

*To His Holiness Pope John Paul II
To the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister*

*To usher in the 21st Century,
we hope that peace in the Holy Land
would be our gift to the world.
But if the local belligerent parties/negotiating partners
prove to be incapable of achieving it,
peace should be the gift of the world
to us in the Holy Land.*

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50 YEARS ON: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

**SPEECH DELIVERED ON JULY 9 1998 AT ANNUAL DINNER OF
MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS (M.A.P)**

I feel honoured and privileged to have been invited for a third time in eight years to address MAP's annual dinner, the major social event in London for the Arab community and for our British friends. MAP has undeniably become the pride of us all who yearn to enhance British-Palestinian cooperation.

Secretary of State, I wish to convey to Prime Minister Tony Blair and to yourself President Yasser Arafat's deep appreciation for your constructive contribution during our multiple recent talks here in London with the Americans and indirectly with the Israeli side. Allow me to express my respect and admiration to all the officials in the Foreign Office that I deal with. They have always shown immense professionalism and profound decency. Allow me also, to welcome my British counterpart and friend, H.E. Robin Kealy, the British Consul-General in Jerusalem and his wife, Annabel, who represent Britain in Palestine with great distinction and dedication.

This year the Israelis celebrated the 50th anniversary of the birth of their State. This year the Palestinians commemorated the 50th year of the loss of our homeland. I do not see this MAP dinner as another Wailing Wall or as an opportunity of self-flagellation. 50 years on, it is time for an evaluation of the achievements accomplished. 50 years on, it is time for an assessment of the challenges that still lie ahead.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

I believe that there are 4 achievements of historical significance:

1. Years ago, those who chose to be our enemies, many analysts and commentators predicted that, shattered and scattered to the four corners of the earth, the Palestinian people were destined and doomed to evaporate into historical oblivion.

2. Having been the Jews of the Jews, the victims of the victims of European history, we the Palestinian people were denied in 1948 our legitimate share of sympathy, solidarity and support. But successive eye-openers created conditions for an improved perception of our unacceptable fate and an improved awareness of our desirable future. Those eye-openers were: the brutal occupation policies that followed the 1967 war, the accession of Liked to power in 1977, the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, our cry for freedom out of captivity and bondage represented by the Intifada, our peace strategy.... Today - unlike yesterday - in the Western world, it is no more politically suicidal to be pro-Palestinian. Today - unlike yesterday - it is no more electorally rewarding to be anti-Palestinian.

3. I have always believed the the PLO was at the same time an institution and an idea. The idea was simple yet inspiring and immortal: our sense of identify and our ceaseless quest for independence and sovereignty. For the last four years this idea has started to become a territorial reality. In political science, a state is defined as “an authority on a demography on a geography” and history will prove that the emergence of the Palestinian entity has been a historical and irreversible turning point.

Already for many years the international community has recognised the legitimacy of our quest for Palestinian statehood. Now unsympathetic yet extremely influential personalities like Henry Kissinger in the United States and General Ariel Sharon in Israel admit, yes reluctantly but unequivocally, “the inevitability of Palestinian Statehood”. That is a major achievement that we owe to decades of Palestinian sacrifices. Yet we should always bear in mind how Nahum Goldmann once defined diplomacy. He said “it seems to me that diplomacy in the Middle East is the art of delaying the inevitable as long as possible”.

Secretary of State, I believe it to be the noble task of British and Palestinian diplomacy to disallow the attempts at delaying the inevitable and, even better, to usher in the historical short-cuts needed to end unnecessary protracted injustice, unnecessarily prolonged suffering and unending belligerency.

CHALLENGES:

1. Economic success or failure: When the peace process was initiated, knowing how devastating the notion of a “divine mission for a chosen people on a promised land” was, we rebaptised Palestine as “the promising land”.

Today, because of the unconvincing nature of the process, because of the policy of closures that result in the strangulation of the Palestinian society and economy, we are witnessing dramatic reductions in per capita income, rocketing levels of unemployment and hardly any significant investment. Yet, for every possible reason, we are condemned to succeed in the economic arena.

2. The territorial dimension: Today’s diplomatic impasse that has shattered the little credibility left to the process does not stem from what percentage of withdrawal is required for the long overdue first and second and even third redeployments. It is already the battle for final status. Bibi Netanyahu does not conceal his “vision” of returning around 40% of the occupied West Bank. Ladies and gentlemen, I have news for Netanyahu. I fully agree with “his” principle of reciprocity and since the peace process is based on the concept of “land for peace” and since we are in favour of 100% peace, he should not be surprised at all that our expectation is the return of 100% of those territories occupied in 1967.

With Netanyahu and most of the Israeli establishment, we seem to have a conceptual difference. They tend to prefer the concept of “territorial compromise”, consider the West Bank as “disputed territory” and generously offer to meet us half-way between ...Jerusalem and Jericho. We, on the other hand, operate on the basis of the search for a “historical compromise”, consider Mandatory Palestine to be the disputed territory and offer to meet them along the 4th of June 1967 boundaries in Jerusalem and nowhere else but in Jerusalem.

It seems that Arab realism was misunderstood as resignation. Since the Arab Summit meeting in Fez - Morocco in 1982 and the adoption of the peace proposals of the Crown - Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia, the message from the Arab world was: “in exchange for Israel’s withdrawal from its 1967 expansion we are ready to recognise Israel’s existence in its pre- 1967 boundaries. That is the only game in town from Morocco to Muscat. That is the only deal in town, from Rabat to Riyadh.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the victim has moved faster than the oppressor beyond double negation towards mutual recognition, mutual recognition between Israel and Palestine. I hope Bibi Netanyahu has not misread our intentions again. We were not in favour of a Palestinian unilateral recognition of Israeli existence. Recognition should be two-way traffic. Recognition can only be a double way traffic. Secretary of State, if the diplomatic avenue continues to be obstructed, I fear that many from the realist school of thought will be reduced to say: radicalism is too important to be left to the radicals alone any longer.

Former Israeli Prime Minister *Itzhac* Shamir, in his speech at the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, spoke of “Israel’s hunger for peace”. Secretary of State, we can satisfy Israel’s hunger for peace, if Israel abandons its appetite for territory.

3. The need for an improved performance: there is undeniably room for improvement in the Palestinian performance. By the way, Helmut Schmidt is known to have said that “the largest room on earth is precisely the room for improvement”. I still believe that we, the Palestinian people, have still neither the Authority we deserve nor the opposition we need. There is ample room for improvement in both. The criticism also extends to the performance of the Palestinian intelligentsia, the Palestinian business community and the Palestinian Diaspora.

4. Alienation of segments of our society: With great lucidity, we should admit that the way the peace process was approached, great anxieties surfaced among certain segments of our society. The Palestinian refugee community, still living in sub-human conditions on the periphery of the homeland, feels abandoned, ignored, neglected. We should do our utmost to keep their dossier, which the PLO reluctantly had to accept to see deferred to final status negotiations, on the forefront of our agenda. The Palestinians who have succeeded in staying in what became the State of Israel in 1948 also feel that they have been dropped from any vision for the future and that since we adopted the two-States approach. A dynamic strategy based on a triangular Palestinian-Palestinian-Palestinian cooperation, among the Palestinians of the State in the making, diaspora Palestinians and the Palestinians of Israel, should be initiated. A multi-faceted cooperation, a multi-dimensional interaction, with political economic, commercial and sociological components that will strengthen our social tissue, our national fabric.

5. Redefinition of roles: During the last years the centre of gravity of Palestinian nationalism has moved back home to Palestine. That was the logical and inevitable evolution in any rational strategic thinking. The reemerging Palestinian national movement was a diaspora phenomenon. It all started in the University campuses of Cairo and Beirut. Its constituency was in the refugee camps, its financial backing was provided by the Palestinian communities in the Gulf. But this development, the shift from the periphery to the centre, from outside to inside, invites us to quickly undertake a redefinition of the respective roles of the different components of our society, not least the more than ever decisive role of our diaspora communities mainly in the USA but also in Europe and elsewhere.

GLOBAL TRIBES:

There is a new concept in contemporary international relations, fashionable yet fully relevant to our Palestinian experience: the concept of “global tribes”. The Jews are the global tribe par excellence. But so are the Anglo-Saxons, the Scots, the Chinese, the Indians, the Armenians and the ...Arabs and the Palestinians. We can and should transform our geographic dispersion, from Scandinavia to California, the symptom of our tragedy, into a major source for influence and empowerment. We often diagnose as one of the major causes of our underdevelopment, our inclination to clannish and tribal patterns of behaviour. The challenge and the opportunity for us is to succeed in operating from now on as a tribe, as a modern tribe, as a global tribe. While maintaining and cultivating our intimate interaction with the homeland, we should better integrate and fully participate in the political life of our host countries. The day will come, soon, when here in the United Kingdom we will witness the birth of the British-Arab Liberal Association, the British-Arab Conservative Club and of course, Secretary of State, the British-Arab Labour Movement, becoming no longer an alien phenomenon or a foreign factor but a domestic actor. Ladies and gentlemen, this distinguished gathering tonight can make any Western political party blush with envy.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Not only in Palestine but all over the world we live today in a transitional period. I have never belonged to a fatalistic, a deterministic school of thought but to the voluntarist school that emphasises the importance of the will, individual and collective. Yes, today, and on a variety of issues, History is undecided. We should shed aside the psychology of failure, the mentality of defeat, the feeling of impotence and be confident that we can make a difference.

