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Editor: Athanasius MACORA, ofm

Pope calls for international mediation to Israel-PA conflict

Pope John Paul II issued on Sunday a strong denunciation of terrorism in his weekly message, which was devoted to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"[The Pope] wishes to repeat to everyone, regardless of the ethnic group to which they belong, that there is no justification for those who kill defenseless civilians indiscriminately," he said from his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.

Papal Nuncio Pietro Sambi, the ambassador of the Holy See to Israel, said that the words constituted an unequivocal condemnation of terrorism.

Calling for an end to all violence, the pope called upon both Israelis and Palestinians to end what he called a deadly unending spiral of violence. Neither attacks, nor retaliation, nor walls will lead to a just solution of the conflict, he said.

John Paul spoke both of the suffering of Palestinians, who he said had been driven out of their land and placed, in recent times, under siege, and of the suffering of the Israelis, who he said live in daily terror of being targets of anonymous assailants. He said that because of curfews, believers no longer have access to places of worship.

He called upon the international community to be present in the area, and to offer mediation.

Sambi said the pope was not calling for an international peacekeeping force. Although he did ask the international community to be present in the field, Sambi said, how this is implemented depends on political leaders.

In a related development, sources said yesterday that the meeting in Gaza City on Saturday between Jerusalem Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah and Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin represented the beginning of an attempt by Palestinian Christian leaders to mediate between Israel and Hamas.

Sabbah, who later met with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, was accompanied in both meetings by Anglican Bishop Riah Abu el-Assal and Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan. The sources said that the three had also asked for a meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

In another development, the heads of the Christian churches in Jerusalem have organized a fortnight of prayers for peace in churches throughout the city. The prayers, which are to begin on Thursday at St. James Armenian Cathedral, are to be held in a different church each day.

*By Haim Shapiro
The Jerusalem Post - 12 August 2002*

Churches vs. US decision on Jerusalem 10/31/2002

The US president's approval of a decision to consider Jerusalem the capital of Israel has provoked a controversy in political and religious arenas in the Arab World and the international community. The issue is a highly sensitive one, not least of all because

the presidential approval could pave the way for relocating the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Patriarchs and directors of churches in the Holy Land have sent a letter to President George Bush calling on him to reverse the decision, which they consider inappropriate, especially at a time when efforts are being made to put an end to violence and bloodshed. The letter said that he could hinder peace efforts in the region and that it would appear that Congress wishes to violate the Oslo Accord, which leaves the fate of Jerusalem to be determined in permanent status negotiations. Worthy of mention is the fact that UN Resolutions consider Jerusalem an occupied city that should be returned to its rightful owners and whose features should not be changed in any manner.

The church heads explained that “East Jerusalem is an occupied city protected by International Law,” concentrating especially on the holy sites in the city, which are “sacred to Muslims, Christians and Jews and should be open to people of the three faiths, who should also be guaranteed free access to places of worship during times of peace and times of war.” The letter further said that freedom of worship is currently absent, with holy sites open only to Jews and tourists, not to Muslim and Christian Palestinians, even on holy days and religious occasions, which is a violation of basic human rights.

The church heads called on President Bush to exert more effort and exercise patience and good judgment in order to reach a final settlement for the issue of Jerusalem, urging him to avoid recklessness that may subject the peace process to another crisis, thereby adding to the suffering of its residents.

The following points were brought up by the Rev. David Jaeger, Franciscan spokesman, in a recent interview with Vatican Radio:

First: Jerusalem is of great value and UN resolutions concerning it must be honored.

Second: Control over the city should be determined in negotiations according to the Oslo Accord.

Third: The future of the city is connected with the right of self-determination of its Palestinian and Israeli residents.

Fourth: The papal stance is in complete harmony with that of the United Nations; the city, according to that stance, should receive special consideration.

Fifth: Considering that holy sites in the city are part of an international heritage, the fate of the city must not be connected with that of a state. International participation is needed to find a solution to this issue.

I believe it is necessary to reiterate the official stance of churches in Jerusalem regarding the city by mentioning the letter issued by heads of churches in Jerusalem in October 1994. The Christian stance could be summarized as follows:

First: Jerusalem is a city for the three monotheistic religions, and sovereignty in it is connected with the two peoples living in it: Palestinians and Israelis.

Second: Jerusalem is to Christians the city of roots, home to the emergence of Christianity.

Third: The Christian presence in Jerusalem has continued for 2,000 years.

Fourth: Various churches have rights in the city that have been recognized by world countries and successive Israeli governments and must continue to be honored.

Fifth: The churches of Jerusalem have a duty toward the churches of the world. They must receive and serve pilgrims to the city, and responsible authorities must enable them to do so.

Sixth: Jerusalem is a holy city in which equality is necessary. Everybody in the city must be free.

Seventh: The fate of Jerusalem should consider its stature. The city must have a special standing in light of the fact that there are two peoples of three religions living there. Discrimination is contrary to the nature of the city. The people of the city should determine its future, without the intervention of other countries but with the safety of international guarantees.

It should be mentioned that the stance of the international Catholic Church agrees with the stances of local churches, as evident in a statement released by the secretary of the Vatican in May 1996 and issued upon the request of the Middle East Patriarchal Council. The Vatican considers East Jerusalem an occupied city in which International Law is applicable. The Vatican also is ready to recognize Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem when a Palestinian state is declared.

One reason why churches are concerned with Jerusalem is the fact that it is the birthplace of Christianity. The churches are concerned that the city is now in danger, becoming prey to political greed that will strip it of its religious and spiritual standing and weaken its efforts to spread peace, fraternity and justice among peoples.

*By Father Raed Abusahlia
The Jerusalem Times - 4 November 2002*

Christian Church Leaders in capital plea for easing West Bank curfews

The heads of the Christian Churches in Jerusalem this week appealed to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the government to ease the curfews in the West Bank.

However, an Israeli source familiar with relations between the churches and the Israeli government said that yesterday's statement was far more moderate in tone than other such documents, which have attacked Israel and viewed no wrongdoing on the part of the Palestinians. In yesterday's statement the heads of the churches specifically rejected suicide bombings.

"Our churches do not support or accept any form of violence nor do we condone the suicide bombings of recent days," the church leaders said in their statement.

They asked for what they described as a small, but crucial, gesture: to set regular hours for the curfews and to extend the hours during which people were allowed out of

their homes. Referring to allegations that local residents often did not know when the curfews were in force, they said the inconsistency in timing and the daily uncertainty endangered many lives.

The Israeli source compared this appeal to a letter drafted to US Secretary of State Colin Powell when he visited in April. That letter was never sent because not all the heads of churches agreed to sign it, but it was nevertheless published on the Web site of the Latin Patriarchate. That letter, in effect blamed Israel for any violence.

"The Palestinian/Israeli conflict is not a mere question of violence. Violence is only a symptom of the root cause of the Middle East conflict, namely, the Israeli occupation of 1967 territories," the letter said.

The Israeli source said that the difference in tone between the two documents is indicative of differing views among the heads of churches themselves. The more aggressively anti-Israel tone represents the influence of the outspokenly pro-Palestinian churchmen, the source said.

*By Haim Shapiro
The Jerusalem Post - 25 July 2002*

Latin Patriarch: To fight terror, we must understand it

Jerusalem Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah told an interfaith gathering marking the anniversary of the September 11 attacks yesterday that terrorism should be fought, but that in order to do so, it is necessary to understand what causes men to resort to terror.

"Ways of fighting and uprooting terrorism are many and varied, and it is never easy to decide which ways are more appropriate and more effective. However, if we want our reaction to have a lasting effect, we should also have the courage to recognize the causes that may push others to such acts," he told a meeting organized by the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem.

He said that this is particularly true when the evil committed by others happens to be rooted in our own shortcomings or shortsightedness. Although he did not mention the Israeli-Palestinian conflict yesterday, in the past he has argued that Palestinian terrorism would stop if Israel withdrew from the West Bank, eastern Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

Sabbah said that we all condemn terrorism, but that some of our actions may sow seeds for new violence.

