

Holy Week & Israeli restrictions:

HOLY WEEK 2010 REPORT

Hanna Karkar

hanna@alqudsnet.com

Yusef Daher

yusef66jrs@yahoo.com

Xavier Abu Eid,

xabueid@gmail.com

Media team on behalf of the Related Christian Organizations in Jerusalem

Holy Week and Israeli restrictions (2010)

Background:

Here below is information on Israeli restrictions and policies during Religious celebrations that have been in effect for the past 6 years:

- Entry to Jerusalem for West Bank and Gaza Christians is always restricted. On the occasion of Easter, Palestinian Christians living outside of Jerusalem in the West Bank and Gaza are required to apply for permits to access their holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem. It is estimated that of those, only 2000 – 3000 Palestinian Christians received permits. Jews do not have to apply for permits to access their holy sites during their holy days nor in any other day and Moslems usually are treated differently in way where closures are lifted on People over 45 or 50 years of age.
- The permit system instated by Israel is in obvious violation of the ICPRR, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international covenants and treaties to which Israel is a signatory.
- Worshipers are restricted by road blocks and check points around the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem.
- This year, buses going to Jerusalem from Ramallah and Bethlehem with worshippers planning to attend the Palm Sunday procession were stopped on the way by the Israeli Army. Many were unable to attend the historic procession.
Example: The Holy Family Scout Group, which belongs to the Roman Catholic Church in Ramallah, took four hours to reach East Jerusalem. They missed the procession from the Mount of Olives to the Old City. The drive, without checkpoints, would take about 20 minutes.
- During Jewish holidays, Palestinian areas are put under military closure in the West bank, and many times Jerusalemites are not allowed inside the Old City.
- Palestinian Christians living in East Jerusalem and the West Bank were denied entry to the Old City for the first two days of the holy week.
- Israeli occupation police banned Palestinian Christians and scout groups from flying the Palestinian flag during the Palm Sunday procession.
- The heavy presence of Israeli Police and Military forces (around and in the Old City and surrounding the holy sites) disturbs the spiritual traditions of Easter.
- Every year Christians try to spiritually connect Bethlehem, the city were Jesus was born with the city where the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus took place. This connection is made through the traditional Palm Sunday march, in which this year many Palestinians and foreign supporters were arrested on their way during a non violent march through the Bethlehem check point. The two spiritual centers for Christians are separated by a complex network of walls, checkpoints and security apparatuses.
- Last year, Israel prevented Palestinian Christians from attending the Holy Fire Saturday in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Christians in past years refused the permit system that was instated in an effort to limit those who attend the celebration. Palestinian Christians have a long tradition of waiting for the light on the roof of the Patriarchate and at the Saint

Jacob's. Palestinian Christians are considering regaining their rights through legal means and non-violent acts.

Position of the Local Christian Palestinian community on Religious rights restrictions

In a Press release on Holy Saturday the local Christian organizations issued their position in an attempt to stand up to their historic traditions and Christian heritage in the Holy Land. The Arab Christian institutions insisted by saying:

- Excuses being used by the Israeli police regarding our 'own security' are not acceptable. In addition our prayers and holding of candles are signs of peace & should not threaten the might of the Israeli Police. Therefore it should not be met by a fully charged army & police force.
- Actions taken against Palestinian Christians, the oldest Christian community in the world is an attack not only against the Palestinian people and their rights in the occupied city of Jerusalem, but against the whole of Christianity.
- Regardless of the number of people from the local congregation allowed to participate in the celebrations, we reject the imposition of a permit/quota system to access our churches and shrines.
- It is unfathomable that by the year 2010, Christians in the Holy Land find themselves forced to be led by an occupation security officer down to their Churches. We know every single corner of our Holy City and therefore we don't need someone to remind us of our way to our Church; these Israeli impositions are just part of their arrogance trying to show a control over Jerusalem that is not recognized by anyone on this world and this is well argued since before 6 years this was not the case.
- Israel, the occupying power, has to be forced to put an end to its illegal policies in occupied Jerusalem. The colonization policies not only include building of settlements, home demolitions or ID revocations, but also severe violations to the freedom of worship aiming to cleanse the Arab identity, Christian and Muslim, from the city.
- We call on all our friends around the world to continue putting pressure on Israel, to respect international law and our right to freely worship in our city of Jerusalem.

Report:

Follows is a compilation of facts on the ground and events impacted by Israeli limitations, restrictions and actions against the local community; starting by Palm Sunday and during the whole of the Holy Week.

- **Holy Family Scout group from Ramallah being delayed for 4 hours on their way to Jerusalem due to Israeli checkpoints.**

Two buses going from Ramallah and Bethlehem with worshippers on their way to attend the Palm Sunday procession were stopped on the way by Israeli army check point. Also the Holy Family Scout Group belonging to the Roman Catholic Church in Ramallah, it took them four hours to reach occupied Jerusalem due to Israeli movement restrictions, thus missing the procession from Mount of Olives to the Old City of Jerusalem. The distance between Ramallah and occupied East Jerusalem being only 18 kilometers.

