

BISHOP SUHEIL VISITS DIOCESAN ALHI HOSPITAL IN GAZA; LENDING SUPPORT TO GAZA'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Jerusalem – (March 12, 2009) – On Tuesday, March 10, Bishop Suheil Dawani, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, was granted permission to go into Gaza to make a pastoral visit to our diocesan hospital, Ahli Arab Hospital. Bishop Suheil was accompanied by Greek Catholic Archbishop Elias Chacour and Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan. Driving in Bishop Dawani's car, the three Church leaders made their way through the badly damaged area of northern Gaza to the hospital, which has served over 400 casualties during the recent crisis.

There are approximately 3,500 Christians living in Gaza. During his visit, the Bishop said the "Christian presence must be empowered and must remain in the Holy Land." He encouraged Gazan Christians to "look forward and build up what has been destroyed, to keep faith and hope in the future, and carry on living in hope of a more normal situation despite all the hardships they have been facing."



St. Matthew's Church at Ahli Hospital in Gaza

During their time at the hospital, Bishop Dawani, Bishop Younan, and Archbishop Chacour were updated by Al Ahli's devoted director, Suhaila Tarazi and dedicated medical director, Dr. Maher Ayad. As the wounded continue to heal, many are in need of ongoing care, rehabilitation, and social services which continue to stretch the capability of the hospital beyond its normal capacity. Nevertheless, the entire hospital staff continues to provide exemplary care for all in need, regardless of faith or ability to pay, in keeping with the highest standard of medical ethics. The Episcopal diocese of Jerusalem receives donations from across the Anglican community, which are vital to continuing care and support for the innocent civilians in Gaza.

The three bishops visited staff and patients in the hospital, reassuring all of their concern and support. Taking time to pray in the hospital church for the dead and wounded in the January conflict, as well as for peace in the region, Bishops Dawani and Younan, and Archbishop Chacour toured the hospital grounds, with gratitude for the minimal structural damage despite the windows which blew out.

The remaining visit included a meeting with Constantine Dabbagh, director of the Near East Council of Churches Refugee Works, and brief stop at the NECCRW clinic to hear reports of their work, including building damage and outreach efforts. Like the staff at the diocesan Al Ahli Arab Hospital, the clinic staff finds themselves confronted with extraordinary need and limited resources and housing.

The visiting bishops spoke with the media about their visit, explaining that they came to personally show their support and thank the medical staff, and to pray for peace in the region and reconciliation between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

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