"Each of us is called to search our own conscience and to ask ourselves this question: How much am I a part of the violence and the terrorism of which I am a victim and which today threatens all human societies?" he said.

British Ambassador Sherard Cowper-Coles said that while it is important to remember that the September 11 terrorists were human beings, one should also ask what deformed logic led to such acts.

Stressing the need to fight terrorism within the framework of accepted morality, US Ambassador Dan Kurtzer told the gathering, which included Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders, that it is important for people of religion to fight terror with the most powerful weapons in their arsenal of faith.

"Your success will prove to be the most fitting memorial to those who died last September 11," he said.

*By Haim Shapiro
The Jerusalem Post (Internet) - 12 September 2002*

Armenian Church accuses Israelis of a Land Grab *Ancient Olive Grove seized for Security Wall*

The Armenian Orthodox Church is opposing Israel's seizure of an ancient olive grove for a planned security wall between Jerusalem and the Palestinian town of Bethlehem.

Community leaders of this church, one of the oldest in the Holy Land, accuse Israel of a land grab that has less to do with its security than with an attempt to expand its border into the West Bank, according to the Financial Times.

The fate of the 35-acre site is being watched by the Armenian government, whose senior representative in Jerusalem has written to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres demanding an explanation for "this infringement of Armenian rights."

The Baron Der property, purchased in 1641 as the site of a summer residence for the patriarch, lies on the northern outskirts of Bethlehem where the town borders the Jerusalem municipality. The Jerusalem city limits were extended by Israel after the 1967 war in an annexation of West Bank land that is not internationally recognized.

The invisible "red" line dividing the municipalities -- a potential state border in any Mideast settlement -- runs through the 1,600-tree olive grove. The proposed 40-meter-wide barrier would cut through the Armenian property and occupy land on both sides of the border.

It would be part of a 350 kilometer (217 mile) barrier being built around the West Bank and parts of Jerusalem to stop Palestinian suicide bombers reaching Israel. Overnight, in Gaza, Israel killed the commander of the military wing of Hamas and 14 other Palestinians including nine children in an air raid on his home that also wiped out a crowded city block, hospital officials said.

The Armenian Patriarchate received emergency seizure orders late last month from the Israeli defense ministry, which claims the Jerusalem side of the line, and the army commander of the West Bank, who is commandeering the southern stretch.

What was until recently a rural retreat for Armenian monks is part of a wider agricultural area hemmed in on the south by Bethlehem's Aida refugee camp. To the north

is an Israeli settler road and to the east the heavily fortified Israeli enclave of Rachel's Tomb, one of Judaism's holiest sites and a frequent target of attacks in the 22-month Palestinian uprising.

Armenian community leaders believe sovereignty over the access route to the tomb is the underlying motive of the land seizure.

Jewish worshippers are transported in armored vehicles to the tomb, a few hundred yards inside Palestinian territory. But a proposal has been floated to link the shrine of the biblical matriarch to the Jerusalem municipality. That would involve moving the border 200 meters further south into West Bank territory.

Although the proposal has not won government approval, the Ashkenazi and Sephardic chief rabbis of Israel have ruled the tomb must remain in Israeli hands in a final Israeli-Palestinian border settlement.

Thus, the Armenian Church finds itself unwillingly at the center of a territorial dispute. The Armenian presence in Jerusalem dates back more than 16 centuries, almost to the time when Armenia became the first nation to embrace Christianity as its official religion in 301. The Patriarchate was founded in 638, the year of the Muslim conquest of the Holy City.

Today, however, emigration has reduced the community in the Old City of Jerusalem to about 2,000. Yet, the Armenian Church is the largest landowner in the Old City and has substantial holdings in the Israeli coastal city of Jaffa and in Jewish west Jerusalem, where it owns much of the central shopping district.

The church jealously protects its ancient rights as one of the three traditional guardians of Christian holy sites, along with the Greek Orthodox Church and the Catholic Franciscan order.

Armenia's honorary consul in Jerusalem, Tsolag Momjian, wrote to Peres: "Baron Der has an enormous historical and moral value to the Armenian Church and the Armenian people."

The olive trees of Baron Der supply the oil that lights the lamps over the traditional tomb of Christ at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and above his traditional birthplace at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Israeli officials have so far held off starting work on the barrier. But, in several meetings with Armenian officials, they said the seizure orders were irreversible.

The church has responded with a petition to the Israeli supreme court. Mazen Qupti, the Patriarchate's Arab Israeli lawyer, said: "The Armenians say it's the wrong place for a security wall and that they are losing what is a holy place for them."

Zenit News Agency - 23 July 2002

Armenian Patriarchate protests land confiscation

The local Armenian Patriarchate is protesting plans to build the security fence separating Jerusalem from Bethlehem and Beit Jala through the middle of its property, and says it will petition the High Court of Justice over the issue.

According to Father Pakrad Bourjekian, the property, known as Baron Der, consists of some 143 dunams (36 acres), with ancient caves and tombs, olive trees, and a monastery, north of the Aida Refugee Camp and south of Tantur, near Rachel's Tomb. Bourjekian said the monastery used to house monks who officiate in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and functioned as retreat for Jerusalem monks.

Bourjekian said that the IDF took over the monastery in May 2001 and damaged the building. In August of that year, he said, tanks created the route along which the security fence is to be built.

In April of this year, he said, the IDF paved the road, dividing the property into what Bourjekian described as two useless plots. He said that the project destroyed tombs, antiquities, and centuries-old olive trees.

Bourjekian said that the Patriarchate has proposed that the fence and road be built along the path wall which currently separates the monastery from the refugee camp, a suggestion that the army has rejected. Instead, he said, the Patriarchate received a military order seizing part of the property for security purposes.

Two weeks ago, he said, the Patriarchate filed an appeal in the Tel Aviv District Court relating to that part of the property which is inside the Jerusalem city limits. The Patriarchate plans to petition the High Court over the remainder of the property, which is outside the city limits, he said.

The spokesman for the IDF Coordinator of Activities in the Territories was unavailable for comment. According to informed sources, because of the terrain, the fence must go through the middle of the property and cannot run along the edge, as suggested by the Armenian Patriarchate.

The army has also seized land belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate to build the security fence, the sources said.

On the other side of the fence, the leader of the Moledet party, MK Benny Alon led Moledet youth yesterday on a protest march from Jerusalem to Rachel's tomb demanding that the tomb be walled inside the fence of Jerusalem's municipality. According to MK Alon, "Rachel's Tomb is located less than 500 meters from the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. Any plan that would leave the tomb outside the absolute and exclusive control of Israel, endangers our future control over this holy site. We will not lose Rachel's Tomb as we lost Joseph's Tomb in Nablus."

Two weeks ago, MK Alon gathered the signatures of dozens of MKs on a petition of ministers and MKs demanding the inclusion of the tomb within the Jerusalem security fence.

*By Haim Shapiro
The Jerusalem Post - 30 July 2002*

Coptic Church to create own court in West Bank

The Palestinian Authority has authorized the Coptic Church to have its own ecclesiastical courts in the West Bank, Dr. Anba Abraham, the Coptic archbishop of Jerusalem, said on Monday.

Observers of the Christian scene see the move as part of an attempt by the PA to exert influence within the Christian communities, as well as a gesture of goodwill toward Egypt. Until now, under Ottoman, British, Jordanian, and Israeli rule, the Copts had to use the Greek Orthodox religious courts.

The move also comes in the wake of reports that the PA is seeking to remove Jerusalem Greek Orthodox Patriarch Irineos I from his post, saying he is planning to reduce Arab influence within the church and sell land to Jews.

