



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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September 22, 2015

His Excellency Ron Dermer
The Ambassador of Israel
3514 International Dr. NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

It is with great concern that I write about the challenge confronting Christian schools in Israel that have been on strike since early September in response to policies of the Israeli government. The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem issued a statement noting that “serious budget cuts imposed [by the Israeli government] upon our schools caused a financial deficit.” It is my understanding that while other private schools, such as the ultra-Orthodox, are totally subsidized by the State of Israel, Christian schools, which are in a similar category, have been allotted only enough funds to cover 29 percent of their operating costs, a marked drop from the 65 percent they received as recently as two years ago. In addition, the Israeli government has placed a cap on the tuition fees that the Christian schools can receive from families. These two policies mean schools cannot cover their annual costs, thus jeopardizing the education of some 33,000 students of different faiths, and the ability of Christian schools to function at all in Israel.

Pope Francis raised this serious issue when he met with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in early September 2015. The Council of European Bishops Conferences, in a recent message after a meeting in the Holy Land, likewise affirmed the right to “educate one’s children according to one’s own belief” and expressed support for an increase in the allocation to Christian schools. As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I want to lend my support to the survival of Christian schools in Israel.

The Israeli government says that its “educational system aims to prepare children to become responsible members of a democratic, pluralistic society in which people from different ethnic, religious, cultural and political backgrounds co-exist.”¹ This kind of quality education is precisely what the Patriarchs and other Christian religious leaders are committed to providing for young people in Israel, recognizing that to do so will help to shape the next generation of citizens. Please convey to your government the urgent need to revise their policies and significantly increase their funding for Christian schools so that students can go back to school. Providing equitable funding would be a long-term investment in strengthening Israel’s commitment to democracy, religious freedom and pluralism.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

¹ <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/IsraelExperience/AboutIsrael/Education/Pages/Education.aspx>