BETHLEHEM 2000

This interview was conducted by Sue Wheat and published in "Tourism in focus" spring 1998.

Q. Do you feel tourism will be important to Palestine during the next millennium?

Safieh: We believe that tourism will be the backbone of our future economy. Since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in July 1994, we have given tourism our top priority. We have the major sites for the three monotheistic religions which makes Palestine a great attraction for Pilgrims. Being on both the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, we have the sun, sea and sand, we also have great potential for summer tourism in the mountains and winter tourism in Jericho oasis.

Q. Are Palestinians currently benefiting from tourism?

Safieh: At the moment there are 2.3 million foreign visitors to the Holy Land but Palestinian travel agencies cater for only 4 per cent of the pilgrims although we make up 40 per cent of the inhabitants. Israeli guides can guide anywhere in Israel and Palestine. But throughout the 30 years of occupation Israel did not issue licenses to Palestinian tourist guides. Palestinians allowed to guide are only those who were registered prior to 1967, so they are now elderly and declining in numbers.

Q. What plans are being made for the millennium celebrations?

Safieh: Several committees have emerged. Each Church - and there are 13 difference denominations - has an inter-church Jubilee Committee dealing with spiritual arrangements. A committee set up by the Authority, the Palestinian government, will handle all non-religious aspects like cultural events through the period from Christmas 1999 to Easter 2001. (Now a special Ministry was set up for "Project Bethlehem 2000"). We will invite artists, philharmonic orchestras and theatrical groups to perform in Bethlehem and in other sites. We will offer an interesting cultural menu both for the pilgrims and for our people who suffered from cultural claustrophobia during the occupation. Just imagine the Three Tenors performing the Ave Maria in Manger Square for instance!

In the past, a major grievance was that tourists saw the archaeology but not the society. Several institutions have been created to offer local indigenous contacts for pilgrims. Lectures by Palestinian academics are planned.

Palestinian folklore will be performed, and encounters with community leaders, inter-faith meetings and visits to out-of-the-way villages will be organised. We also feel, in this era of rising fundamentalism, that it is important to show that we have a successful model of Muslim-Christian co-existence.

Q. What sort of numbers are expected for the millennium celebrations?

Safieh: 5-6 million are expected between Christmas 1999 and Easter 2001, which is much less than the forecasts for Rome. If you bear in mind that it all started in Bethlehem, with the birth of Jesus Christ, one would expect many more would want to visit Bethlehem. Unfortunately, the political uncertainties are probably not conducive to a rapid expansion of tourism.

Q. Will there be enough accommodation to cope with the millennium visitors?

During the years of occupation there were no new hotels built in East Jerusalem. But there are around 30 hotels that were there before 1967. Since the peace process has started, over 20 new hotels have been built in Bethlehem, Ramallah and Gaza. A variety of projects in East Jerusalem still have to materialise because the Israelis are trying to delay them by withholding construction permits. Many convents will also be hosting pilgrims as they have superb, spacious buildings. Modestly priced camp sites may also be set up. Accommodating everyone may well be a nightmare for the millennium celebrations but I think many will risk undergoing the nightmare because of the spiritual rewards.

Q. What are your hopes for tourism into the next millennium?

Safieh: Today history and the peace process seem to be undecided between the desirable breakthrough and a possible breakdown. But once peace is achieved, tourism in Palestine has the greatest potential and we are encouraging investors. For several decades the Palestinian diaspora which numbers over 4 million people, but also the Arabs who are 250 million and the Muslims who are one billion, were prevented from visiting Palestine.

This is an immense reservoir of people who are highly motivated to visit when the political environment will allow.

Q. Do you think there could be a downside to such an increase in tourism?

Safieh: I am fully aware that tourism can be intrusive and have devastating effects on society, its culture and architecture. We are analysing the phenomenon and studying all the factors to limit possible damage. But for us in Palestine, it is not tourism but military occupation that has mutilated our cities and our countryside. We view tourism as the means now for our economic take off, our national resurrection and, as you know, in Palestine we have had some previous experience in resurrection.

THE HOLY SEE AND JERUSALEM

ARCHBISHOP JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN.
THE VATICAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER.

It is Jerusalem that has brought us together.

It is Jerusalem that urges us to look to the future.

And Jerusalem, yet again, wishes to impart its secret, the secret which the Prophet Ezekiel disclosed for all time: "And the name of the city henceforth shall be The Lord is there" (Ez 48:35).

On behalf of us all, I think it is right that I should thank His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah for the warm welcome extended to us, as well as for the spiritual joy he has brought us by gathering us together for the sake of the Holy City.

This cause of the Holy City has long been at the centre of the Holy See's concerns and one of its top priorities for international action, ever since the Jerusalem question existed.

I. THE JERUSALEM QUESTION.

Indeed, there is a conflict, or rather there are conflicts, because of and within Jerusalem - all related to its universally accepted uniqueness. It is unique in itself, and consequently it is also unique in its conflicts. It is different from any other city. The introduction to a book published in 1994 by a number of important Israeli academics begins thus "At least in three respects Jerusalem differs from most other places: the City is holy to the adherents of three religions, it is the subject of a conflicting national claims by two peoples, and its population is heterogeneous to a considerable degree".⁽¹⁾ Let us remember what Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter "Redemptions Anno" of 20 April 1984 "...Jews ardently love (Jerusalem) and in every age venerate her memory, abundant as she is in many remains and monuments from the time of David who chose her as the capital, and of Solomon who built the Temple there. Therefore, they turn their minds to her daily, one may say and point to her as the sign of their nation."

“Christians honour her with a religious and intent concern because there the words of Christ so often resounded, there the great events of the Redemption were accomplished: the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord. In the City of Jerusalem the first Christian community sprang up and remained throughout the centuries a continual ecclesial presence despite difficulties.”

“Muslims also call Jerusalem ‘holy’, with a profound attachment that goes back to the origins of Islam and springs from the fact that they have there many special places of pilgrimage and for more than a thousand years have dwelt there, almost without interruption.”

II. I think it is important to clarify from the very start that when we speak of Jerusalem the distinction often made between “the question of the Holy Places and the question of Jerusalem” is unacceptable to the Holy See. It is obvious that the Holy Places derive their meaning and their cultic and cultural uses from the intimate connection with the surrounding environment, to be understood not merely in terms of geography but also and most especially in its urban, architectural and above all human community and institutional dimensions.

In papal documents there certainly exist emphases and nuances, and they are seen more clearly the greater the span of time under consideration, for example, in a book edited by Archbishop Edmond Farhat ⁽²⁾, in which he gathers papal documents from 1887 to 1986 (one hundred years), dividing this span of time into three periods:

- 1) from 1887 to 1947 (the first war between Arabs and Israelis), when the Popes spoke of the Holy Land in general and of Jerusalem, insisting primarily on the need to protect the physical integrity of the Holy Places and on the needs of the local Catholics;
- 2) from 1947 to 1964 (Pope Paul VI’s pilgrimage), here the stress is on safeguarding the Holy Places, on freedom of access for all the faithful of the three religions and the right of each of the three religions to have control of its own holy sites;
- 3) from 1964 to the present day, a period during which the emphasis moves to Jerusalem in a global context and to the preservation of its identity and vocation: The Holy Places, the areas surrounding them, guarantees for everybody of their own cultural and religious identity, freedom of religion and conscience for the inhabitants and the pilgrims, the cultural dimension.

III. From the references to historical events, particularly those of the last fifty years, there emerges what is commonly referred to as the “political dimensions” of Jerusalem in a complex of situations which have arisen regarding territorial control and the actions carried out to gain such control. The concern expressed in the interventions of the Popes and in other documents of the Holy See could not and cannot overlook this aspect. It is ever present, first, in order to prevent the Holy City becoming a battlefield and later to ensure that it does not become, as is the situation today, a case of manifest international injustice. The situation today have been brought about and is maintained by force. The Holy See has spoken out on this and will continue to speak out clearly, without mincing words and consistently adhering to the position of the majority within the international community, as expressed above all in the pertinent United Nations Resolutions. Since 1967, a part of the City has been occupied militarily and subsequently annexed. In that part of the City are to be found most of the Holy Places of the three monotheistic Religions. East Jerusalem is illegally occupied. It is therefore wrong to claim that the Holy See is only interested in the religious aspect or aspects of the City and overlooks the political and territorial aspect. The Holy See is indeed interested in this aspect and had the right and duty to be, especially insofar as the matter remains unresolved and is the cause of conflict, injustice, human rights violations, restrictions of religious freedom and conscience, fear and personal insecurity.

