

Holy Land Coordination 2021

Final Communiqué

This is the first time we have been prevented from meeting physically in the Holy Land. Yet we remain resolutely committed to supporting our sisters and brothers in the homeland of Christ. Over the past week we have been privileged and moved to hear from Christians across the West Bank, Gaza and Israel about their mission, resilience and witness in these unprecedented circumstances.

Through our dialogue, it has become painfully clear that there is today less cause for optimism than at any time in recent history.

The health challenges of Covid-19, felt by the entire world, are compounded by conflict, occupation and blockade.

The absence of international pilgrims has exacerbated widespread economic hardship, increased levels of unemployment and pushed many more families into poverty.

The lack of political progress, along with relentless expansion of illegal settlements and the impact of Israel's Nation-State law, continues to erode any prospect of a peaceful two-state solution.

Now is a critical moment for us all to strengthen our expression of solidarity with the people of the Holy Land *"not as a vague sentiment but as a 'firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good'"*.¹

We stress the importance of the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships recommitting to direct negotiations. We call upon our own governments and political leaders urgently to renew their active participation in the search for a just peace, supporting dialogue between all sides, upholding international law, and reaffirming the plurality of Jerusalem, given its unique significance for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Furthermore, the international community must hold Israel accountable for its moral, legal and humanitarian responsibility to make Covid-19 vaccines accessible for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and encourage cooperation by the Palestinian Authority, heeding Pope Francis' message that *"in the face of a challenge that knows no borders, we cannot erect walls."*²

While many of our own countries continue to face severe hardship amid the pandemic, we have a profound responsibility to support our fellow Christians in the Holy Land. Church schools, clinics, hospitals and other social projects including the work of Caritas, while under severe pressure, are models of charity, justice, and peace. These Christian institutions are vital in bringing together people from many different backgrounds to serve the common good of all.

¹ Pope Francis, *World Day of Peace 2021*

² Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi 2020*

The Christian community, though small, is an important guarantor of social cohesion and a bearer of hope for a better future. We eagerly await a time when Christians from across the world can once again make pilgrimages to the Holy Land to witness and support this first-hand. Until that point, we encourage our communities to provide any assistance that may be possible and hold all the region's peoples in our prayers.

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England and Wales (Chair of the Holy Land Coordination)

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Germany

Archbishop Stephen Brislin

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Bishop Christopher Chessun

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Bishop Michel Dubost

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Bishop Felix Gmur

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Bishop Nicholas Hudson

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Archbishop Patrick Kelly

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Bishop William Kenney

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