



## *Committee on International Justice and Peace*

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May 6, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to protest in the strongest terms a recent decision of the Israeli Special Appeals Committee for land seizure under emergency law in the Cremisan Valley. I had written to your predecessor late last year regarding this case.

The Cremisan Valley lies in the West Bank on the Palestinian side of the Green Line adjacent to Beit Jala and Bethlehem. The State of Israel plans to re-route the separation barrier through the Cremisan Valley. The route will separate a Salesian monastery from a Salesian convent, and will separate both from their lands. The Salesian Convent and Primary School will be surrounded on three sides by the barrier that will confiscate most of the convent's lands.

At the same time the route will harm 58 Christian families whose livelihoods depend on these lands. Proceeding with this plan will cut families off from agricultural and recreational lands, other family members, water sources and schools – including depriving Christian Palestinian youth of fellowship with their peers.

In solidarity with our brother bishops in the Holy Land, we oppose re-routing the separation wall in the Cremisan Valley and ask the State Department to raise the concerns expressed by the bishops of the Holy Land in the enclosed statement with the government of Israel. In the wake of the Appeals Committee decision, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, speaking for the bishops of the Holy Land, reminded “Israeli decision-makers that the expropriation of lands does not serve the cause of peace and does not strengthen the position of the moderates.”

The Cremisan Valley is a microcosm of a protracted pattern that has serious implications for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As the wall moves and constricts more communities in the West Bank, the possibility of a future two-state resolution becomes less likely. Moving the wall and disassociating Palestinian families from their lands and livelihoods will incite more resentment against the State of Israel among residents of the West Bank, not less, increasing the frustrations that can lead to violence. Such policies put Israeli citizens at risk and weaken initiatives for reconciliation and peace.

Sharing the overwhelming sentiment of the world's nations, USCCB supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a reversal of Israeli policies, like those proposed in the Cremisan Valley, that undermine a just resolution of the conflict.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates  
Bishop of Des Moines  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops