

November 2016

Dear Commissioners,

We, the undersigned, as individuals and organizations who are deeply concerned about issues of religious freedom in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), are writing to urge the Commission to examine and report on the religious freedom situation in this critical region of the world.

As members of faith-based organizations, we are familiar with the work of USCIRF in monitoring international religious freedom and making policy recommendations at the highest levels of government. It has come to our attention, however, that the Commission, in its almost 20 year history, has never reported on religious freedom in Israel and the oPt. This is a conspicuous gap which must be addressed: for the sake of those subjected to religious freedom violations in the Holy Land; for the prospect of broader peace within the region; and to ensure consistency in the promotion of religious freedom standards around the world.

What we see in Israel and the oPt is a system that seeks to establish the dominant, privileged position of Jewish Israelis in a manner that has discriminated against the Christian and Muslim Palestinian population in Israel and the oPt. The system in practice has also negatively affected non-Orthodox and secular Jews, while promoting the fragmentation of the Palestinian population along religious lines, resulting in a number of religious freedom – and other human rights violations – affecting Jews, Christians and Muslims.

These worrying violations include, among others, deeply disturbing discriminatory laws that impact the freedom to marry, family unification, discrimination in housing and land-ownership, the freedom of movement, and the right to worship at and to maintain holy sites.

While we note that countries with similar practices come under scrutiny of the Commission, we are concerned that Israel has not been subjected to the same degree of scrutiny.

We, therefore, urge the Commission to examine this issue carefully by conducting a comprehensive review of religious freedom in Israel and the oPt, consistent with the principles it has established with respect to other states - including those states which occupy the territory of another people (for example, Russia in Crimea and Turkey in Cyprus).

We thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to hearing from you on this issue.

Signed,

Global Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Global Ministry of the United Church of Christ

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Episcopal Church

Alliance of Baptists

National Coalition of Christian Organizations (NCCOP)

Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America (Emeritus)

Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches

Hind Khoury, Kairos Palestine Executive Director

Jerusalem

Arab Catholic Scouts Group

Arab Orthodox Society

Caritas

Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees- Middle East Council of Churches

Greek Catholic Sayedat AlBishara Association

International Christian Committee

Laity Committee in the Holy Land

National Christian Association

Pontifical Mission Palestine

SABEEL – Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center

Union of Arab Orthodox Club

Young Men’s Christian Association

Young Women’s Christian Association

Gaza

Near East Council of Churches

Bethlehem

Network of Christian Organizations in Bethlehem

The East Jerusalem YMCA /Beit Sahour Branch

The Arab Educational Institute

Holy Land Trust

Wi'am Center

Saint Afram Assyrian Society

Holy Land Christians Ecumenical Foundation

Al-Ihsan Arab Orthodox Society, Beit Jala

Arab Orthodox Club, Beit Sahour

Arab Orthodox Club, Beit Jala

Arab Orthodox Club, Bethlehem

The Arab Orthodox Charitable Society, Beit Sahour

Bethlehem Bible College

Siraj Center for Holy Land Studies

Alternative Tourism Group, ATG, Beit Sahour

Senior Citizen Charitable Society

Environmental educational Center, Beit Jala

Saint Vincent Charitable Society, Beit Jala

Shepherds' Children Society, Beit Sahour