The Coptic Church has generally been hostile towards Israel, especially since an incident in 1970 when control of two disputed chapels and a stairway on the roof of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre passed from the Copts to the Ethiopian Church, with what the Copts said was Israeli police collusion.

Abraham said that the PA decision only relates to the West Bank, where there are Coptic families and institutions in towns such as Bethlehem and Jericho, and not to areas within the Green Line or in Jerusalem.

He said the move "has absolutely no political significance."

Abraham said his church had applied several times to the Israeli government for such recognition, but it has not received a response. He said that the church had asked for recognition from the PA on the advice of a number of Palestinian lawyers.

Father Gabriel Naddaf, a spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, said that the Patriarchate had no comment on the change.

*By Haim Shapiro
The Jerusalem Post - 20 August 2002*

Background/A Patriarch under fire from his Arab flock

Recent infighting at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem is believed to be behind Archmandrite Atallah Hanna being detained and questioned by police yesterday. Hanna, 37, is a relatively young clergyman from Reine village in the Galilee, and the leading figure among Arab clergymen in a Patriarchate that is ruled and dominated by priests of Greek origin.

He was detained and questioned on suspicion of expressing support for terrorist organizations and illegally entering an enemy country. Hanna, who is openly identified as a PLO supporter, initiated a power struggle against the recently crowned Patriarch, Irineos, whom he accused of planning to sell church property to Israelis. Hanna does not

disguise his support for the Intifada, and the Patriarch fired him as spokesman for the Patriarchate.

"He was never authorized to speak on behalf of the Patriarchate," said a senior churchman last night, adding that Hanna had used the title of spokesman without being authorized.

A few months ago, Patriarch Irineos was considered to be a supporter of the PLO and close to Yasser Arafat. The Israeli government delayed approval of his election, and this may be one of the reasons for his recent anti-Palestinian positions.

Rumors inside the Palestinian Authority hold that the new Patriarch is trying to bring his church closer to the non-Jewish Russian immigrants, most of whom are Orthodox, to undermine the status of the Arab flock.

The Patriarch is also suspected, according to Palestinians, of doing business with Israeli contractors to whom he promised to lease church properties. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has vast plots of land throughout Israel and the territories, and both Jewish and Arab businessmen are vying for their control.

Hanna, who is a low-ranked clergyman, has become a hero in the Palestinian and Arab media in recent weeks. In his appearances he accuses the Israeli authorities of terrorist occupation and several months ago paid a visit to Lebanon and met with the Hezbollah chief, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. He is also cooperating with the Committee of the Arab Orthodox who are demanding that the Greek priests controlling the Patriarchate's assets allow Arabs into the management as well. They are also demanding that the Patriarchate invest more resources for the benefit of the community.

Hanna's detention yesterday was interpreted by the Palestinian leadership as an attempt to discourage him from further attacks against the Patriarch. After his release from police custody, Hanna gave an interview to Al-Jazeera television in which he said the Palestinian struggle against Israel would continue.

*By Danny Rubinstein
Ha'aretz - 23 August 2002*

Crisis deepens in local Greek Orthodox Church

Arab Orthodox Christian leaders in the West Bank and Israel have decided to increase pressure on Jerusalem Greek Orthodox Patriarch Irineos I to accept measures to allay fears that the patriarch, who was elected last year, is trying to turn them into a minority in the Patriarchate.

Marwan Toubasi, vice president of the Orthodox Congregation in the Holy Land, a non-governmental organization representing Arab Orthodox Christians in the West Bank, Israel, and Jordan, said his group has given Irineos an ultimatum to accept proposed changes within two months.

"If he chooses to continue ignoring our demands, we will launch a wide-scale popular campaign against him," Toubasi told *The Jerusalem Post*.

"Irineos has made many false promises in the past to the Arab community, and that's why we don't believe him any more. Now he has only two months."

Toubasi returned Thursday from Jordan, where he attended an expanded meeting of the Orthodox Congregation of the Greek Patriarchate.

Participants accusing the Patriarch of mishandling funds and trying to sell property to Jews.

Toubasi said the conference was presented with a document proving the patriarch is prepared to hold serious negotiations with Israelis about selling church lands.

"We fear that some of the lands in western Jerusalem which are owned by the church will be sold to settler groups." He said the conference also received complaints from Arab Orthodox Christians living in northern Israel about the misuse of church-owned land.

Toubasi said that the campaign has not been engineered by the Palestinian Authority.

He said his community is worried the patriarch is trying to eliminate the Arab character of the church.

The Arab Orthodox Christians are pressuring the patriarch to implement law number 27, which dates back to 1958 and regulates the relationship between Arabs and Greeks in the church.

Among other things, the law calls for the appointment of Arab bishops. Toubasi said that Irineos has refused to comply with that part of the law. "He even went further by deposing Archimandrite Hanna Atalla, an Arab from the Galilee, from his job as church spokesperson."

Atalla has been questioned by police on suspicion of supporting terrorism and of travelling illegally to Syria and Lebanon.

The Arab community is also demanding that Irineos publish the church's budget, which they say has been kept a secret since 1967.

Irineos sent three metropolitans to the conference to defuse tension with the Arab orthodox community. The emissaries asked for more time to study the demands, but were shunned by most of the participants.

"We've had enough of these promises," Toubasi said. "No one here believes the patriarch any more. If he does not meet our conditions, we will ask Jordan and the PA to revoke their recognition of his status as head of the Greek Orthodox Church." A spokesperson for the Greek Orthodox Church refused to comment.

*By Khaled Abu Toameh
The Jerusalem Post - 30 August 2002*

Greek Patriarchate expecting early recognition for Patriarch

Greek Orthodox Patriarch Irineos I, who was elected more than a year ago and has still not been recognized by the government, will soon receive such recognition, Father Gabriel, a spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, said on Tuesday.

He said indications that recognition would come soon had come from a variety of sources, including a recent statement by Justice Minister Meir Sheetrit.

"Irineos was elected legally. There is no reason not to recognize him," Gabriel said.

Irineos was elected on August 14, 2001, by the synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem in a centuries-old ritual in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. According to church protocol, the election must be approved by the "ruler."

In this case, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate requested recognition from Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. Jordan and the PA issued their recognition, but Israel has yet to do so, apparently because of reports that Irineos has close ties with the PA. Part of the opposition is a result of statements made by Father Hanna Atalla, a Palestinian Greek Orthodox priest who is an outspoken supporter of the Palestinian cause.

The issue assumed greater complexity two months ago following a report that the PA has been trying to unseat the patriarch. Atalla, whose statements the Patriarchate has repudiated, is considered the PA's candidate to replace Irineos.

On Monday, the Associated Press reported that US State Department Ambassador for Religious Freedom John Hanford III said the issue of recognition of Irineos is something the State Department is well aware of. He reportedly made the remark in response to a Greek reporter's question at a news conference on the department's annual report on international religious freedom.

In August, 156 members of Congress sent a letter to President George W. Bush, calling upon him to look into the withholding of recognition. Among those who signed the letter was Ben Gilman (R-New York), one of the strongest supporters of Israel in Congress.

*By Haim Shapiro
The Jerusalem Post - 9 October 2002*

Patriarchate protests demolitions

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate on Wednesday issued a muted protest against government plans to demolish a large Beit Sahur housing project built by the local Greek Orthodox community.

The complex is in Area C, under total Israeli control. The government maintains that the homes were erected without a building permit. The Patriarch noted that despite its

tradition of not becoming involved in political disputes, it is also concerned for the needs of the congregation. In 1995, it said, it offered the Beit Sahur congregation 20 dunams on lease.

The Patriarchate said the buildings have almost been completed, at considerable sacrifice and that the demolition orders caused surprise, frustration, and agony. Patriarchate officials have reportedly appealed to the Vatican to intervene. This would constitute a sharp change in the attitude of the Patriarchate, which makes every effort to stress that it is unconnected to the Catholic Church.