Obviously, the Holy See’s immediate and practical concern is with religious questions, while in other matters - political, economic, etc - it interests itself inasmuch as they have a moral dimension. If the Holy See has no competence to enter into territorial disputes between Nations, to take sides, to seek to impose detailed solutions, on the contrary it has the right and duty of reminding the Parties of the obligation to resolve controversies peacefully, in accordance with the principles of justice and equity within the international legal framework. In the case of Jerusalem, both aspects, the religious and the political and territorial, are closely linked, even though they are different in their constitutive elements, in the proper means of dealing with them in finding a solution to them.

IV. What is the Holy See requesting for Jerusalem?

1) First of all, it asks that Jerusalem be respected for what it is in itself or rather what it should be, compared with what it actually is. That is what I defined a short while ago as the vocation or identity of the Holy City. Jerusalem is a treasure of the whole of humanity. In view of a situation of evident conflict and considering the rapid transformation of the Holy City, any unilateral solution or one brought about by force is not and cannot be a solution at all.

It is the view of the Holy See that every exclusive claim - be it religious or political - is contrary to the logic proper to the very City itself. I must insist: every citizen of Jerusalem and every person who visits Jerusalem should embody the message of dialogue, coexistence and respect evoked by the City. Exclusive claims cannot be backed up by numerical or historical criteria.

Having said that, I must add that there is nothing to prevent Jerusalem, in its unity and uniqueness, becoming the symbol and the national centre of both the Peoples that claim it as their Capital. But if Jerusalem is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, it is also sacred to many people from every part of the world who look to it as their spiritual capital or travel there on pilgrimage, to pray and to meet their brethren in faith. It is the cultural heritage of everybody, including those who visit it simply as tourists.

2) Consequently, the Holy See believes that there is an obligation to find a realistic solution to the problems of Jerusalem, to all of them, according to their particular characteristics.

a) There is a political problem concerning Jerusalem for Israelis and Palestinians first of all which is very practical. The Madrid Conference of 1991 and what followed gave birth to hopes of a peaceful future. Hopes founded on a willingness to talk, to negotiate and to seek to compromise. Hopes which appeared well-founded also by reason of the commitment and efforts of a large section of the international community, and in particular of the United States of America, as the events which took place at Wye Plantation in the last few days have demonstrated. Let us hope that the aspirations for dialogue and peace will contribute to the implementation of what has been agreed upon.

In this context, which is certainly both complex and delicate, the Jerusalem question has been placed at the bottom of the agenda. It is understandable that the difficulty and delicacy of the question of Jerusalem have meant that it had been left till last. But we all know, and the Israelis and the Palestinians are the first in this, that peace and coexistence in the Holy Land and Middle East have no future, unless an answer is found to the political question of Jerusalem. Allow me to quote once again from "Redemptions Anno" of 1984, in which His Holiness Pope John Paul II wrote "I am convinced that the failure to find an adequate solution to the question of Jerusalem, and the resigned postponement of the problem, only compromise further the longed-for peaceful and just settlement of the crisis of the whole Middle East."

What does the Holy See mean by an “adequate solution”? It means recognising that the situation today is one of conflict. It means that Israelis and Palestinians, with the collaboration of all who can help them have to reach an agreement which corresponds in some way to their particular legitimate and reasonable aspirations, and respect the principles of justice.

b) As far as the Holy See is concerned, however, the solution of a territorial dispute alone is not enough for Jerusalem, precisely because Jerusalem is an unparalleled reality: it is part of the patrimony of the whole world. And the whole world had shown that it is fully aware of this when, for example, through resolutions of the United Nations it has sought to defend that patrimony.

Looking to Jerusalem, the Holy See continues to ask that it be protected by “a special internationally guaranteed Statute”. What is meant by this? In the Holy See’s view:

- the historical and material characteristics of the City, as well as its religious and cultural characteristics, must be preserved, and perhaps today it is necessary to speak of restoring and safeguarding those still existing;

- there must be equality of rights and treatment of those belonging to the communities of the three religions found in the City in the context of the freedom of spiritual, cultural, civic and economic activities;

- the Holy Places situated in the City must be preserved, and the rights of freedom of religion and worship, and of access, for residents and pilgrims alike, whether from the Holy Land itself or from other parts of the world, must be safeguarded.

At stake is the basic question of preserving and protecting the identity of the Holy City in its entirety, in every aspect. For example, the simple “extraterritoriality” of the Holy Places, with the assurance that pilgrims would be able to visit them without hindrance, would not suffice. The identity of the City includes a sacred character which belongs not just to the individual sites or monuments, as if these could be separated from one another or isolated from the respective communities. The sacred character involves Jerusalem in its entirety, its holy places and its communities with their schools, hospitals, cultural, social and economic activities. Israelis and Palestinians, in the desired search for a political settlement of their conflict over Jerusalem, cannot overlook the fact that the City has aspects which go far beyond their legitimate national interests. They, therefore, have to take

these aspects into consideration in looking for and in reaching a lasting political and territorial solution. In the same way, they will not be able to avoid giving due consideration to the efforts and demands of all legitimately interested parties. In this, Israelis and Palestinians must not feel in any way restricted, but rather, honoured and reassured.

V. It is essential that the parties to the negotiations take a fair and appropriate account of the sacred and universal character of the City. This requires that any possible solution should have the support of the three monotheistic religions, both at the local level and at the international level. Besides, as they are being proposed, the negotiations are expected to include the participation of the sponsors of the Peace Process and other parties could also be invited to contribute. The Holy See believes in the importance of extending representation at the negotiating table in order to be sure that no aspect of the problems is overlooked and to affirm that the whole International Community is responsible for the uniqueness and sacredness of the incomparable City.

CONCLUSION

In these coming days we shall listen to various other presentations and reflections. I would like to end my own intervention by expressing two feelings which I have experienced with great intensity:

a) Sometimes I have felt great sadness and almost a sense of helplessness. The way forward to peace for the Holy Land and Jerusalem appears very precarious, alternating between progress and hesitation or failure. One has the impression that anything could happen, be it good or bad. Thinking also about the Year 2000, I wish to quote a few words which Pope John Paul II addressed to the Diplomatic Corps on 11 January 1992: “What a blessing it would be if this Holy Land, where God spoke and Jesus walked, could become a special place of encounter and prayer for peoples, if this Holy City of Jerusalem could be a sign and instrument of peace and reconciliation! It is here that believers have a mission of primary importance to accomplish. Forgetting the past and looking to the future, they are called to repentance, to re-examine their behaviour and to realise once again that they are brothers and sisters by reason of the one God who loves them and invites them to cooperate in his plan for humanity”.

b) And the second of my feelings: Episcopates of important Nations of the world are represented here. The Bishops are in communion and solidarity with each other, and the initiative of His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah is founded

on this certainty. In the name of the Holy Father and together with the Patriarch, I say to you all: let us remember Jerusalem, let us recall its essential nature, its vocation and the love which people have for it, let us help the world and those who wield power in it to remember Jerusalem and to understand that for its sake it should not be impossible to make it definitively a place of meeting, of harmony and of peace. It is my earnest hope that the Episcopates of the world will become Jerusalem's "Ambassadors" within the local Churches, to your respective Nations and societies and to the institutions and Authorities thereof. "Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem about my highest joy!" (Ps. 137:6).

Jerusalem October 26, 1998.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Ruth Lapidot-Moshe Hirsh,
The Jerusalem Question and its Resolutions: selected documents,
Dordrecht-Boston, London 1994.
- 2 Gerusalemme nei Documenti Pontifici, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982

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WE SHALL NOT ALLOW OURSELVES TO DESPAIR

ALBERT AGHAZARIAN

Afif Safieh's initiative to prepare an annual booklet to send to friends and contacts during the holiday season is a pleasantly refreshing occasion for reflection. On the most personal level, it revives childhood memories of growing up in the Old City of Jerusalem. It reminds us of what we have experienced in the last half-century or so, where we are today, and, where we are heading.

On a Christian level, it is an occasion for us to express our deep resentment at being viewed as a minority, just as the title of Fr. Elias Chacour's book suggests, *We Belong to the Land*. Similarly, William Dalrymple's remarkable book, *From the Holy Mountain* provokes reflection into our roots that are an integral part of the Arab-Islamic and Mediterranean culture and are universal in outlook. Those interested will find this volume a valuable and fitting gift for friends during the holiday season.

RECLAIMING IDENTITY AND LIFE

Most importantly, this is an occasion for us to reclaim our dislocated lives by reconstructing and redefining a Palestinian identity of universally binding values, similar to those our parents and educators sought to inculcate in us before both Afif and I were separated and dislocated in 1967. With the increasing hardships that surround us, we feel close to the essential elements in religious and non-religious social movements. We had to convince ourselves that only dead fish swim with the current. Being dislocated, Afif and I - each in our own way - have resisted denying our Palestinian identity. This denial played an essential role in the construction of Israeli consciousness. We also resisted from adopting the prevailing idea that Israel was the progressive, righteous entity simply attacked and engulfed by the demonic evil that surrounded them.

