



## Action & Prayer to protect the people and lands of Cremisan

August 2015

Once again the people and lands of the Cremisan valley are under threat. Bulldozers have begun to up-root ancient olive trees and take land and private property in order to continue the construction of the Separation Barrier. We urge you to **write now** to the FCO and to the Israeli Ambassador to express your concern. Israel must not be allowed to get away with this immoral and illegal behaviour. Below you will find statements from church leaders and representatives, please draw on these in what you say to show that there is a strong voice among Christians against this action.

### ACTION - write to

Israeli Ambassador  
Daniel Taub  
Israeli Embassy  
2 Palace Green  
London  
W8 4QB  
FAX: 0207 957 9555

[info@londonmfa.gov.il](mailto:info@londonmfa.gov.il)

Tobias Ellwood MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH  
Email: [fcocorrespondence@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fcocorrespondence@fco.gov.uk)

Email: [info@london.mfa.gov.il](mailto:info@london.mfa.gov.il)

### Latin Patriarchate condemns resumption of separation wall construction (19 August)

On Monday morning, August 17, Israeli bulldozers arrived unannounced on private properties in Beir Ona, near the Cremisan Valley, to resume construction of the separation wall. The residents of the area were surprised and felt the pain of the loss of about fifty of their centuries-old olive trees that were uprooted.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem strongly condemns this Israeli conducted operation, which is without regard to the rights of the families of the valley; the rights that these same families have bravely tried to defend before the law over the past decade. We join with the sorrow and frustration of these oppressed families, and we strongly condemn the injustice done to them.

The construction of the Separation Wall and the confiscation of lands of the local families are threats and insults to peace. We call on the Israeli authorities to await the decision on the petition submitted by the families of the Valley to the Supreme Court of Israel a few days ago and to stop the work that has been started.

**From Fr Aktham Hijazin, parish priest of Beit Jala.** "The bulldozers arrived this Monday at 9 am, nobody had taken the trouble to warn the inhabitants. The labourers and their bulldozers uprooted about fifty trees amongst the most ancient of the valley - some of 1500 years of age - under the protection of the Israeli army...this as an action against the past and the future of our people, this is an operation against justice, against our presence here, against our history and our future. These trees have been here for centuries and are part of the lives of these families. Confiscate these lands and you confiscate the past in these families and the future of generations to come."

But it is mainly the Christian presence on this land, already reduced to a wick, which is threatened. The inhabitants of Beir Ona and Cremisan are angry, says Father Hijazin. The Israelis say 'we uproot your olive trees, but you can replant them elsewhere'. But families do not want to hear this! These are their lands! "

**Statement from Bishop Declan Lang, Chair of the Bishops' Conference Department for International Affairs , (19 August)**

I add my voice to that of His Beatitude Patriarch Twal in condemning the latest move by the Israeli authorities to displace the people of Cremisan from their land and threatening their livelihoods.

The action of the IDF in bulldozing olive trees to prepare for the construction of the separation barrier is a cruel blow to the hopes raised by the recent Supreme Court ruling.

I urge the Israeli authorities to stop construction and reconsider urgently their approach to the people of the Cremisan valley which has caused such grave injustice.

As always my prayers and thoughts are with the people who are facing this unjust and difficult situation and who are seeking peace in the midst of this conflict."

**Statement from the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, (11 August)**

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another' ( Zech 7:9)

The Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa, gathered in Mariannahill for their plenary session, are saddened and dismayed to learn of the recent decision by the Israeli Supreme Court to allow the Separation Barrier to be built in the Cremisan Valley.

The extension of the Separation Barrier will severely affect the livelihoods and the quality of life of 58 Christian families, whose land and olive orchards have been in their families for generations. Furthermore, it will separate them from the spiritual and pastoral care of the Salesian Sisters and the Monastery both of which will remain in Palestinian territory.

The extension of the Barrier will be a further encroachment on Palestinian lands close to Bethlehem, squeezing the population once again into a smaller area. The building of the barrier on Palestinian territory is arguably illegal in international law - most certainly it places more obstacles in the way of finding peace in the Middle East and contributes to further destabilization of the whole region.

We believe that peace can only be achieved by seeking justice for all. The separation of peoples through walls and barriers can only further divide and anger people, and will not contribute to peace. We call on all leaders in the Holy Land to work for peace by seeking justice, and to show mercy and compassion to one another. We express our solidarity and support for the Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Faoud Twal, his auxiliary bishops and all the suffering peoples of the Holy Land... we hold all people of the Middle East in our hearts and in our prayers.

**Statement from the The Society of St. Yves - Catholic Center For Human Rights**

The Society submitted on July 30th, 2015 a new petition to the Israeli High Court, in which it requested the court to order the Ministry of Defense to reveal and present its whole planned route of the Separation Wall in Cremisan before it proceeds with building it in the privately owned lands. St. Yves also requested the High Court to issue an order to prevent the Army from building the Wall before such route plan is presented, and after allowing all parties and petitioners to submit their objections, especially for the land owners who will incur severe damages from the construction of the Separation Wall... St. Yves also highlighted in its petition that building the Separation Wall without revealing the whole planned route can be subject to future problems that would affect the land owners and the local community directly, and the Monastery and Convent indirectly. Accordingly, St. Yves demanded that the Army reveals the whole route of the Wall immediately and refrains from any construction until then. St. Yves'

petition comes after the High Court dismissed a petition presented by the land owners in Cremisan on August 5th 2015, in which they requested that the route of the Separation Wall as presented by the Army be annulled, and that the Army presents an alternative route. St. Yves awaits the decision of the High Court on its petition.

## PRAY

- Ensure that prayers are said for the people of Palestine in your parish or community, remembering especially in these days the situation in Cremisan.
- Engage your Church in some action/reflection on the impact of the separation wall during the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, 22-26 September. The theme is **Bridges not Walls** : “*God has broken down the dividing Wall*” (Ephesians 2:14). **Lots of resources to help you here** <http://paxchristi.org.uk/campaigns/israel-and-palestine/world-week-for-peace-in-pi/>

## Prayer offered by Pope Francis on his visit to the Holy Land, 2014



Open our eyes and our hearts,  
and give us the courage to say:  
“Never again war!”  
With war everything is lost.  
Instil in our hearts the courage to take  
concrete steps to achieve peace.

Lord, God of Abraham,  
God of the Prophets, God of love,  
You created us and you call us to  
live as brothers and sisters.  
Give us the strength daily  
to be instruments of peace.  
Enable us to see everyone  
who crosses our path as  
our brother or sister.

*Pope Francis, Holy Land May 2014*

## Prayer for the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel

God-with-us, you sit down in our midst.  
Nothing can separate us from your love—not towering concrete walls  
or the deep darkness between searchlights;  
not distance from friends or despair in our hearts  
that the world’s wrong cannot be changed.

You are with our brothers crowded at the checkpoint,  
with our sisters witnessing for peace: you sit down in our midst.  
Born into poverty to displaced people living under occupation,  
you shared our human lives, and we know  
that your love can never be contained by the walls of separation.  
You sit down in our midst, God-with-us.

Amen

*Jan Sutch Pickard*