*By Haim Shapiro
The Jerusalem Post - 17 October 2002*

U.S. raps Israel on religious freedom

The U.S. State Department's annual report on religious freedom around the world criticizes Israel for government interference in the election of the Greek Orthodox Church's Patriarch for the Holy Land, Irenios I, and for budget discrimination against non-Jewish citizens and non-Orthodox Jewish communities.

The report, issued last night, does not cite Israel for grave violations of religious freedom but it does say the government tried to prevent Irenios' being elected. It conditioned recognizing his election on getting political concessions from the Palestinian Authority, and the authorities wanted one of his competitors for the post who had business dealings with Israelis. The report cites Israel for using budgets to discriminate against non-Jewish citizens, and against those who belong to non-Orthodox Jewish communities.

The report criticizes the PA for refusing to allow non-Muslims to visit the plaza on the Temple Mount and the mosques there.

Countries cited as being the worst offenders against religious freedom were China, Myanmar, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam. The State Department also criticized religious intolerance in Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Afghanistan was the only country named in the report as showing improvement.

*By Natan Guttman
Ha'aretz - 8 October 2002*

OSCE proposal seeks to internationalize Jerusalem's Old City

Israeli, US, and German delegates spent yesterday fighting a surprise proposal to internationalize Jerusalem's Old City presented by an Italian politician at the five-day

meeting in Berlin of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, composed of parliamentarians from 55 countries.

"It came as a surprise to us," said MK Colette Avital (Labor). "We have been working the whole evening to persuade him to take it back but we haven't succeeded."

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associated dean of the US-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, who is also in Berlin, said he fears the initiative will pass when brought before the OSCE for a vote today because it appeared to have a lot of support yesterday.

"The head of the Italian delegation told us his main concern is that in the future when there are peace discussions, the Palestinian entity will be given control of the Christian Holy Sites. He thinks that is not good enough for Christians," Cooper said.

He added that the Italian politician preferred for religious reasons to have the Old City internationally administered.

*By Tovah Lazaroff
The Jerusalem Post - 8 July 2002*

Teddy Kollek calls for division of Jerusalem

Palestinians should be given control over some parts of Jerusalem, including disputed holy sites in the Old City, according to Teddy Kollek, the city's long-time former mayor.

In reaction to the discovery of the Hamas terrorist cell in Jerusalem, Kollek said Israel's control over east Jerusalem was slipping.

"I think there needs to be an arrangement and we need to give something to them [the Arab residents of Jerusalem] and have part for ourselves," Kollek, 91, told Army Radio. "It will never be easy."

Kollek said the 200,000 Arabs living in east Jerusalem should not be under Israel's jurisdiction. "Listen, they [the Palestinians] have been sitting there for so many years and feel that it is theirs," said Kollek, who served as mayor from 1965-1993. "You can't achieve calm if you don't give them part of what they want and can control. There's no solution without this."

*By the Associated Press
The Jerusalem Post - 23 August 2002*

Beit Jala families seek to return home

Some 30 families who fled Beit Jala over the past two years, have appealed to the Palestinian Authority to help them return. The families left after Fatah terrorists started firing at Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood, drawing IDF retaliation.

The families have been staying in hotels or with friends and relatives in Bethlehem. The PA said it would pay the expenses for their accommodation, but did not do so, the families said Sunday. It also failed to make good on a promise to rebuild houses that were damaged when the IDF returned fire.

The mostly Christian families said the Beit Jala Municipality and PA Chairman Yasser Arafat's office had promised to help them renovate the houses, but to no avail.

"Although we went several times to ask what was happening with our request, we didn't get anywhere," said Ramzi Qiasiyeh. "We have visited all the ministries, including the ministries of finance and public works, which had promised to help."

Qiasiyeh said the PA also failed to pay the expenses of their temporary accommodation.

The families appealed to Arafat for help in solving their crisis after some of their landlords threatened to evict them because of accumulating debts.

"We, the families from Beit Jala, who number about 90 individuals, appeal to your excellency, the passionate father and leader, Abu Amar, to extend an assisting hand to us in order to solve our problem so that we can return very quickly to our homes and maintain our dignity," the families wrote to Arafat.

Many families, especially those whose houses face Gilo, have fled since the beginning of the current conflict, according to sources in Beit Jala.

The attacks on Gilo stopped after Operation Defensive Shield and the deportation of 13 fugitives who were hiding inside the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem.

*Khaled Abu Toameh
The Jerusalem Post - 4 November 2002*

U.S. Ambassador: The situation in the territories is a humanitarian disaster

American Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer yesterday told the Israeli negotiating team meeting the international "task force" on advancing the Palestinian Authority reforms, that the situation in the territories was "a humanitarian disaster." He called for Israel to lift travel restrictions on the Palestinians.

Kurtzer spoke bluntly of the difficulties Israel had created for Palestinian movement and said it was difficult to make reforms when Palestinian officials were delayed by closures and checkpoints. "Movement for senior officials is crucial for the reforms," said Kurtzer, and he also complained about difficulties faced by sick people in getting medical treatment.

Kurtzer said PA reforms were based on a 100-day plan formulated by the PA. "It's a Palestinian reform," he said. "We are here to help it, not dictate it," and he said the U.S. was working separately on security reforms.

Maj. Gen. Amos Gilad, government coordinator in the territories, said Israel was allowing more freedom of movement and easing restrictions on international aid organizations in the territories. Representatives of the U.S., European Union, UN, Russia, Norway, Japan, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund attended the meeting.

European envoy Miguel Moratinos said the planned Palestinian elections were a cornerstone for the reforms. Others reviewed the financial reforms being planned by PA Finance Minister Salem Fayad.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres briefed the session on government plans to ease conditions for the Palestinians, including the transfer of NIS 200 million of frozen PA assets to Fayad, who will get the money next week from treasury director general Ohad Marani.

Peres said there were plans to expand industrial parks on the seam lines, and his proposal to rehabilitate the refugee camps that were damaged in combat, "with plenty of jobs."

"We are starting with a very low level of confidence with regard to the Palestinian Authority. Improving standards of living depends on only one thing, security. We cannot do what we want to do - withdraw the army from the positions it is holding - if the next day there's a suicide bombing." He asked for financial aid for security technology to ease passage through the checkpoint at Kalandiya, near Jerusalem.

Minister Danny Naveh, the Prime Minister's chaperone at the meetings, said "the terror is not only Hamas and Islamic Jihad, it is also the Palestinian Authority, and that's the main problem."

Naveh told the officials Israel had a moral obligation to help the Palestinians. "The only reason we entered the Palestinian cities is the lack of security. We will be prepared to leave them, if Israeli lives are not endangered," Naveh said.

*By Aluf Benn
Ha'aretz - 26 July 2002*

UN report urges Israel end restrictions, PA halt terror

New York -A new UN report on the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is recommending that Israel ease military restrictions and that the Palestinian Authority halt terrorism in order to boost living conditions in the area.

The report, which was written by Catherine Bertini, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's personal humanitarian envoy, and released on Wednesday, urges Israel to allow increased freedom of movement to Palestinian farmers, traders, teachers, and international aid groups and calls for accelerated release of \$600 million in funds withheld from the PA, while offering a rare rebuke to the PA for failing to halt attacks.

Bertini states that the UN "acknowledges the need of Israel to protect its civilian population from further attacks by Palestinian groups." She calls on the PA to "prosecute and effectively bring to justice any personnel and other individuals suspected of being involved in criminal activities, including attacks on Israeli civilians," and urges the PA to ensure that its supplies, including ambulances, "are not used for unlawful activities and remain free of any contraband."

According to Bertini, 22.5% of Palestinian children under five suffer from chronic or acute malnutrition, and 19.7% of all children are anaemic. She also said that Israeli policies are responsible for a rise in stillbirths and miscarriages, though no figures are cited.