Essentially, we were - and still are - defending our presence and our right to have a place under the sun. We are both aware of the havoc and devastation that the creation of Israel had brought into our own lives and against this blizzard of history, it is hard not to hate. Yet, we sought compromise and found hope in the continued efforts for a peaceful solution. We hoped that what began at the Madrid, Oslo and the Wye Plantation Agreements, would finally untie the knot of injustice, regardless of how cynical we are about the prospects.

MYTHOLOGY AND EXCLUSION THE REALITIES ON THE GROUND

While Palestinians have been developing a new national consciousness, the intention of Israeli policy is to fragment. It is true that Israel is divided, but the division is not a matter of two differing approaches to the Palestinian question. Rather, it is torn by conflicting approaches to Jewish sovereignty in Palestine, and with them come two sets of terminology.

On the one hand, there is the terminology of traditional religious language. On the other, is the terminology of modern liberal discourse, which also depends on theological terminology. The unfolding reality is that even for the most liberal of Israeli circles, the issue is not a long-sought historic compromise towards recognition of the Palestinians, but instead it is about an opportunity to get rid of them and recreate the concept of “the vacant land.” Zionism was to be perceived as a liberating force, free of injustice.

Over the years, the brutal reality of military occupation irrevocably tarnished Israel’s self-image, which was carefully nurtured in the West. The Intifada asserted the Palestinians as an integral part of the scene, yet the Israeli establishment still chooses to deal with them as a “problem” in need of elimination. This is nothing new. Palestinians have been excluded from the Zionist vision since long before their actual expulsion in 1948 and the subsequent dispossession. The vision was never built on the the principles of partnership, reciprocity, and equal rights. Even for the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his Labour Party, the idea of separation, or even the condoning of a Palestinian state did not emanate from respect and reciprocity, but rather to simply avoid the creation of a two-nation state. While every state should be founded on universal principles of liberty and equality, Israel’s right-wing continues to demand the illegal expulsion of Palestinians. Netanyahu’s over-arching concern for “security” masks the reality that Israel has failed to live up to its obligations in the agreements it has signed. Jewish settlements, remain an unwelcome fact of Palestinian life. Israel’s policy of closure has gained legitimacy as simply “security procedural measures,” rather than a violation of human rights and the humiliating restriction of the freedom of movement. Bomb attacks, born amidst this atmosphere of utter desperation, work cyclically allowing Israelis access to legitimising illegal and inhumane policies.

While we should be appreciative of the encouragement and funding of peace and coexistence activities, we must also acknowledge the systematic avoidance of central issues, which allows Israel to dictate their own framework of dialogue. In the light of the supposed and hopeful break-away from the cycle of past discourse, one would hope that Israel would abandon the concept that this was an empty land. The healing process requires recognition, and not the imposition of an exclusive narrative of history, as dictated by White European Jewish immigrants.

What is especially frightening when examining the reality on the ground, is the rampant rise of extremist Israeli groups. While violence against Palestinians has gained ground among such groups, the assassinations of Rabin, and the mounting threats levelled against even Netanyahu, indicate that Israel's main security concerns should be refocused to address their own people.

Once again, biblical Judeo/Christian mythology is misleading settlers, like those in Hebron, to believing they have claim as the true adherents of basic Zionist myths. What they are in fact doing is revealing the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the Israeli "left".

Disheartened by these realities, I discovered the importance and depth of culture. If the "peace process" and the concept of separation are based on apartheid values, then we will never steer away from this tragic path. If the Israeli "left" continues to exclude the contributions of Israelis of oriental origin, and ignores harmful religious aspects of the Zionist movement, then a much-needed new Israeli perspective is prevented.

CULTURE AND HOPE

Having expressed all that, I would like to point out that I am not a pessimist. While I regularly borrow Emile Habibi's coinage of "optimism," or pessoptimism," the fact is that my daily work is with young Palestinian university students, and I am not about to tell young people who are just taking off in their lives that what surrounds us stinks.

Birzeit University's achievements are living proof for the need of such a view. In other universities, research is conducted in line with academic teaching, but here I see the entire Birzeit University as a large sample representative of our future society. Dissidence is not only tolerated, but encouraged. Muslim Bloc students together with those that lean to the left, and those who think we should give the "process" a chance, have discovered the importance of this tradition. In the midst

of a national reconstruction of identity, I am amazed by the maturity of these young people in their avoidance of a detrimental polarisation.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF LAW

Just a few days before writing this, we inaugurated the Birzeit University Institute of Law, in the presence of the French and Qatari ministers of justice, and an impressive audience. University President Dr. Hanna Nasir, pointed out that through such efforts, we are bringing the East together with the West. It was especially moving when Dr Nasir remarked that the Institute is the highest building on campus - the implication being that nothing is higher than the power of law.

THE WONDERFUL LEGACY OF TAWFIQ CANAAN

Shortly after, we had the privilege of hosting an exhibit of the remarkable Tawfiq Canaan amulet collection, which was donated to the university. Led by his genial daughter Leila Mantoura, four generations of the Canaan family showed up. I insisted that it was actually five generations, not only because of the miraculous symbolism of the number five in amulet mythology, but also because I felt the presence of Dr. Canaan. Canaan was a brilliant medical doctor, who after his graduation from the American University of Beirut in 1905 pursued a medical career while becoming the uncontested father of Palestinian folklore, as Palestinian Minister of Culture, Yasser Abed Rabbo, and Birzeit folklore scholar Dr Sharif Kana'ane both pointed out.

In 1947, Dr Cannan's house just outside the New Gate the the Old City was taken over by Hagana forces. He had to creep through the walls and become a refugee in the Old City. His library and icon collections were pillaged, his family left stranded as scholars and remarkable contributors to many fields around the world. Having lost his only son, during an archeological dig in the Transjordan, Tawfiq Canaan left behind no one to carry the family name. Yet, like a phoenix, he has come back to life.

Recently we had a visit from George Foulkes, British Minister for International Development, who informed us that several important projects had been approved by his government. The fruits of Mr Foulkes' visit include a series of initiatives which will assist in the creation of a viable Palestinian plan for water allocation.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE

The university is holding an International Conference on Landscape Perspectives of Palestine, which will feature thirty-two international experts, including Professor Edward Said. These are just some of the events which contribute to the revitalisation of our struggle for reconstruction of identity. Our challenge is to carry this spirit and to spread this message to Palestinian society as a whole, both on governmental and non-governmental levels. Our common future demands that we shall not allow ourselves to despair. We must persevere, but more importantly, we must rise to meet whatever obstacles may lie in our way, facing head on any complexities the future holds.

(Albert Aghazarian, a historian is the head of the Public Relations Office at BirZeit University.)

A CENTURY APART PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS AND THEIR CHURCHES FROM AWAKENING TO NATION BUILDING

Bernard Sabella

This is an essay that spans a century with concentration on the awakening that occurred among palestinians at the turn of the 19th century and the challengers of state building confronting them at the end of the 20th century. The role of expatriate Christians is acknowledged then and now. This is not a historical account rather it is a bird's eye view of developments that affected education, health and other services at the turn of the last century. It is also an assessment of the role of Palestinian Christians and their Churches and their related organisations as Palestine undergoes the process of state building at present. In covering the nineteenth century, the sources used are primarily literary and historical . For the modern period, a primary source are interviews conducted in 1997 with a number of Churches and Christian NGOs operating in palestine. These interviews were made for an assessment of the role of Church Related Organisations (CROs) for a workshop on the Emerging Palestine, held jointly by the Middle East Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches in Ramallah in 1997.

THE INTRODUCTION TO AWAKENING

In the 1890's Christians in Palestine were estimated at forty three thousand, or 13 percent, of the entire population of the country. The population composition then, as reflected in student figures of the Jerusalem, Acre and Nablus areas indicate an awakening in the population for the virtues and advantages of education. In the three areas, there were 108 schools that enrolled 15773 students of whom 8705 were Moslems, 3445 Christians and 3623 Jews. Education is quite an appropriate introduction to understand both history of Palestine and the contributions that the various Christian communities have made to Palestinians and their society.

It was towards the mid 19th century that various missions from a host of European countries including Russia and the USA started showing increasing interest in the Holy Land and its population. The motivations for the missions were varied, as some wanted to proselytise Jews such as the Berlin Society for Prompting Christianity while others aimed at educating and socialising the indigenous Christians. Certainly the "mission civilizatrice" of the European and American missions played a role in their religious enthusiasm but there were also links to the politics of their respective countries and these were mixed with zealous efforts at saving the souls of the locales.

