

**EMBASSY OF THE
STATE OF PALESTINE**
to the Holy See



سفارة
دولة فلسطين
لدى الكرسي الرسولي

H.E. Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher
Secretary for Relations with States
Vatican City

October 06, 2021

Your Excellency,

Palestine, the birthplace of Christianity and center of the three monotheistic religions, is going through a delicate situation whereby hope is much needed. This month we mark 30 years since the Madrid Peace Conference that was supposed to deliver a political solution, ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, within a few years. As the Holy See is well aware, the people of Palestine began to prepare for justice, freedom and peace with several projects, being the Vatican' sponsored Bethlehem 2000 one of its most prominent initiatives. Regretfully, thirty years have passed and the situation on the ground has mainly worsened: Our religious and heritage sites in Gaza are under siege, the northern West Bank continues to face obstacles in linking with the Galilee, the Jordan Valley, including the Dead Sea, remain under the threat of annexation, while Bethlehem has been surrounded by almost 100,000 settlers and an illegal annexation wall has suffocated the city, artificially separating it from Jerusalem for first time in over 2000 years of Christianity. This, in addition to the impact of COVID-19, presents one of the most challenging situations we have faced in years.

During his 2000 year pilgrimage, Pope John Paul II told our people in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp "Dear brothers and sisters, dear refugees, do not think that your present condition makes you any less important in God's eyes! Never forget your dignity as his children! Here at Bethlehem the Divine Child was laid in a manger in a stable; shepherds from the nearby fields were the first to receive the heavenly message of peace and hope for the world. God's design was fulfilled in the midst of humility and poverty. Probably the pastors and shepherds of Bethlehem were your predecessors, your ancestors". It is with this message of hope that our people approached the new millennium, yet unfulfilled promises and impunity led to a disaster that even witnessed the Nativity Church being surrounded by tanks and helicopters.

It is our duty as peace loving people to do everything possible to revert this reality and to prevent a new disaster. H.E. President Mahmoud Abbas delivered a clear message before the inauguration of the 76 session of the UN General Assembly in the context of its General Debate, making clear that Palestine is ready to negotiate within a year a final status agreement with Israel. Failure to push for a comprehensive political solution that fulfills the long overdue rights of the Palestinian people means failing the promises given to millions around the Middle East and the world that peace is indeed possible. We are respectfully calling upon you to make use of all your relevant diplomatic engagements, including with the White House, to make sure that the world understand the unequivocal position by the Holy See in support of the implementation of international law and relevant UN resolutions in Palestine, the Holy Land.

It is in this context that I respectfully suggest for His Holiness Pope Francis to hold a prayer during the Christmas season, sending a message of hope and peace to the people of Palestine and mainly to Bethlehem and the rest of the region. It is time to make use of the important connections

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made during His Holiness' pilgrimage and visits to our region, to push for a peace agenda that will promote the values of justice, equality, security and freedom for all. You may also want to consider exhibiting the Bethlehem Reborn-The Wonders of the Nativity Exhibition in the Vatican's museums or in any hall you see appropriate. This will be seen as a significant gesture to Palestine.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to Your Excellency the assurances of my highest respect and consideration.

Respectfully,

Ambassador Issa Kassissieh

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