

A Jerusalem Voice for Justice: *an ecumenical witness for equality and a just peace in Palestine/Israel*

September 27, 2025

Occupation not Palestinian Authority harms Christians in Palestine

On September 26, 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Netanyahu defended Israel's genocidal war in Gaza and the policies of his extremist government. The Israeli Prime Minister formulated many blatant distortions, traded in Islamophobia, and deliberately confused antisemitism with legitimate critique of Zionism and Israel. Here, we would like to relate to one particular lie that concerns the Christians in Palestine.

Netanyahu said, "Christians don't fare much better. When Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, was under Israeli control, 80% of its residents were Christians. But since the PA (Palestinian Authority) took control, that number has dwindled to under 20%."

Mr. Netanyahu does not speak on behalf of Christian Palestinians and cannot be allowed to twist the truth. Bethlehem was a Christian-majority city until 1948: more than 80% of the population was Christian. With the expulsion of about 750,000 Palestinian refugees from their homeland in historic Palestine during the 1948 Nakba, three refugee camps were established in Bethlehem, changing the demographic make-up of the city. When Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967, Bethlehem had a population composed of a majority of Muslims. Decades of Israeli occupation, causing harsh living conditions, provoked many Christians and Muslims to emigrate and this reality continues until today. Bethlehem, a city dependent on tourism, has suffered particularly in the past two years of Israel's war on Gaza with the almost complete stop of tourism and pilgrimage. Hundreds have left Bethlehem in the past months because of the ongoing ravages of Israeli occupation and military violence.

The reason Christians and many others too are leaving Bethlehem is Israeli occupation and its policies of closures, permits, exclusionary residency rights, etc., and not the policies of the Palestinian Authority.

We insist: Christians and Muslims in Bethlehem and throughout Palestine continue to live together as one people, sharing the same struggles under occupation. The truth remains: Palestinians, Christians and Muslims alike, seek equality, justice, and peace in their homeland.

Signatories:

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