But irrespective of the motivations; religious, political or others, these missions ended up creating what we refer to in modern parlance as “infrastructure” of education, health and other community services. This has given Palestine a push forward and, in retrospect, has forced the local population, irrespective of religious background, to become aware of developments taking place outside of their own country and the Ottoman empire, in general. The effects of this “infrastructure” would be first felt in the educational achievements of Christian population. Also, its effects were reflected in the better life changes that accrued to the population, in general and to Christians, in particular. But with these improvements, comparisons with distant lands made for a push-pull effect that contributed to the start of the emigration process particularly from the Bethlehem and Ramallah areas which, together with Jerusalem, had a relatively higher concentration of Christians.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

The various foreign missions started their activities by setting up their own schools: in 1851 Bishop Gobat of the Anglican Church established a school which became known in his name and today is still known as Madrasat al Mutran (The Bishop’s School) in acknowledgment. It has long been Arabized and it serves the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem, irrespective of religion. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate also established a school in 1855 at the initiative of Patriarch Kyrillos II, which became known as the Musalba School. This heralded the establishment of Greek Orthodox schools in various localities including some that still operate today in Haifa, Jerusalem, Jaffa, among other places. In 1860, the Americans set up the Syrian Orphans’ School that introduced vocational specialisation such as tailoring, blacksmithery, pottery and other vocations that were in need. Today, the American Quaker school for boys and girls in Ramallah are reminiscent of the tradition of imparting education that was started by compatriots in the mid 19th century.

In 1879, the Catholic Order of St. Jean Baptiste deLa Salle established their school in Jerusalem. Known as the “college de frères”, the school was opened to all students, Moslems, Jews and Christians alike until 1948 when the first Arab-Israeli war took place. Since then, the school has succeeded at creating a Jerusalem family tradition, with three generations of grand fathers , fathers and children of the same family attending it. The tradition still goes on and is in the fabric of the Palestinian Jerusalem community, both Moslem and Christian. The investment in education by the frères culminated in 1973 with the establishment of Bethlehem University at the express desire of the Holy See. The University still functions and

in 1998 celebrated its 25th year jubilee with a record of over 5000 Palestinian graduates, men and women, Moslems and Christians, who are active in all spheres in their society.

Of particular interest is that Bethlehem University has introduced new specialisation in fields such as Physiotherapy, Nursing, Social Work, Hotel Management, Tour Guide, Tourism and Travel Agency and Business Development. These fields are of practical and immediate relevance to the society. The “Frères” continue to operate schools not only in Jerusalem but in Bethlehem and Jaffa, as well. BirZeit University, on the other hand, had started with the pioneering and onward looking vision of a Palestinian Anglian family from Bir Zeit, the Nassers, and particularly its scion, the late Moussa Nasser who, in 1924, started in his town which became, fifty years later, BirZeit University, a leading institution of Palestinian higher learning.

Among the earliest schools for girls was the one started by the Order of the Nuns of Saint Joseph in 1848. The Order started as foreign in the origins of its members but throughout the years has increasingly become Arabized as more and more of Christian Palestinian and other Arab women have joined it. Today, the schools of St. Joseph are found in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nazareth and a majority of nuns are Arabic speaking and hail from the local population or from the surrounding countries. The Rosary Sisters founded their Order in 1885. It was distinguished for being the first indigenous Catholic Order intended to encourage young women to devote their lives for medical, social work and teaching. Today, all of the members of the Order remain indigenous Arab women, hailing primarily from Palestine and Jordan, and they run schools for girls in various Arab countries, including some in the Gulf region. The Franciscans also contributed their share and they set up , as early as the 18th Century, one of the earliest orphanages in their convent of Saint Savior just inside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, few meters from the New Gate. In keeping with the mission and witness to the local society, the Franciscans have set up schools throughout the country, again open to all students, especially the needy ones, irrespective of background.

The Latin Patriarchate also embarked on setting up educational institutions, after it has been reactivated in 1848 and a new Patriarch arrived from Rome. The Clerical School in Beit Jala which prepared young local men to the priesthood opened soon after and in 1856, a couple of local priests from Jerusalem and its surroundings graduated from the school. Today, the Patriarchate runs schools throughout the diocese that includes Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Cyprus. Most of the priests of the Patriarchate and Palestinian and Jordanian Christians, a fact

which apparently impresses Pope John Paul II himself as reflected in a conversation during the Synod for Asia held in the Vatican between April 19th and May 15th, 1998.

The Americans, the Germans and the Russians set up various “higher” level educational institutions such as Teachers’ College both for men and women. One of the main contributions of these schools is their stress on the revival and use of the Arabic Language especially at the elementary levels of education. According to some, this has contributed to an awakening of the population to their heritage and culture.

THE HEALTH WITNESS

Together with interest in education went interest in healing the body. Various missions set up hospitals, medical and specialised institutions. The Daughters of Charity, a French Catholic Order of Nuns, established in the 1980’s their St. Vincent home in Manilla where they catered to the sick, orphans, disabled and all those who needed attention and care. Today, this order is partly Arabized with more than 20 Palestinian Daughters serving their own people and other peoples in the region. At the same time that they have established the St. Vincent home, they also set up the French hospital in Bethlehem to care for unwed mothers and unwanted babies and to serve in addition the medical needs of the general population.

One of the earliest hospitals was the Russian hospital in Jerusalem founded in 1859. Its building was one of the first edifices outside the walls of the city. In 1880, the French set up St. Louis hospital which still stands across from the New Gate and specialises in treating and catering to the needs of the terminally ill, irrespective of religious, national or ethnic background. The Order of the Hospital of St. John started its own hospital in 1882 while the Italians built their own in 1894. What Jerusalem witnessed during the last two decades in the 19th century was duplicated in other cities and towns such as Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jaffa and Haifa. This tradition of setting up medical service received but also in the eventual development of interest in the medical profession by local youngsters who were keen to study medicine and to work in these institutions.

One, however, has to admit that until recent times, there was some opposition among parents to the idea that their daughters would train and work as medical nurses. This opposition stemmed from two reasons: first, the fear for possible compromise of the modesty of young women as they were asked to perform duties

as nurses that a traditional society found unacceptable. Second, nursing was associated with service and such notion was foreign to traditional family knit society that considered service to the general public as an act with possible negative implications for family standing and status in the community. But this negative outlook on nursing started changing, in part due to the example set by sisters of various religious orders and by the professional nurses and staff nurses who manned the hospitals and clinics during the British Mandate period. In more recent times, nursing has become influenced by the employment market equation of supply and demand. Almost all nursing graduates from Bethlehem University, one of the few institutions to offer a Bachelor degree in nursing in Palestine, find immediate employment in the country and are sought after for the medical institutions of the neighbouring and Arab Gulf countries. Nursing, in fact, is enabling young Palestinian women, both Moslem and Christian, to chart a life career for themselves in which they feel proud and appreciated.

Today, throughout the country, there are scores of hospitals, clinics and specialised institutions run by local Christian Palestinians and by Churches that cater to thousands of Palestinian patients and those of special needs on a daily basis. This must not be underestimated as the presence of these institutions lessens the burden on the Palestinian Ministry of Health and helps maintain a quality of health services to as wide a Palestinian public as possible.

THE PRINTING PRESSES AND THE PRINTED WORD

The Franciscans set up the first printing press in the country in 1848. The Austrian Friar Frotchner was responsible for this development as he imported most of the equipment and the technical staff from his native country. The first book printed was that of the Christian Catechism in Arabic and Italian which reflects the primary purpose of setting up the press. Today, the Franciscan Press continues to operate and it has been one of the leaders in the terms of the quality literature printed that relate to the holy places, the archaeology and history of the land and its Christian biblical heritage. The British were also among the pioneers in introducing the printed word as the British London Press sought in the mid 19th century to publish religious books intended to proselytize the Jews. The Americans also introduced their first printing press around this time as well as the Greek Orthodox who, in 1849, set up their press in close proximity to the seat of the Patriarchate. Enterprising Palestinian Christians were not late in adding their imprint to this field as Alfons Anton Alonzo, a Latin (Roman Catholic) and Gheorgie Habib Hanania, a Greek Orthodox, each started their own printing

presses. This explains why until today there are relatively more Palestinian Christians engaged in printing. Among these Christians who still operate printing presses in Palestine one can mention Mushahwar, Habesch, Naber, Emerzian in East Jerusalem; Rafidi in Ramallah, Hazboun and Dougbash in the Bethlehem area. An exhaustive list of local printing presses, operated by Palestinian Christians, would probably bring the total number into the twenties and thirties, if not more.

Side by side with the introduction of the printing presses came the publication of magazines and newspapers. This was a business that was dominated by Palestinian Christians. As early as 1908 Georgie Habib Hanania founded **Al Quds** newspaper in Jerusalem and Bandali Elias Mushahwar founded **Al Insaf**. Boulos Shahadeh published **Mir'at al Sharq** in 1919 while Issa el Issa and Yousef el Issa published **Falastin** in 1911 in Jaffa and Wahbeh Tamari published **Abu Shadouf** in 1912. Even Bethlehem, a small town then, saw the publication of the newspaper **Sawt el Sha'b** (Voice of the People) by Yousef Abu el 'Araj and Issa Bandak.