In addition, half the population has borrowed money to buy food, and 17% of households have sold personal effects, including jewellery, to purchase food, according to the report. Some 45% of all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, or 1.5 million people, receive food assistance from various agencies, up from 300,000 in 2000, wrote Bertini, and she noted that 100,000 people previously employed in Israel have lost their jobs.

Following the report's release, an Israeli source said that Israel recognizes the Palestinians' humanitarian plight, and that the state "will do its utmost, and has already begun to assist the Palestinian people on a humanitarian basis."

At a press briefing last week at UN headquarters here, Bertini announced that Israel had agreed to ease a series of restrictions, including allowing farmers to freely harvest their crops, facilitating water deliveries, and agreeing to stop ambulances at checkpoints for no more than 30 minutes.

*By Melissa Radler
The Jerusalem Post - 9 September 2002*

Report: Muslim strength up in Old City

Jews and Christians together make up about 30 percent of the population of Jerusalem's Old City, making them minorities in a place that is central to their religion, said speakers Sunday night at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies.

Israel Kimhi of the institute said the proportion of Jews is increasing, from 8.6% in 1995 to 11.34% in 2002. There are some 33,500 people living in the Old City today. Kimhi said most of the Jewish population growth has been in the Muslim Quarter, which now houses 800 Jews.

The number of Christians is dropping, Kimhi said, but he could not say by how much. In 1995, according to a report issued by the institute last week, out of the 32,488 people living in the Old City, 70.6% were Muslims and 20.3% were Christians.

The report showed that out of the 879 dunams of land in the Old City, 24% is owned by the Islamic Wakf, 28% by Muslims, 29% by Christians and the remaining 19% by Jews.

The report was undertaken with the hope that it will provide useful in any future negotiations on the Old City's future, said Ruth Lapidot, a senior researcher at the Jerusalem Institute.

Last night, Kimhi said that despite their growth in numbers, Jews are losing their connection to the Old City while the Muslim connection is growing.

Jews are afraid to come to the Old City, but Muslims are not, he said.

Amnon Ramon, who worked on the report, said Christians are leaving in the face of increasing Islamic fundamentalism, despite their strong religious connection to the Old City. They feel there is no room for them there as Christian Palestinians because they are not accepted by Muslims. This reflects a nation-wide trend, he said.

Christian interests should be part of the debate over the Old City's future; instead their issues are seen as peripheral, and the Old City is viewed purely within in the context of Jewish and Muslim interests, Ramon said.

The Old City is growing more religious in its character, according to the report. The number of holy places has grown from the 30 cited in a 1949 United Nations list to 328 in 2000, Lapidot said.

Among the Jewish population, 70% are Haredi, 25% are Orthodox. Only 5% are secular, compared to 40% among the Jews who returned to the Old City after 1967.

Overall, the Old City's population has grown by 36% since 1967, with the highest absolute growth in the Muslim community. The Muslim population remained constant from 1967 to 1983, but then jumped from 16,760 in 1983 to 22,814 in 1995.

The Christian population dropped from 6,994 in 1967 to 6,483 in 1983. In 1995, there were 6,570 Christians in the Old City and the numbers have dropped since then, according to Kimhi. Because of Muslim population growth and the return of Jews, the percentage of Christians living in the Old City dropped from 29.5% in 1967 to 20.3% in 1995.

The Jewish population has risen from zero in 1967 to 2,235 in 1983, 2,802 in 1995, and 3,800 today.

Kimhi said that a large amount of illegal construction has accompanied the population growth, but the institute's study has no exact numbers, Kimhi said.

People are building without licenses because construction laws are very restrictive, Kimhi said. They are adding rooms in basements and courtyards so they can't be seen from the street, Kimhi said. There is little supervision of illegal construction in the Muslim and Jewish quarters, Kimhi said.

Lapidot said that the Old City suffers from overcrowding, with an average of 70 people per dunam.

*By Tovah Lazaroff
The Jerusalem Post - 15 July 2002*

80,000 Palestinians emigrated from territories since beginning of year

Approximately 80,000 Palestinians have left the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the beginning of the year, a rise of 50 percent compared to last year, a senior Palestinian Authority official said Monday. The official, who asked not to be named, told The Jerusalem Post another 50,000 Palestinians are now trying to leave through the Jordan River bridges and the Rafah border crossing.

"We are seriously talking about transfer," the official added. "We are holding urgent deliberations with the brothers in Jordan and Egypt to try to stop the influx."

He estimated that at least half of those who have already left would eventually decide to settle in another country.

The figures, which do not include Palestinian residents of Jerusalem who have Israeli-issued ID cards, are based on data provided by several PA ministries, which issue various travel documents for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Last week Bethlehem Mayor Hanna Nasser revealed in an interview with the Post that about 1,000 Palestinians from his town had left the country over the past few months.

Thousands of Palestinians have been camping in the open air outside Jericho, waiting for their turn to cross the Allenby and Adam bridges into Jordan. Hundreds others are waiting near the Rafah border crossing.

According to the PA official, at one stage more than 40,000 would-be entrants were gathered near Jericho. Many of them have been waiting for weeks after Jordan decided to limit the number of West Bank Palestinians entering the Hashemite Kingdom.

The Jordanian authorities say they do not want to help Palestinians leave their homes for fear Israel will not allow them back. But Palestinians say they believe the Jordanians are afraid a large number of Palestinians want to live permanently in Jordan.

Under pressure from the PA and humanitarian organizations, some of which have supplied the stranded Palestinian travellers with tents and food, the Jordanian government earlier this month agreed to allow 1,000 people a day to enter Jordan. The move came after the Palestinians complained that Israel was preventing them from returning to their homes in the West Bank.

A PA cabinet minister, who visited Jordan last month for talks with Jordanian officials on the restrictions, said he could understand the Jordanians' fears. "They fear that [Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon wants to expel the Palestinians to Jordan, where they would be able to establish a substitute state," he told the Post yesterday. "This is understandable."

The minister added that top Jordanian government officials told him Israel could seize the opportunity during an American military strike on Iraq "to try and get rid of as many Palestinians as possible."

One of the measures currently being applied by the Jordanian authorities requires each Palestinian to deposit a sum of 1,000 Jordanian dinars (\$1,400) to ensure that they do not settle in the kingdom.

Khaled Khatib, a leader of the Palestinian Democratic Union, an offshoot the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, warned that tens of thousands of Palestinians could be driven out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip when the US launches a military offensive against Iraq. "Israel might exploit the situation to mount a wide-scale military operation to destroy the PA and expel tens of thousands of desperate Palestinians," he said. "But this plot will not succeed because our people have learned from previous mistakes."

In 1991 Jordan opened its borders to tens of thousands of Palestinians expelled from Kuwait and other Gulf states in retaliation for PA Chairman Yasser Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein.

"No one is opposed to Palestinians visiting Jordan," said Jordanian writer and columnist Fahed Fanek. "But the fear is that many visitors do not want to go back and are seeking a refuge, be it in Jordan, the United States, Canada, Australia, or elsewhere."

"One cannot blame them as individuals, because life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is intolerable for both economic and security reasons," he added. "But we have a national duty to Jordan, first, and to Palestine, second, to block gradual transfer and prevent the Palestinian State from being relocated outside Palestine, specifically to Jordan."

*By Khaled Abu Toameh
The Jerusalem Post - 26 August 2002*

More Israeli Arab women stay unmarried

A new phenomenon has developed among Muslim and Druze women over the past three decades: An increasing number of them do not marry. At the end of the 1990s, some 10 percent of Muslim and Druze women aged 40-44 had never married, compared with 4 percent at the beginning of the 1970s. At the same time, the age of marriage in the two sectors went up by one year, over this period.

This is revealed in a new publication of the Central Bureau of Statistics, devoted to demographic, social and economic changes in the year 2000, in the Muslim, Christian and Druze sectors in Israel. The publication, part of the Statistical series, also brings comparisons with the past and with the Jewish population.