- **Israeli closure of Bethlehem 300 checkpoint during Palm Sunday and Holy Week.**

On Palm Sunday and following a Palestinian and Christian attempt to access Jerusalem from Bethlehem within a non-violent march through the historic Hebron road passing the checkpoint, Israeli forces violently repressed the crowd and imposed the closure of the Bethlehem 300 checkpoint starting by Palm Sunday at noon time and until Thursday of Holy Week as means of collective punishment. Eleven people were arrested.

This action prevented Palestinian Christians from attending religious services in the Holy City of Jerusalem. While some of them were randomly allowed to cross through the Beit Jala checkpoint, the Israeli closure of the Hebron Road meant also the deviation of pilgrims willing to visit the birthplace of Jesus.

- **Ban on Palestinian flags imposed on Palestinian scouts and worshippers.**

Before Palm Sunday the Israeli occupation police warned Palestinian scout groups against waving their national flag during Palm Sunday and Easter processions in occupied East Jerusalem. The ban was an attack against the national feelings of the scouts at the same time that contradicts the traditions of scouts all over the world waving their own national flag.

The scout groups have been threatened with denial of permits to access occupied East Jerusalem if they wave their national flag, including scouts from occupied Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territory.

- **Old City closed to Palestinian ID holders and Palestinian Christians from elsewhere in Jerusalem for the first two days of Holy Week.**

Due to a Jewish holyday, the Old City of Jerusalem was closed for Palestinians Christians and Muslims living outside the Old City. On Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week, Christians living in East Jerusalem and elsewhere within the occupied Palestinian territory were banned from the Old city and praying at their churches while Jews were allowed to freely access the Old City.

- **Jerusalem being closed to Palestinians during the first two days of Holy Week.**

Due to a Jewish holyday, the West Bank was put under military closure meaning that all issued permits to access occupied East Jerusalem were nullified. This policy justified by Israeli occupation authorities under the motto of 'security' prevented Holy Land Christians from reaching their churches and shrines in the Holy City of Jerusalem, while at the same time Jews had free access to their temples.

- **Obstructing the procession on Good Friday (Catholic Way of the Cross).**

The traditional Catholic and Franciscan procession to the Holy Sepulcher through the Via Dolorosa was interrupted by an Israeli army roadblock established few meters outside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; Israeli occupation Police behaved rudely beating young Palestinian Christian women and men, to later on close the entrance to the Plaza of the Holy Sepulcher; there were no clear reasons to interrupt the traditional procession.

A testimony from Usama, a Palestinian Christian who was attending the procession says: *“We were at the procession following the 14 Stations of the Cross. Suddenly we realized that the Police had closed the road and soldiers started shouting at the priests (...) our people didn't want to stop the procession without making it to the Holy Sepulcher and so we tried to continue but the army personnel hit a girl and then the men retaliated to defend her... at that moment the Israelis took one of the young men (Zaki Hazou). Later on they opened the door and so we were able to enter, but then several officers came to me and started screaming ordering me to leave, but I responded that I came to pray and I won't leave until I finish the 14 stations of the cross... For the first time, they wouldn't allow the procession to finish the way it was expected.”*

- **Movement restrictions for Holy Fire Saturday.**

The brutal scenes experienced a year earlier where Christian families were beaten by Israeli army and police forces and the announcement of movement restrictions for Holy Fire Saturday plus the lack of permits for Palestinian Christians coming from other areas within the Palestinian territory dramatically reduced the number of people willing to access the Holy Sepulcher area from thousands to a few hundreds.

Palestinian Christians were met by Israeli occupation police in several checkpoints and roadblocks in and around the Old City on their way to the Holy Sepulcher; while Jews were allowed to freely enter the Old City, Palestinian Christians had to wait for Israeli permission to cross.

Only few were able to make it to the roof of the Patriarchate, which is a centuries old tradition where the local community receives the Holy Fire at 2 pm. No one was allowed to get to the Mar Yacoub Church or the Holy Sepulcher plaza after 10:30. Only 8000 were allowed inside the Church, most of them are Pilgrims. Number of tourists at that day was estimated on that day over 200000.

After the mediation of lawyer Mazen Qupty, the Israeli occupation Police allowed some Palestinian Christians to go into the roof of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, where according to Religious celebrations tradition Holy Land Christians would wait for the Holy Fire while leaving the church and the plaza of the Holy Sepulcher for foreign pilgrims.

Despite the Israeli occupation police assurances that the place was full of people, the roof of the Holy Sepulcher was empty. A place where thousands of Palestinian Christians would meet this year had around 200 people, most of them young and almost no families made their way there fearing the policies of the Israeli occupation policies.