ASSOCIATIONS AND LITERARY SOCIETIES

Palestinian Christians at the turn of the century were an active group, judging from the various activities undertaken by them. A group of local young men established in 1877 a local branch of the London YMCA. At the same time the Greek Orthodox youth set up their youth society and club. Around this time, the St. Vincent de Paul society started a branch in Acre having taken the example set by a group of young Palestinian Christian men and women who, a decade earlier, have started the society in Jerusalem. The Society was a lay Catholic group that responded to the needs of the sick, poor, disabled and often brought the community together in times of great crisis and need such as the earthquake that hit Palestine in 1927 and also in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, Haifa had two women societies; one for Moslem women and the second for Christian women. These two societies paralleled the two "men" societies established by Sheikh Mohammed Murad, Mufti of Haifa and by Fouad Sa'd, a Christian leader. In 1920, these two societies invited an all Palestine conference to enable Palestinians to reflect on the political developments occurring in their country with the institution of the British Mandate. Moslems and Christians of Haifa grouped together in 1922 to establish the Society for Arab Economic Renaissance which was more concerned with organising community events, lectures and stage productions than with economic activity as such.

But even Gaza City, then a small town, had an indigenous Orthodox Club with a Subcommittee for Acting and Stage Productions. Nazareth and Bethlehem as well had literary and youth clubs that specialised in promoting the Arabic language and its literature and arts. Jerusalem was the jewel in these literary activities as in 1898 a group of Jerusalemites established Jam'iat al Adab al Zahirah (The Society of the Flourishing Arts). From the names of its founders, it is clear that the driving force behind its founding were young Christians as the following list indicates: Daoud Sidawi, Issa el Issa, Faraj Farajallah, Eftim Mushabbak, Shibli el Jamal, Jamil Khalidi, Nakhleh Tarazi and Khalil Sakakini. Visitors from neighbouring countries, especially poets and literary figures, were also impressed with the activities of the Society as its members weekly to discuss literary publications and trends together with the Arabic language and its intricacies and complexities.

A CONTINUOUS COMMITMENT

The commitment and faith that motivated Palestinian Christians at the turn of last century still motivate them at the end of this century. While the context and conditions have changed, the challenges are still there. Even more so at a time when Palestinians are charting their own course towards the future and when the Palestinian Christians and their Churches feel more than ever the need to continue witnessing in service and full participation.

In the autumn of 1998, and looking in retrospect to the awakening experienced towards the end of the 19th century, Palestinians today are confronted with the challenges of nation building and of those of search for peace and stability. This has been a long road travelled and yet the road still lies ahead and the tasks waiting to be accomplished are numerous and most difficult. Palestinian Christians and their Churches as part of history, experience and culture of Palestine and they are certainly part of its future. Without their active participation and contribution, the picture of Palestine would definitely not be complete.

Indeed there are difficulties: the Arab-Israeli conflict of one hundred years seems, as if ever mercurial to advancement on the road of peace and to the work and good will of many in our region and throughout the world. Peace-making and reconciliation are not easy and simple processes. They are, however, essential to the stability of the region and to progress to normal relationships within societies and across them. Without peace, it is doubtful that Palestinian society can undertake and sustain human, economic and institutional developments. These, by their turn, are vital for the establishment of viable and equitable peaceful relationships among neighbours and states in the region as they contribute significantly to healing and reconciliation.

THE CHALLENGE TO PALESTINIANS

The challenge faced by Palestinians is how to create a democratic and civil society that can respond to the yearnings and aspirations of generations of Palestinians, whether in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or abroad? It is in this context that one needs to ask the question of where do Palestinian Christians and their Churches stand in terms of accepting to respond to the challenge posed by their own people and the need to have and safeguard a democratic, pluralist and civil Palestinian society?

While the Society for Flourishing Arts was debating in the 1890's questions of literary publications and the intricacies of the Arabic tongue, today Palestinians, and among them Christians, are asking the most pertinent question of where to? And what kind of society do we want to have? These questions should be understood in the historical context of conflict with Israel and also in the context of the many sacrifices that Palestinians of all walks of life have offered for the sake of their people and its cause.

A TRAUMATISED PEOPLE

The conflict with Israel and the long period of occupation since 1967 have exerted their own toll on Palestinians. Almost a member of every other household was arrested at least once between 1967 and 1993. Hundreds of homes were sealed or demolished in punitive measures. Thousands of Palestinians, especially the young people, were injured some with life-long injuries. Hundreds were killed leaving families or kin without support or mainstay. Large tracts of land were expropriated to make way for Israeli plans and designs. Senseless violence, regardless of source, has left Palestinians and Israelis wounded in spirit and in a state of grief and mourning. The closer the violence to one's family, friends and beloved, the greater its impact and the urgency to treat its psychological and other effects. Palestinians, in the early mid-nineties, showed signs of traumatised and psychologically stressed people. In fact, indicators of stress showed expectedly high percentage of Palestinians who have experienced symptoms related to stress. Children and women, exposed to stressful situations, were especially vulnerable.

In any development work, sensitivity to this factor is important. One cannot hope to achieve healing, reconciliation and socio-economic reconstruction without appreciating the causes of trauma experienced by the people. These causes could

be relatively distant, as in the 1948 war, or as recent as September 1996 when scores were killed and hundreds injured as a result of the tunnel demonstrations. Understanding trauma, and ways to develop work and witness is as much part of the reaching out of the Churches and their related organisations. What we have here is a case of people that needs healing but healing cannot occur if careful attending to the wounds caused by conflict is not undertaken. In interviews with Christian Palestinians activists, social workers, priests and dignitaries, it became clear that the Churches and their related voluntary organisations are attempting to do this attending and healing. These engaged persons are also aware that the future poses special challenges in terms of population growth and the needs of the younger generation.

A NATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Palestinians are a nation of young people: close to fifty percent among them are below the age of 14 years. In fact, over 70% of the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were born after 1967. Recent figures indicate that it will take the Gaza Strip less than 14 years to double its population and to reach the two million mark. This fact presents a burden of great proportions and it reflects on the urgency for reaching a solution that would create the infrastructure needed to accommodate these relatively huge numbers that will populate the 363 square kilometres strip of land.

Development work cannot be undertaken without considering the effect of a useful population on the nature of society and economy. Without addressing the needs of youth for health, education, employment and social and leisurely services and activities, no development plan can be complete. The aspirations of activist youth transcend the political, at a certain age, to settle for steady employment and personal and family-building preoccupations. Many of our youngsters, including university graduates, do not yet have the possibility of exercising these normal preoccupations.

The question then becomes what role would the Churches and Palestinian Christians play in this? Specifically how would the Churches, with their offerings of education, at the high school, vocational school and even university level, proceed further to the creation of new job and career opportunities for young Palestinians? Or is this the exclusive responsibility of government and the private economic sectors?

A NATION OF REFUGEES

One of the apparently perennial problems confronting Palestinians is the refugee problem. The Churches, independently and through the Middle East Council of Churches have been engaged in work with the refugees since 1948. Thanks to the Churches many of the Palestinian refugees especially in the urban centres of Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon have found shelter and the promise of a career or employment opportunities. There are 2.8 million Palestinian refugees in the region of whom over a million are found in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. 45 percent of the West Bank and Gaza UNRWA's (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestinian Refugees) registered refugees live in the 27 refugee camps. In the West Bank's 19 refugee camps, the average camp population is 6,600. In the Gaza Strip the parallel average is 42,000 residents in each of the Strip's eight camps. All the camps lack sewage systems, suffer from overcrowding and are considered, by many of the residents, as transitional stations, in spite of the fact that many of the residents have called these camps home, for the past fifty years.

Because of UNWRA's services, levels of education among camp children have been kept at the same level of the general population. UNWRA's vocational training gets reflected in the above average number of young refugees who are vocationally trained. Health services in camps have contributed to lowering mortality rates among infants and have offered affordable medical attention to all camp residents. But the camps have also proportionately poorer population than found outside camps and unemployment rates have been found to be double than those of the general population. A pool of unskilled labourers is found in most camps and these are particularly affected when Israeli imposes closures that deny them to commute to work in Israeli. The living conditions and even the building materials of homes in refugee camps were found to be worse in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. The problem is worsened by the fact that UNWRA has continuously suffered, particularly in recent years, from serious financial constraints and deficits.

Palestinian refugees are also found in Jordan with over 1 million of whom 24% live in camps; in Syria with 314,000 of whom 28% live in camps and in Lebanon where 330,000 refugees live with 52% of them in refugee camps. The situation has deteriorated due to internal Lebanese considerations and the fact that the PLO, which had once been a felt presence, had moved to the West Bank and Gaza.

Services that were once offered by the UNWRA have been interrupted by the continued conflict in occupied South Lebanon and by economic conditions which

have obliged children to leave school and vocational training and look for work, often illegally, to help support their families. But the refugees in Lebanon have the feeling that they have been left out of the peace process ever since the signing of the Oslo accords. Their disappointment reflects the obstacles, concrete and psychological, to healing, reconciliation and reconstruction. Development work that would lead to peace and stability cannot ignore the need of these refugees for dignity in their lives and justice to redress the wrongs that they have experienced ever since their first dispersal in 1948. The Churches are not simply in Palestine but in the region as a whole and in Lebanon in particular are called upon to play a constructive role in healing and reconciliation. In the case of Lebanon this should be focused on mutual acknowledgment and healing between the Lebanese and the Palestinians. The work of the Churches there should also dwell on enabling Palestinians to lead a dignified life until the politicians find a solution that will offer peace with and justice.