Another phenomenon revealed by the statistics is the rapid rise in the rate of education of the Arab population. In 1970, the mean education level of the Jewish population was four years higher than that of the Arab population, but the difference now is three years. A comparison revealed, however, that the percentage of Christians (27 percent) who had studied more than 12 years was double that of the Muslims or Druze. In

1970, half of the Muslim population had a mere five years' formal education while, today, half of that population has almost 10 years' schooling.

A marked change is also reported in the infant mortality rate among Israel's Arab population. In 1970, more than 30 babies died for every 1,000 live births in this sector. By the year 2000, the infant mortality rate had dropped to below 10 deaths per 1,000 births. This is double the mortality rate among Israeli Jewish babies, but significantly lower than the infant mortality rate in neighboring Arab countries. (In Jordan, for example, it is 31 deaths per 1,000 births). The statistical breakdown revealed that the mortality rate among Israeli Christian Arabs is 3.9 per 1,000 births as compared with 9.1 among Muslims.

As in the Jewish sector, the Arab sector registered a drop in the number of men who are part of the work force, among all ages but particularly among the young (who apparently are studying more) and the elderly. One out of five Arab women between the ages of 25 and 44 work.

*By Moti Bassok
Ha'aretz - 11 July 2002*

Archaeologists verify physical evidence of Jesus

Washington - Archaeologists have authenticated what they say is the first physical evidence that corroborates biblical references to Jesus - an inscription of his name on the ancient bone box of his brother James.

The inscription found on the container, known as an ossuary, reads in Aramaic: "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." The ossuary has been dated to approximately 63 BCE.

Palaeographer Andre Lemaire of Sorbonne University researched the box, which is owned by an anonymous Israeli antiquities collector, while he was a visiting scholar this year at the Hebrew University's Institute for Advanced Study in Jerusalem. Lemaire published his results in the November/December edition of the *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR). The findings were unveiled yesterday at a press conference in Washington hosted by the magazine's publisher, the Biblical Archaeology Society.

Hershel Shanks, editor in chief of *BAR*, admits that the finding "confirms the Jewishness of both James and Jesus."

During the first century, BCE, Jews often transferred bones of the deceased from burial caves to ossuaries. This practice was halted after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Based on extensive research, Lemaire concluded that approximately 20 Jerusalemites from this period would "be called James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."

"It is, however, impossible to estimate how many of these 20 people were buried in ossuaries and how many of these ossuaries would be inscribed," he writes in the article.

According to Lemaire, inscribing the deceased brother's name on the ossuary was rare and likely occurred in this case, because Jesus - James's brother - was prominent figure.

Dr. Amnon Rosenfeld and Dr. Shimon Ilani of the National Infrastructure Ministry's Geological Survey verified the authenticity of the ossuary.

Researchers examined the chalk (limestone), soil, and patina (the thin covering of the surface caused by age) of the ossuary. They further concluded that the ossuary was not tampered with.

The anonymous antiquities dealer purchased the ossuary 15 years ago from an Arab dealer for a few hundred dollars. The item is believed to be from Silwan, a neighbourhood in east Jerusalem.

*By Adam Sharon
The Jerusalem Post - 22 October 2002*

Antiquities Authority: Temple Mount wall in danger

The southern wall of Jerusalem's Temple Mount is in unequivocal danger of collapse, the head of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, Shuka Dorfman, confirmed yesterday.

"I cannot tell you when it will happen, and I do not know what section will fall, but I can tell you that the southern wall is indeed in danger of collapse," Dorfman said yesterday.

Noting that over a year of contacts with Wakf, the Muslim religious trust, to fix the problem have been fruitless, Dorfman noted that his archaeologists and engineers are prevented by Wakf officials from carrying out needed tests on the Temple Mount to survey the damage and enable repairs.

"The necessary cooperation needed with the Wakf is nonexistent," Dorfman said bluntly. "We cannot get in to carry out the tests," he added, although only "several days" are needed.

Wakf director Adnan Husseini confirmed yesterday that Islamic officials had rejected an Israeli request to be involved in the necessary work, which he said was previously done by "an Arab company."

"It's a principle. The Wakf works alone at the mosque," he said.

The Antiquities Authority first conducted a series of tests on the outside of the wall in the first half of 2000, after sections of the southern retaining wall surrounding the Temple Mount were seen protruding, likely due to Wakf construction work in years past at Solomon's Stables just above.

"If not treated, the problem is a source of danger in the medium-term (in a range of a number of years), and its collapse may cause irreversible damage to the structure," the Antiquities Authority's survey stated in July 2001.

Due to the extreme sensitivity of the issue and the need for cooperation from the Wakf, the Antiquities Authority has heretofore maintained a low profile on the issue, hoping that back channel and diplomatic efforts would bear fruit.

After Dorfman notified the political echelon of the likely disaster waiting to happen, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres tried unsuccessfully to bring aboard the Egyptians and Jordanians in the effort to fix the problem, sources said. A Jordanian group visited the site last week, but nothing came of their trip since the Wakf is now controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

The Internal Security Ministry declined to comment yesterday on Dorfman's warnings.

Concern is mounting in the Israeli archaeological community ahead of the upcoming Ramadan holiday in November, when hundreds of thousands of Muslim worshipers visit the site, with perhaps 10,000 able to attend the mosque at Solomon's Stables.

While Dorfman says he cannot estimate the timing of a possible collapse if the problem goes untended, leading Hebrew University archaeologist Dr. Eilat Mazar said yesterday that disaster may be only weeks or months away.

"I have difficulty believing that the Wall will last the whole winter," Mazar, a leading spokeswoman of the Committee Against the Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount, said yesterday.

"If a year ago it was a 'fourth-month' bulge, now it looks like it's in its 'eighth month,'" she added.

*By Etgar Lefkovits
The Jerusalem Post - 27 August 2002*

Bethlehem residents fear cancellation of Christmas celebrations

The curfew in Bethlehem enters its fifth day on Tuesday, amid fears that the IDF is planning to stay at least until the end of the year.

Many residents expressed concern the military presence would lead to the cancellation of Christmas and New Year celebrations.

"It looks like they are preparing to stay here for a long period," a municipal official said. "It's not clear if we will be able to hold religious services for Christmas. The army has told us that it plans to stay here until it achieves all its goals."

Preparations for Christmas and New Year celebrations began almost immediately after the IDF left Bethlehem in August. Life has since returned to near normality, with restaurants and cafes open until late at night. For many merchants, this was a sign of hope that the tourists and pilgrims would finally reappear in Manger Square.

But last Thursday's suicide bus bombing in Jerusalem, in which 11 people were killed and scores wounded, marked the end of the short-lived mood of optimism in Bethlehem.

"As soon as we heard that the suicide bomber was from here, we knew that the worst was yet to come," said Omar Odeh, owner of a grocery near Manger Square. "Everyone here knew that within a short time Israel would reoccupy Bethlehem. People rushed to withdraw cash from banks, and many lined up outside bakeries and groceries to buy food supplies."

The streets of Bethlehem and the surrounding towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahur were deserted Monday, as IDF jeeps and armored personnel carriers enforced a strict round-the-clock curfew. The IDF has declared the area a closed military zone, but that hasn't prevented journalists from finding their way into the city.

They were not the only ones to discover the "bypass" road on a hilltop near Beit Jala. A few Palestinians and foreign residents have also been using the side road since the IDF recaptured the city. They often hire private ambulances to take them past the IDF jeeps and armored vehicles.

Others have discovered another safe way of avoiding the soldiers: hanging "TV" signs or UN flags on their cars.

Abu Ibrahim, who has braved the curfew to help journalists enter the city, said he has no other choice, "because I must feed my children."

A resident of Aida refugee camp north of the city, the father of eight said: "I know it's dangerous to drive around during the curfew, but nothing will stop me from earning a living. I must admit that the soldiers are very understanding and turn a blind eye, because they can see that a person like me is only looking for ways to feed his children.

