

Message of H.E President Mahmoud Abbas on the Occasion of Christmas

From Palestine, the Holy Land, we extend our warmest greetings to peoples around the world while we celebrate the occasion of the birth of the prince of peace, Jesus, peace be upon him.

“They say “peace, peace” where there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). While the international community is talking about resumption of the peace process, Christmas in general, and the situation of Bethlehem in particular, are a reminder that peace cannot remain an empty word. This Christmas, we deliver a very special message to the world: All I want from Christmas is justice. Any initiative to bring peace will fail if it doesn’t bring justice to the Palestinian people. As the Holy Bible says “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Luke 6:20-23).

We celebrate the birth of Jesus, a Palestinian messenger of love, justice and peace, which has guided millions from the moment that his message came out from a small grotto in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. His message resonates among all of those who are seeking justice and among our people who have been the guardians of the holy sites for generations. It resonates in our prayers for our people in Gaza. On this note, we reiterate that we will continue our efforts for national unity just as we are committed to rebuild Gaza. We call upon the international community to intensify their efforts on that matter.

Jesus’ message resonates in our prayers for our people in our capital Jerusalem, who continue to resist the Israeli attempts to turn the city into an exclusive Jewish place. The mosques and the churches of Jerusalem will continue to remind the world of the Palestinian, Arab, and Christian and Muslim identity of the city. Justice means ending the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, an integral part of the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 border.

This Christmas we remember our prisoners. We also remember all our refugees around the world, and particularly those of Christian faith who have been stripped from their land since 1948, The Christian communities of Safad, Beisan, Kufr Bir’im, Iqrith, Suhmata, Al Birwa, Ma’alul, Al Bassa and many others who are still waiting for justice to prevail.

This Christmas we pray for the people of Cremisan, in Beit Jala, and particularly for the 58 Palestinian Christian families whose lands are being threatened by the illegal Israeli annexation Wall that separates Bethlehem from Jerusalem for first time in 2000 years of Christian presence in Palestine. On that note, we salute the role of the local churches and their institutions in defending their land and Palestinian national rights and advocacy all over the world.

This Christmas we would like to thank the thousands of churches, priests and faithful from all over the world that have joined the campaign to boycott and divest from companies that support the Israeli occupation. This principled position is an investment in peace. We also thank various churches that have called upon their governments to recognize the State of Palestine on the 1967 border. They remind us of what the Holy Bible says: “Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10).

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We are very concerned regarding what is happening in the region. The uprooting of Christian communities by terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq, just as the rest of the killings against faithful from all religions, is a crime against international law and a sin against God. The Palestinian people know very well and have painful experiences of being uprooted due to religious or national reasons. We commend the efforts of the Arab countries to stop the uprooting of Christians, and we fully endorse the words of Pope Francis “there is no Middle East without Christians.”

Our late leader Yasser Arafat said over 20 years ago “there is no Palestine without Christians.” The Government of the State of Palestine is fully committed to the rule of law and respect to freedom of worship. In Palestine, Christians are not a minority but an integral part of our nation and of our national movement.

This year- 2014- was a special year in our relationship with the Holy See due to the Peace pilgrimage of H.H Pope Francis to Palestine, the Holy Land, where he had the opportunity to meet with Palestinian families and to hear their grievances and fears. We are also negotiating with the Holy See to consolidate a strong presence of the Church and its institutions in Palestine, reaffirming our previous commitments, including those we assumed when the State of Palestine signed earlier this year on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This Christmas we call upon the international community to partner with us in order to preserve a large and vibrant Christian presence in Palestine by stopping all Israeli policies that have driven our people, Christians and Muslims, out of their homeland. This includes recognizing the State of Palestine on the 1967 border and supporting our UN initiative to set a deadline to end the Israeli occupation.

On behalf of a people struggling for justice and peace, from the land of Jesus, peace be upon him, we wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, hoping that 2015 will be a year of justice to advance freedom and peace for the people of Palestine and justice and peace for the world at large.