UNEMPLOYMENT, DEPENDENCY AND WOMEN

The Palestinian National Authority is the largest single employer in the West Bank and Gaza as it employs, according to some estimates, close to 100,000 employees in government offices and institutions. The capacity of the national authority to offer new employment opportunities is quite restricted as it is already suffering from a budget deficit. The grants offered by donor countries barely cover the basic minimum of running the government.

With the closures and travel restrictions imposed by Israel and with the absence of large-scale investments, the unemployment rate among Palestinians has passed 52% affecting adversely over 50% of the Palestinians families in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But even if we consider a lower figure of unemployment of 25 to 30% still a considerable number of Palestinians are confronted with the inability of providing the basic necessities, on a daily basis. The fact that the Palestinian economy continues to be dependent on Israel for employment, import, licensing and other vital needs does not bode well for the development of the Palestinian economy and for alleviating the negative effects of unemployment. This dependence perpetuates the inequities and makes prospects for peace and for healing and reconciliation quite unlikely. It is here that some Church Related Organisations such as Caritas, the Lutheran World Federation, the International Christian Committee in the West Bank and the Near East Council of Churches in Gaza attempt to generate income and to promote employment of the youth in the West Bank and Gaza. This is done through loans intended to help in starting or

strengthening small businesses and through vocational and special training courses targeted to strengthening the capacity of the youngsters and they embark on search for employment or as they contemplate starting their own businesses. But this is the least that Churches and their related organisations can do and their contribution, in this sphere, should not be exaggerated as the needs are so great and the possibilities remain limited. Because of Israeli Occupation policies and other restrictions on the Palestinian people, women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been unable to join the labour force. Palestinian female participation rates in the labour force are among the lowest in the Arab world: West Bank has 10% rate while that for Gaza Strip does not exceed 4%. This is at a time when Palestinian women have one of the highest averages of years of education among women in the Arab world. Due to anomalies caused by long occupation, Palestinian women have twice the number of children born to them in comparison with Egyptian women. This translates into population growth rates among Palestinians that are unparalleled except by few countries worldwide. But this situation produces structural and other restrictions imposed on women, in spite of the fact that studies have found Palestinian women to be overly occupied inside and outside of their homes. Since wage employment helps in attaining some form of individual independence in decision making and other matters, that fact that the few Palestinian women have access to this possibility renders them highly dependent on the income and wealth of their husbands, brothers and other male members of the family. This, evidently, perpetuates a structural imbalance in the family dynamics and, as a consequence, denies women full participation and contribution to the overall well being of society.

In any development work in Palestine, women should be a priority. Some of the Church Related and Christian organisations, such as Caritas, YMCA, St. Vincent de Paul, are quite active in putting women at the top of their agenda. In fact, women run these societies. But not all Churches and their related organisations are pressed to consider women as the number one priority. This woman prioritizing and increasing awareness of gender issues should be directed towards providing women with possibilities in order that their talents, skills and abilities be put to their advancement and to that of the Palestinian people and society. In sociological surveys undertaken recently, a significant majority of Palestinians believe that women are entitled to work outside the home but a substantial minority would like to see them work only in such professions as teaching and social work. The principle that women should not be restricted to the homes is a good reflection of the general orientation of Palestinians. The Churches and their related organisations should take heed of this fact when planning for further work among Palestinian families and particularly among women.

JERUSALEM! JERUSALEM!

The status of Jerusalem and that of its holy places remain a crucial issue and concern. While Jerusalem, the refugees and the Jewish settlements are issues to be discussed between Palestinians and Israelis when final status arrangements are negotiated, it is clear that Israel is undertaking a series of actions, particularly in Jerusalem, to preempt any sharing of the city with Palestinians. Of particular concern is the estimate, reached by the Palestinian and Israeli demographers independently, that 1% of Palestinians living in Arab East Jerusalem would be forced to leave the city's municipal boundaries annually. In 10 years' time, this translates to over 20,000 Arab Jerusalemites forced to leave their city due to primarily to the absence of affordable housing and to nureaucratic and other measures undertaken by the Israeli municipal and ministerial authorities. In addition, 700 Arab homes built within the municipal boundaries are threatened to be demolished because, according to Israeli authorities, they were built without proper licensing. Building licenses for Arabs in Jerusalem involve an arduous and complex process that can take years to obtain.

Beside the difficulties encountered by Arab Jerusalemites in mundane matters, there is a need to arrive at agreements on the status of the holy places. A majority of Palestinians, and still greater majority of Arab Jerusalemites, believe that control of the holy places should be entrusted to the respected religious authorities of the three monotheistic faiths. There is awareness by Palestinians that Jerusalem is equally holy to Christians, Jews and Muslims. Any final peace treaty cannot but include Jerusalem in its stipulations and to specifically settle once and for all, the national claims to the city by both the Palestinians and Israelis and the status of the holy places for the respective religions. Otherwise, healing and reconciliation and the progress towards peaceful relationships between Israel and Palestinians and between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world would be affected negatively.

PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

There is a particular concern on the ever-dwindling numbers of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land. While at the turn of the 19th century, the percentage of Palestinian Christians was 13% of the total population of the country, today at the turn of the century their percentage is only 2%. Some estimate predict that in two to three decades the percentage of Palestinian Christians will not be more than half of one percent of the population. It is not numbers that worry Palestinian leaders and church dignitaries; rather it is the fear that some Christian communities that have had a presence almost going back to the early church would

in fact be threatened with disappearance. Today only 45% of all Palestinian Christians live in the Holy Land, the others having been scattered throughout the world. It is important to keep the predicament of Palestinian Christians in mind as one explores the challenge facing Palestinian society in general. It is also appropriate for Church Related Organisations to ask what can be done to revive Palestinian Christian communities as part of reviving and reconstructing of Palestinian Society? After all, Palestinian Christians are an integral part of their society.

CHURCH-RELATED AND OTHER NGOS

The churches of the Holy Land together with churches throughout the world have witnessed in close partnership with the Palestinian people and their plight since 1948. Christian presence in the Holy Land is testimony to the new beginning in Christ and it extends as far as the early Christian community in Jerusalem, which is appropriately known as the “Mother Church”. With the prolonged Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the development of new local NGOs in various fields of interests, the church-related organisations entered into partnership with these in areas touching on education, health agriculture, rehabilitation and women’s issues, among others.

Come to Intifada in 1987 and the tens of international, local and church-related organisations gained additional numbers of committed NGOs that wanted to enter into partnerships with various groups of Palestinian society. The mushrooming of local and international NGOs reached into the hundreds and it gave Palestinians hope and solidarity needed to chart their new course in their relationship within their own society with Israel. In the Intifada years, 1988 - 1991, Churches continued with their educational, health and other services that have been offered for decades without interruption. In some cases, particularly during school closures, church institutions cooperated with local NGOs to conduct classes in informal settings. Besides, churches offered medical, relief and rehabilitation possibilities for the thousands injured during the Intifada years in addition to creating job possibilities and initiating other programs of help that enabled hundreds of families to continue operating in those difficult times. Palestinian Christians were always an integral part of the efforts of their Churches and the related Church organisations that witnessed to the society.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING OR ARE THEY?

The Intifada was a necessary introduction with all its sacrifices and lessons to the period in which we are at, presently. Almost all church-related organisations which operate in Palestine recognise this fact and characterise the present period as “transitional”. Apparently, the first chapter after that of “introductory Intifada” is still being written. As one member of the Palestinian Legislative Council said: “We are still at the beginning of the process of building our society. Even we at the Legislative Council thought, at first, that matters would be easier. We realise now that even if we legislate the most progressive legislation and it is accepted by the Executive Branch of government, there are a host of factors that may interfere to make the implementation of the legislation very difficult, if not impossible.”

The promises of the peace accords appear not to be forthcoming, as initially expected five years ago when they were signed in Washington. In fact, some Church Related Organisations (CROs) believe that the situation has deteriorated. Gaza is often out of reach for those organisations operating from East Jerusalem and the West Bank and, at times of hermetic closures, there are difficulties for a majority of CROs in even functioning normally out of their Jerusalem offices. Towns only 12 kilometres away from Jerusalem, such as Bethlehem, become off-limits for Palestinian and also international staff. Similarly, Palestinian staff from the West Bank cannot have access to their offices in Jerusalem. As one CRO official summarised it: “It is becoming more complicated and what we took for granted during the Intifada years, in terms of travel and free access, is proving to be a complex matter...”