"People here are very angry with those who are launching the suicide attacks. These attacks are causing great damage to our people. Islam does not approve of the killing of innocent civilians. The Koran even forbids suicide."

Many in Bethlehem blamed "outsiders" for providing the IDF with an excuse. Na'el Abu Hilayel, the Hamas suicide bomber who blew himself up on the Egged bus in Kiryat Menahem, is originally from Dura, south of Hebron. He and his family moved to the Bethlehem area a few months ago.

"The Hebronites have invaded our city," complained a Christian businessman. "Statistics show that almost all those responsible for the terror attacks are not from Bethlehem. In the last few years, many families from Hebron and nearby villages have settled here and in Beit Sahur and Beit Jala.

"In many cases, they grab land owned by Christian families that are abroad. Others are exploiting the hard economic situation to offer cash for houses, land, and

businesses. In a few years, Christian pilgrims visiting Bethlehem will have to bring their own priests with them."

*By Khaled Abu Toameh
The Jerusalem Post - 26 November 2002*

'No Christmas this year,' says Arafat

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat on Wednesday ordered Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem cancelled, to protest the IDF presence in the city.

Speaking to reporters at his Ramallah office, Arafat called the army's decision to declare Bethlehem a closed military zone until the end of the year a "crime."

"These [Israeli] measures mean that there is no Christmas this year," Arafat said.

His announcement is seen as an attempt to pressure Israel to pull its forces out of Bethlehem, where he claimed that soldiers had prevented Christian worshipers from entering the Church of the Nativity for prayers last Sunday.

Palestinian sources said Arafat's decision would be rescinded if the IDF leaves the city.

Palestinian journalists reported Wednesday that soldiers showed them a document declaring the Bethlehem area a closed military zone through the end of December.

Also on Wednesday, the PA issued a statement saying the IDF had demolished eight houses in the Bethlehem area in the past 10 days. The statement described the Israeli closure of Bethlehem as a grave violation of the freedom of worship.

The PA appealed to Pope John Paul II to intervene, and also urged the United Nations and the international community to condemn the Israeli invasion of Bethlehem, and to put pressure on Israel to withdraw from the city.

*By Khaled Abu Toameh
The Jerusalem Post - 28 November 2002*

SELECTIONS OF ITEMS FROM VATICAN INFORMATION SERVICE

Archbishop Tauran comments on International Situation

The Italian newspaper "Avvenire" published an interview today with Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, secretary for Relations with States, about the international situation.

Referring to the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2002, the archbishop says that "that abominable action provoked the universal condemnation of terrorism ... and prompted the leaders in society to examine the causes of such inhuman violence. In addition, the meeting in Assisi on January 24 as well as the 'Men and Religion' meeting in Palermo have emphasized that religion can never justify terrorism and that all believers have the common duty to dispel hatred."

In continuation, speaking about the Holy See's position on the situation in Iraq, the prelate responds by saying: "To promote dialogue always; never to isolate a country or a government ... Obviously one evil cannot be combated with another evil ... If the international community, inspired by international law and in particular by the resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations, were to consider the use of force opportune and fair, this would have to take place through a decision made within the framework of the United Nations, after having weighed the consequences for the Iraqi population, as well as the repercussions on countries in the area and on world stability; if not only the strictest law would prevail."

With respect to what would be the basic conditions in order to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East, the secretary for Relations with States says that in the first place is it necessary that "they drop their arms and that everyone respects each other and their legitimate aspirations; that everyone applies the rules of international law; that the occupied territories are evacuated and that a special statute that is internationally guaranteed is instituted to safeguard the unique and sacred character of the Holy Sites of the three religions in Jerusalem. In addition, the international community would have to be more present in the region in the order to help both sides."

Asked about the repercussion of John Paul II's words of condemnation throughout the year, Msgr. Tauran said that "they have been of great value to help everyone to understand that a theology of terror cannot exist and that extremist groups that find inspiration in Islam should not be confused with true Muslims" and that "many heads of State that have visited the Vatican have expressed satisfaction because the Holy See's position has warned about any such confusion and has addressed an independent word to each one."

Regarding changes that may have been implemented due to September 11 in relations between the Holy See and the Islamic world, the archbishop says: "I think that it is clear to everyone that fighting terrorism does not mean combating Islam ... the Pope and his collaborators have reiterated this on many occasions."

Lastly, analyzing the results of the war on terrorism during this past year, he affirms that "the most important thing is that no political leader worthy of that title or religious leader can justify terrorism in any part of the world ... We must punish the guilty and make sure that they do not do any more damage. But we must be careful not to confuse justice with vengeance and to avoid that entire populations pay for the cruelty of those responsible for the attacks."

VIS - 10 September 2002

Pope remembers and prays for victims of September 11

In the general audience today celebrated in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father remembered the victims of the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on the first anniversary of the tragic events and entrusted them to God's mercy.

The Pope assured the families and loved ones of those who died of his "spiritual closeness. But," he added, "we also want to speak to the consciences of those who planned and executed such a barbaric and cruel act."

"One year after September 11, 2001, we repeat," he said, "that no situation of injustice, no feeling of frustration, no philosophy or religion can justify such an aberration. Every person has the right to respect for life itself and dignity which are inviolable goods. God says it, international law sanctions it, the human conscience proclaims it, civil co-existence requires it."

The Holy Father emphasized that "terrorism is and will always be a manifestation of inhuman cruelty, which precisely for this reason will never be able to resolve conflicts among human beings. Abuse, armed violence and war are choices that sow and generate hate and death. Only reason and love are valid means to overcome and resolve disputes between people and nations."

"A harmonious and resolute effort is necessary and urgent to carry out new political and economic initiatives capable of resolving the scandalous situations of injustice and oppression that continue to afflict so many members of the human family, creating favorable conditions for the uncontrollable explosion of the desire for vengeance. It is necessary to build together a global culture of solidarity, that returns hope for the future to young people."

John Paul II stressed that "only from truth and justice can freedom and peace be born. Upon these values it is possible to construct a dignified life for man. Outside of these values, there is only ruin and destruction."

"On this sad anniversary," he concluded, "we raise our prayer to God so that love can replace hate and, with the effort of all people of good will, harmony and solidarity can be affirmed in all corners of the earth."

When greeting his countrymen in Polish, the Pope invited them to pray for the victims of the attacks and asked for "mercy and pardon for the authors of this horrible terrorist attack."

At the end of the audience John Paul II recited a prayer invoking divine mercy and sanctity "for the injustices that stain the conscience of humankind" and prayed that the breath of the Holy Spirit, instilled in every man and woman, would make them grow "in harmony and become one big family" in which everyone is welcome as a son of God.

"May the memory of the tragic events in human history," he said, "not obscure confidence in the infinite mercy and fidelity of God. His unchanging will of love and peace, manifested in Christ who died and rose from the dead, is the foundation of secure hope for all human beings and for all peoples."

The faithful who joined in the Pope's prayer expressed four prayer intentions in English, French, Arabic and Spanish.

The intention in English prayed for "the victims of violence and terrorism and in particular for those who were cruelly snatched from their loved ones a year ago today." In French, they prayed for "the Church ... so that it may feed and sustain the hope of men of good will, guiding his footsteps on the ways of peace and justice."

"For believers of all religions," went the Arabic intention, "so that in the name of God All Merciful, Lover of peace they may reject firmly any form of violence and so that they may commit themselves to resolve conflicts with sincere and patient dialogue, respectful of the different historical, cultural and religious experiences."

Lastly, in Spanish they prayed for children and young people, "the hope of the new millennium ... so that they may be helped to build a civilization of love and peace, in a world where everyone's rights are defended and where goods are distributed equally in all parts."

