



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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January 28, 2014

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 wrote you last May regarding the injustice being perpetrated in the Cremisan Valley near Bethlehem in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Earlier this month, I made a solidarity visit to the Cremisan Valley together with brother bishops from Europe, Canada and South Africa. Enclosed you will find a statement that summarizes our reflections on the sad state of affairs.

As I stood amidst the beauty of this agricultural valley and heard the testimony of the Christian families whose lands, livelihoods, and centuries-old family traditions are threatened, I was simply astounded by the injustice of it all.

On the eve of the Supreme Court of Israel taking up this case, I ask you once again to urge the Government of Israel to cease and desist in its efforts to unnecessarily confiscate Palestinian lands in the Occupied West Bank. As I said earlier, the Cremisan Valley is a microcosm of a protracted pattern that has serious implications for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and your commendable efforts to achieve a peace agreement.

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

Encl.

**Urgent need for support as Beit Jala families seek justice:
Bishops call for prayer and for international pressure as
Supreme Court of Israel Hearing into Cremisan Valley starts
January 28, 2014**

As Bishops of the Holy Land Co-ordination, we call for justice to be upheld in the Cremisan Valley, near Bethlehem. Israel's plans to build a security wall on the land of 58 Christian families should be abandoned. We met with many families from Beit Jala during our recent visit to the Holy Land. We heard of their pain and anguish. They are faced with the threatened loss of their land and livelihood as the planned security wall will destroy vineyards, groves and orchards and separate them from their land.

We recognise the right of the State of Israel to security and secure borders. However, the planned route of the security wall deviates sharply from the Green Line, the internationally-recognised demarcation line separating Israel and the territories captured in the six-day war of 1967. More than three quarters of the wall's planned route falls outside the Green Line and is illegal according to a landmark advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, while also a flagrant breach of the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We urge our governments to encourage Israel to follow international law. In particular, for Israel to respect the livelihoods of these families and for the people of Beit Jala to be protected from further expropriation of their land and homes by Israel. This is a matter of urgency as on 29 January the Israeli Supreme Court starts its hearing into the building of a security wall in the Cremisan Valley and the families' appeal to protect their land.

Our deep concern, as we have repeatedly stated is that this planned security wall is more about consolidating the settlement areas and permanently choking off Bethlehem from Jerusalem. This particular plan is a microcosm of the tragic situation in the Holy Land which incites resentment and mistrust, making the possibility of a much-needed solution less likely.

Our prayers are with the people of Beit Jala as they seek justice. We offer them also for all who seek a just peace in the Holy Land.

Bishops of the Holy Land Co-ordination, 2014

Archbishop Stephen Brislin, South Africa
Bishop Peter Burcher, Scandinavia, Finland and Iceland
Bishop William Crean, Ireland
Bishop Michel Dubost, France
Archbishop Paul-Andre Durocher, Canada
Archbishop Patrick Kelly, England and Wales
Bishop William Kenney, England and Wales
Bishop Declan Lang, England and Wales
Bishop Denis Nulty, Ireland
Bishop Richard Pates, United States of America
Bishop Thomas Renz, Germany
Bishop Janusz Stepnowski, Poland
Archbishop Joan Enric Vives, Spain