WELCOMING THE PNA

CROs welcomed the arrival of the PNA for it signalled the first time ever that Palestinians have taken control of their own affairs. It also promised a new era; for Palestinians, Israelis and others in the Middle East, with exiting expectations for peace making and the accompanying process of healing, reconciliation and reconstruction. But the arrival of the PNA for some CROs was also important because it meant that the road for the establishment of a Palestinian state was being readied and that eventual full independence of Palestinians is inevitable.

CROs realise that the PNA is starting its institutional infrastructure from scratch; some are patient as they speak of the many needs that require the attention of the PNA. Other CROs are considerate of the fact that the PNA is “picking up” the debris left behind after three decades of Israeli occupation. But all CROs would

want to see the PNA operating in an accountable and efficient manner. This, according to them, would “ensure the development of professional management” and would enable Palestinians to “strategize and plan” thus providing the opportunity for the nurturing and training of experts and professionals who can master the skills needed at this crucial stage of the society’s development. This orientation by CROs towards an “accountable and efficient” performance by the PNA is shared by Palestinians in the Legislative Council and in other Palestinian Authority institutions and in the organisations and associations of the Civil Society.

But the spirit of reflection on CROs-PNA relationships is, perhaps, best captured by one CRO official who stated that development work is “neither government nor NGO but both together.” At the same time he stressed the independence of his organisation by emphasising that “we do not want to come under the control of the PNA.” Clearly, CROs value their independence and they want to maintain their autonomy while at the same time complementing the work done by the PNA. Essentially they see themselves as partners to the PNA but they prize highly their independence and their own perspective on things. Another CRO official put it in the following manner: “In terms of health and rehabilitation, the PNA is justified in its ambition to control and plan for service delivery in terms of health and rehabilitation and yet the challenge remains for the PNA’s various ministries of Health, Social Welfare and Education to coordinate with the many CROs and other NGOs involved in this kind of work.” While the ideal is for the PNA to take over health programs, in many instances this is not possible due to various constraints. Accordingly, the PNA ministries are aware of the need to have the work of Churches and their related organisations as well as that of other NGOs continue in the various areas of health and social service.

PRIORITIES AND PRESSING NEEDS

While each Church and its related organisations have their own agenda for ordering priorities and meeting pressing needs, all of the CROs agree on the overall priorities and needs of the Palestinian society. CROs believe that there can be no sustained development without building civil society; it is the basis for “an environment of mutual respect,” according to one CRO official. Women issues and concerns are also high on the priority of many CROs but so is the employment of young people, regardless of gender, as mentioned above. All CROs are aware of difficult employment situation, especially for young graduates of high school and college. Accordingly, all CRO officials agree that their organisations have a definite role to play programs that would train youngsters and women in certain

occupations and vocations and that would contribute to skills needed to start own businesses or to expand horizons as to possibilities of self-employability.

Community development is a priority for many CROs and is seen as a pressing need of many rural localities. While some international partners of CROs have argued that the PNA should take over projects of rural development such as electricity and road networks and construction of community centre, the reality on the ground points to the need for CROs and other NGOs to continue their involvement in rural community development. The argument, likewise, applies to land reclamation, which, for political, communal, family and individual reasons, has become a high priority for many communities in the Palestinian Territories.

Another area of priority was that of undertaking efforts to reduce the tendency toward emigration among Palestinians, in general and Palestinian Christians in particular. One CRO official phrased his reflection on the topic carefully: “While our organisation provides services to the entire society, we have to serve Palestinian Christians as part of the society and hence our mandate should extend to help stop emigration in general and Palestinian Christian emigration, in particular.” The problem according to another CRO official is that international partners often with funds from their governments perceive help to “religious” groups as sectarian in nature and hence does not reach the general population or the society at large. There must be further reflection on this topic, as one CRO official suggested, pointing out at the same time that if existing patterns of emigration persist there may come a time when the Palestinian Christian legacy would simply be the “history of communities that once existed in Palestine and the Holy Land.”

ADVOCACY

The Churches and the Church Related Organisations are quite aware that their role in Palestinian society is particularly relevant due to the political situation. Accordingly, they are sensitive to issues of justice and peace, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, human rights and other politically related issues. Some CROs work for these issues, directly and indirectly, others give support to group and organisations involved in dialogue, promotion of human rights and improvement of living conditions for refugees. The CROs do not want to be perceived as “taking sides”, as one CRO official pointed out but the facts on the ground reflect socio-economic disparities, within Palestinian society and across the Palestinian and Israeli societies. These disparities “do not make up for a secure political arrangement,” nor do they promise an “enduring and just peace.”

But aside from attempting to cushion off the effects of socio-economic disparities and their negative effects on the peace process, CROs feel committed to advocacy work that would expose the injustices and infractions, irrespective of where they occur or who perpetrates them. Several CRO officials have spoken of the environment of “crisis situation” that seems to be always in season. They are aware of their implications of this environment on “normal” living and on the human rights of Palestinians. All CROs view seriously the closure of the territories and the inability, as a consequence, of Palestinians to enter East Jerusalem. This has resulted in adverse effects on the commerce and economic activities in the Arab City but, more important, it has succeeded in cutting off the Holy City from its natural geographical and human habitats.

While not engaging in political activity, CROs feel that they have an obligation to sensitize their constituencies to what is taking place. They start from the position that by “telling it as it is” the likelihood for reconciliation and peace-making increases. “We cannot separate our work from seeking the truth, even if the truth hurts at the times,” said one CRO official. According to this official, there is a need for a “theology of service” there is need to “sensitize churches in Europe and elsewhere and challenge them with respect to their taking sides, supposedly, for biblical promises and injunctions.”

CROs together with active Palestinian Christians are developing such a “theology of service.” One Palestinian CRO official, who hails from Ramallah, said that Palestinian Christians need to be “honest to their Christian tradition and, at the same time, develop a politically progressive outlook.” According to this official, Palestinian Christians need to work for a “fair, honest and just society.” CROs hence invite Palestinian Christians and others to take part in advocacy work that would eventually lead to the kind of society that would be able to be at peace with itself and with others.

CONCLUSION

Palestinians are at last confronting the challenge of state building, denied them throughout the last one hundred years; the Churches together with their indigenous faithful and those expatriates working with local and international Church related organisations are part of this exiting venture. A century ago Palestinians were awakening to the beauty of the Arabic language, to the need for schooling and to the function of medicine in a society slowly emerging from four centuries of marginalisation and overall impoverishment. Today Palestinians are engaged in moulding the future; this is not an easy task as it involves healing the past and

shaping the future. Palestinians have accepted this challenge but the process is long, arduous and painful. The “Mother Church” of Jerusalem and Palestine, with all its faithful, shares in this process. It behooves all people of good will to stand by the Palestinians at this time: without giving the Palestinians a real chance to develop their own institutions of state and to maintain a civil, pluralist and democratic society, there will be no real peace. In the final analysis, helping Palestinians to achieve their objectives will benefit all of the countries and nations of the region. If we can achieve this vision of peace then the sacrifices and suffering of all of our forefathers in this region will not have been in vain. What better inheritance can we bequeath to our children than this?

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LAMBETH CONFERENCE - JULY 1998

RESOLUTION ON THE HOLY LAND

This Conference:

- (a) expresses its deep ongoing concern about the tragic situation in the Holy Land, especially as it affects the City of Jerusalem:
- (b) affirms the following points:
 - (i) Jerusalem is holy to the three Abrahamic faiths. Judaism, Christianity and Islam and a home equally for Palestinians and Israelis;
 - (ii) The status of Jerusalem is fundamental to any just lasting peace settlement and therefore it should serve as the capital of two sovereign states, Israel and Palestine, with free access to the adherents of all three faiths.
 - (iii) East Jerusalem is an integral part of the occupied territories, and should be included in all political arrangements relating to those territories, including self-determination, release of prisoners, right of return and eventual sovereignty;
 - (iv) The continued serious decline of Christian Community is a substantial threat to the threefold presence in the Holy City;
 - (v) The continued building and expansion of Jewish Settlements within Eastern Jerusalem and the occupied territories remains a major obstacle to any just and lasting peace.
- (c) urges the government of Israel to recognise the right to Palestinians, Christians and Muslims alike to build their own homes and establish their own institutions in Jerusalem;
- (d) sends a message of love, hope, and support to our fellow Christians in Israel and Palestine;
- (e) encourages our own congregations in greater dialogue, understanding and fellowship with their brothers and sisters in that land;
- (f) urges our political leaders to take every opportunity to encourage the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority to work urgently for a just and lasting peace settlement, to include fair and proper provision for the right of return to the land of those Palestinians dispossessed by the conflicts of the past fifty years;
- (g) urges the United Nations, and the governments of the United States and the European Community to use diplomatic and economic influence in support of the above and to demonstrate as firm a commitment to justice as they do for the security of the State of Israel;
- (h) continues to uphold all those, in any nation, who have committed themselves to working for the cause of peace, praying that they may have wisdom and courage to bring this process to a just conclusion; and
- (i) resolves to send copies of this resolution to the respective parties mentioned above as well as to the Prime Minister of Israel and President of the Palestinian Authority.K