VIS - 11 September 2002

Pope makes Appeal for Peace

At the end of the general audience, John Paul II made an appeal for peace once again upon having received news about Iraq. Below are his words:

"In the last few days, after the winds of war threatened to upset the entire region of the Middle East, I have received the good news of the possibility of Iraq's collaboration once again with the international community. I urge you to continue to pray that the Lord enlightens the leaders of nations, opens up and sustains attitudes of good will and leads humanity, afflicted by so many evils, toward co-existence free from war and violence".

VIS - 18 September 2002

Pope asks for end to Attacks on Palestinian Authority

Holy See Press Office Director, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, made the following statement late this morning on the situation in the Middle East:

"Worried about the serious attack on the headquarters of the Palestinian National Authority, Cardinal Secretary of State Angelo Sodano has sent a message to Israeli Prime

Minister Ariel Sharon asking, in the name of the Holy Father, for a suspension of such actions which compromise the already slender hopes for peace in that region, and expressing hope for an immediate resumption of dialogue between the parties in reciprocal respect and mutual understanding.

"At the same time, the cardinal secretary of state assured President Arafat, at this sad hour for the Palestinian people and the National Authority, of the closeness of His Holiness John Paul II, and his own closeness, while repeating that the Holy See will continue its commitment for the defense of the right of all peoples to live in peace with secure borders and in a climate of mutual respect."

VIS - 24 September 2002

Holy Father donates \$400,000 to Holy Land

Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes, president of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," will be in the Holy Land from November 7 to 10 where he will visit Catholic leaders and institutions and will donate \$400,000 to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Franciscan Custos, Caritas and several Catholic communities.

A communiqué released today about his trip states: "With the occupation of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which lasted 39 days, there was further proof of how necessary the presence of Christians in the Holy Land is. The continuous acts of violence between Palestinians and Israelis represents unfortunately a persistent threat to the lives of all the inhabitants of the region. Hospitality homes for pilgrims are empty, while in Bethlehem about 80 percent of the population is unemployed. The desire of many people to leave the country is well understood. The safekeeping of the Holy Places would be in serious danger if Christians were to abandon them.

"Following the terrible attacks on the World Trade Center, the Holy Father John Paul II appealed for material and spiritual aid for those suffering the consequences of war and terrorism. His Holiness, among other things, has designated \$400,000 of the funds gathered for this purpose to the Holy Land.

"The aim of this trip is not just to turn over this money. Through various meetings, the Holy Father's envoy hopes above all to encourage Christians to remain in these battered places, as so many missionaries are already doing in such a heroic fashion. The support is offered to improve living and working conditions in their land so they might be a fertile seed of humanity and peace."

VIS - 6 November 2002

Pope prays for those who suffer in the Holy Land and Iraq

This morning the Holy Father received participants in the plenary assembly of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

In his speech, the Pope referred to the topics that they were considering during their meeting: the activity carried out by the dicastery in the last four years, the election of bishops in the patriarchal Churches and the state of the Eastern Churches.

Speaking about the first point, John Paul II emphasized "the congregation's priority for liturgical and catechetical renewal, as well as the formation of the different members of the People of God, starting with candidates to holy orders and consecrated life."

With respect to the procedure of the election of bishops in the patriarchal Churches, the Holy Father said: "I will be happy to take into consideration your proposals regarding the relative norms of the Code of Canon Law of the Eastern Churches. In any case, when difficulties in applying the current canon norms are made known to the Holy See, everything will be done to help overcome them with a spirit of active collaboration."

On the state of the Eastern Churches and their prospects for pastoral renewal, the Pope affirmed that he was familiar with the difficulties that the Eastern communities encounter in many places: "Few people, lack of means, isolation, and being a minority frequently impede serene and effective educational and charitable pastoral care. In addition, there is an incessant emigration of the most prepared members of your Churches to the West."

"And what is there to say," he asked, "of the suffering endured in the Holy Land and other Eastern countries, dragged into a dangerous spiral that seems humanly unstoppable? May God end this vortex of violence as soon as possible!" John Paul II appealed for peace through the intercession of Blessed John XXIII who "lived for many years in the East, and loved the Eastern Churches so much. ... May he also intercede so that these Churches do not close themselves off to the ways of the past and so that they open up to that healthy revision that he himself desired in line with the sapient harmony between 'nova et vetera'."

The Holy Father concluded by invoking Our Lady's protection for the members of the communities that extend from the Middle East to Africa and from Europe to India, "in particular for those in the Holy Land and Iraq who are going through difficult moments of great suffering."

VIS - 21 November 2002

John Paul II appeals for end to Mideast Violence

John Paul II appealed for an end to the violence engulfing the Holy Land and the Middle East, when he met with leaders of Eastern-rite Catholic Churches.

Highlighting the sufferings of the inhabitants of the region who are "drawn into a dangerous spiral that, humanly, seems unstoppable," the Pope exclaimed: "May God make this spiral of violence cease as soon as possible!"

He made his appeal to 65 representatives who are attending the plenary assembly of the Vatican Congregation for Eastern Churches.

The Pope confided his prayer in particular to Blessed John XXIII, as the 40th anniversary of the encyclical "Pacem in Terris" approaches.

ZENIT - 21 November 2002

Curfew may hinder Christmas Preparations in Bethlehem

The Franciscan Custody in the Holy Land appealed to Israel to lift the curfew imposed on Bethlehem, since it is interfering with important religious celebrations.

The appeal was presented today to Israeli army representatives by Father Ibrahim Faltas... The basilica had been under a siege for more than a month last spring.

On Thursday night, dozens of Israeli army tanks invaded Bethlehem. The area was declared a closed military zone, in response to the latest Palestinian suicide attack, apparently carried out by a native of the city.

"No one can leave; we don't know what can be done. People are desperate," Father Ibrahim Faltas said in a telephone conversation with Vatican Radio.

He explained that the Israeli occupation will impede Catholics from participating this weekend in the traditional celebration, in which Father Giovanni Battistelli, Custodian of the Holy Land, solemnly enters the Basilica of the Nativity, in preparation for Christmas.

The Franciscans hoped to inaugurate the "Peace Door," which was blessed by John Paul II.

ZENIT - 22 November 2002

Appointment of Fr. Giuseppe Nazzaro, OFM *Former Custos of the Holy Land*

The Holy Father appointed Fr. Giuseppe Nazzaro, O.F.M., guardian of the Fraternity of St. Anthony in Damascus, Syria, as apostolic vicar of Aleppo of the Latins (Catholics 10,000, priests 40, religious 242), Syria, at the same time elevating him to the dignity of bishop. The bishop-elect was born in 1937 in San Potito, Italy and was ordained a priest in 1965. He succeeds Bishop Armando Bortolaso, S.D.B., whose resignation from the pastoral care of the same Apostolic Vicariate the Holy Father accepted upon having reached the age limit.

VIS - 21 November 2002

Bethlehem expects to see Religious Celebrations for Christmas

Bethlehem will celebrate Christmas after all.

After Yasser Arafat announced the cancellation of secular Christmas festivities in Bethlehem due to the Israeli occupation, the spokesman of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land clarified that the religious feasts will be observed.

Father David Jaeger told Vatican Radio, "There is no intention on our part to suspend religious observances in Bethlehem for Holy Christmas."

"These celebrations," he said, "are protected by the juridical regime of the Status Quo guaranteed especially by Article 4 of the basic agreement between the Vatican and the Palestine Liberation Organization, as well as by the analogous Article 4 of the fundamental agreement between the Vatican and the State of Israel."

ZENIT - 29 November 2002

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to
those whom He loves" (Lk 2:14)*

Jesus, the Child in the crib, invites us to come to Him. He is the same today:
THE PRINCE OF PEACE. From Him we can receive peace.
Today we need peace. Perhaps our hearts are filled with fear.
But what this Child has to give us is greater than all fears.
His name is PRINCE OF PEACE, MIGHTY GOD,
WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR.

*With these words, the Christian Information Centre sends you
its best wishes for the Year 2003*