The heavy Israeli occupation forces presence, including rude attitude and bad manners, disturbed the families who wanted to celebrate their religious tradition.

- **Others:**

- Israeli Occupation Forces wouldn't allow the Holy Fire to access Bethlehem through the main checkpoint at Hebron Road and so it was forced to go around through Beit Jala.
- Almost no West Bank and Gaza Christians were seen at the Holy Saturday celebrations due to very bad past experience of struggling in vain to be inside the Old City
- Christians of Jerusalem origin living in Gaza were not given permit to return to Gaza if they leave. This ended up in splitting families during Easter week.

Media coverage references during the 2 weeks of Easter 2010 regarding access for Christians to Jerusalem.

Reuters: Easter before and after the occupation (was the most quoted Reuters feature on Good Friday). It was reproduced by Al Quds and Al Ayyam in Palestine and translated to several languages, including French, Spanish and Portuguese. Some of the links are:

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3870864,00.html>
<http://oglobo.globo.com/mundo/mat/2010/04/01/palestinos-dizem-que-pascoa-na-terra-santa-nao-mais-que-era-916230053.asp>
<http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/actualite/monde/20100401.REU4933/les-chretiens-palestiniens-nostalgiques-des-paques-d-autrefois.html>
http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/36140329/ns/world_news-mideastn_africa/
http://www.business.com/directory/telecommunications/convergent_communications_inc/profile/
<http://arabnews.com/middleeast/article38110.ece>
<http://catholicism.org/far-fewer-christians-come-to-jerusalem-for-easter-with-machine-guns-at-every-corner.html>
<http://www.globalmediapost.com/archives/4296>
<http://www.diariodecuiaba.com.br/detalhe.php?cod=367893>
http://www.swissinfo.ch/por/internacional/Palestinos_dizem_que_Pascoa_na_Terra_Santa_nao_e_mais_o_que_era.html?cid=8604360

Al Jazeera: 1) Israeli discriminatory policies against Palestinian Christians during Holy Fire Saturday
http://www.aljazeera.net/Channel/KServices/SupportPages/ShowMedia/showMedia.aspx?fileURL=/mrite.ms/streams/2010/4/3/1_982310_1_12.flv&ImgURL=/mritems/images/2010/4/3/1_982309_1_34.jpg&ArticleGuid={EA67827B-965F-4A10-8B0E-DB3B0EA6EFDB}&CurrentMode=published

Al Jazeera International:

- 1) Story on Palestinian Christians being banned from entering Jerusalem
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyC1-5788AI>
- 2) Discrimination against Christian Jerusalemites (Sunday)

BBC World:

- 1) Israeli restrictions of movement for Holy Fire Saturday.

CNN:

- 1) Restrictions on Palestinian Christians to access their Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

Haaretz:

- 1) Restrictions of access to Holy Places for Palestinian Christians (Jack Khoury)
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArtVty.jhtml?sw=Akiva+Eldar+Christian&itemNo=1160507>
- 2) Israeli restrictions on Palestinian Christians for Easter (Akiva Eldar)
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1159593.html>

Le Monde:

- 1) Christians denounce Israeli "Judaization" plans for Jerusalem
http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2010/04/02/les-palestiniens-chretiens-s-inquietent-de-la-judaisation-croissante-de-jerusalem_1327916_3218.html

Le Croix:

- 1) Israeli settlements at the Via Dolorosa

Radio France International:

- 1) Israeli settlements at the Via Dolorosa

Swiss Radio:

- 1) Restrictions of movement and freedom of worship in Jerusalem

AFP:

- 1) Restrictions of movement and freedom of worship against Palestinian Christians

TVE (Spanish National TV):

- 1) Israeli settlements at the Via Dolorosa

TV3 (Catalunya TV):

- 1) Home eviction against a Christian family at the Via Dolorosa

Spanish National Radio:

- 1) Israeli violations to freedom of worship in Jerusalem
- 2) Movement restrictions on Holy Fire Saturday

EFE:

- 1) Israeli settlements at the Via Dolorosa
- 2) Freedom of worship in Jerusalem
- 3) Reactions to Israeli restrictions on Holy Fire Saturday

Radio Cataluña:

- 1) Restrictions of movement and freedom of worship in Jerusalem

El Clarin (Argentinean biggest newspaper):

- 1) Restrictions of movement and freedom of worship in Jerusalem

O Globo TV (Brazil):

- 1) Restrictions of movement and freedom of worship in Jerusalem

Al Moustaqbal:

- 1) Interview with Yousef Daher (violations to Freedom of worship)

Egyptian TV:

- 1) Interview with Dr. Bernard Sabella and Yousef Daher (violations to Freedom of worship)

Al Quds TV:

- 1) Israeli aggressions during Holy Fire Saturday

Al Watan TV:

- 1) Israeli aggressions during Holy Week.

Holland National TV:

- 1) Israeli settlements at the Via Dolorosa.
