

Easter Initiative Talking Points

2 March 2022

Call for Action

Pray and act for the peace of Jerusalem: The sacred ground of Jerusalem should be protected for all people sharing the city, irrespective of religious or national identity. Easter embodies the spirit of triumph, resurrection, and a new beginning, and is therefore a good time to call for a new beginning for Jerusalem and all its inhabitants. We call on church leaders and elected representatives worldwide to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, to take meaningful action to stop forced displacement, violence and intimidation in Jerusalem, and to support work towards an end to the occupation and a just peace for all people in Palestine and Israel.

Talking Point 1: The Heads of churches in Jerusalem call for a Jerusalem without violence and intimidation.

- Dozens of Palestinians are facing imminent dispossession from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem, in a move to force them out and replace individual homes and entire communities with Israeli settlements.
- Over 20 percent of all demolitions, evictions, confiscations or seizures of Palestinian properties in 2021 took place in East Jerusalem. In many cases, the forced eviction of Palestinians occurs within the context of Israeli settlement construction and expansion.
- Israel has expropriated 35 percent of East Jerusalem for Israeli settlements. Palestinian families who lose their homes have nowhere to go.
- According to the UN, some 218 Palestinian households across East Jerusalem have eviction cases against them, most of which were initiated by settler organizations. Some 970 people, including 424 children, are at risk of displacement.

Talking Point 2: East Jerusalem is occupied territory

- Israel annexed East Jerusalem de-facto to its territory in June of 1967. Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are given the status of “permanent resident” in Israel – a legal status accorded to foreign nationals wishing to reside in Israel. The status can be revoked if a person is absent from their home in East Jerusalem for too long, i.e. for studies or work abroad. More than 14,500 East Jerusalemites have lost their residency since 1967. Most Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem have no other home, no legal status in any other country, and did not choose their status; it is the State of Israel that occupied and annexed the land on which they live.
- In July of 1980 the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) passed the Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel: saying that the city will remain unified in the borders that the Israeli government determined in June of 1967, and that no part of the city may be transferred to a “foreign government or body.”
- The annexation of East-Jerusalem has not been recognized by the international community, and has instead been condemned, i.a., in UN Security Council resolutions 267 and 478.

Talking Point 3: Palestinian Jerusalemites face discrimination and injustice

- There are two sets of laws around property rights in Jerusalem that allow Jewish Israeli families to reclaim property in East Jerusalem while Palestinians cannot reclaim property in West Jerusalem or elsewhere in Israel. After Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967, it passed the 1970 Legal and Administrative Matters Law, allowing Jewish Israeli families to reclaim lost property they owned in East Jerusalem before 1948. Meanwhile, the 1950 Absentee Property Law, and its amendment in 1973, prevents Palestinians from getting back their property in West Jerusalem and elsewhere.
- East Jerusalem Palestinians live in the neglected part of town and feel that their needs are not cared for. According to Al-Jazeera, Palestinians make up 40% of the city’s population, and they pay taxes to Israeli authorities, but only 10% of the Municipal budget goes to public spending in East Jerusalem. The following table illustrates some of the discrimination and injustice endured in East Jerusalem:

	West Jerusalem	East Jerusalem
Public parks	1000	45
Public libraries	26	2
Municipal-run family health centers	27	6
Jerusalem light rail services	21 stations	2 stations

Talking Point 4: International law is unambiguous about the protection of civilians under occupation, including in occupied East Jerusalem

- The IV Geneva Convention states that “Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.”
- Article 46 of the Hague Regulations states that “private property must be respected and cannot be confiscated” in the occupied territory.
- The Joint Urgent Appeal to the United Nations Special Procedure on Forced Evictions in East Jerusalem, of 10 March 2021 by human right organizations, cautioned that: “Not only has Israel unlawfully extended its domestic civil legal system to occupied East Jerusalem, but proceeded to enact more discriminatory laws and policies that enforce the confiscation of

Palestinian property in East Jerusalem in favor of settlers, the forcible transfer of Palestinians, and the expansion of Israeli-Jewish presence in the city.”

Talking Point 5: Heads of Churches in Jerusalem call for the preservation of the multi-religious identity of the city

Jerusalem is a historical-symbolic city, revered by Muslims, Christians and Jews alike, and is the spiritual center associated with age-long dreams for peace and justice. No religion can claim monopoly over Jerusalem. The current conflict in the City is the greatest challenge facing those concerned about its future as a spiritual, tolerant, and diverse place.

- On 5 November 2021, the Latin Patriarchate issued a statement cautioning against the violation of the sanctity of Jerusalem and the people. The statement said: “The historic position of the Churches in Jerusalem is clear with regards to our denouncement of any attempt which makes Jerusalem an exclusive city for anyone. This is a city sacred to the three monotheistic religions and, based on international law and relevant UN resolutions, also a city where the Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, have the same right to build a future based on freedom, equality and peace. We also call for an utter respect for the historic Status Quo of all Holy Places, including Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound.”
- Similarly, on 13 December 2021, the Patriarchs and local heads of churches of Jerusalem issued a statement on the current threat to Christian presence. They warned against change in the status of Jerusalem due to “countless incidents of physical and verbal assaults against priests and other clergy, attacks on Christian churches, with holy sites regularly vandalized and desecrated, and intimidation of local Christians who simply seek to worship freely and go about their daily lives.” The Heads of churches cautioned against the action taken by radical Israeli groups; and called upon local politicians, officials and law enforcement agencies of Israel to curb these activities.
- In response to the threats by radical groups the World Council of Churches issued the following statement: “The Christians of the Holy Land must be respected and valued as part of both the heritage and future of the region, and assured the same rights as others and protections appropriate to a threatened minority, for which the political authorities of the region are both legally and morally responsible.”
- The plan to build a national park on Jerusalem’s Mount of Olives, and to include church-owned land, must be shelved entirely. Moreover, the desecration of Al-Yusifieh Muslim Cemetery, and expropriating Silwan land to build an archeological park- on property adjacent to Mount of Olives- expands Israel’s presence in occupied East Jerusalem and encircles the area with Israeli, residential and archaeological sites.

Talking Point 6: Access to worship in Jerusalem is not a right currently enjoyed by everyone equally in Jerusalem

This year Christians, Jews and Muslims celebrate high holidays at the same time: Easter, Pessach and Ramadan. Jerusalem as holy city for all three monotheistic religions should rightfully be the center of worship and celebrations for everyone, but

- Of the three million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, who are predominantly Muslims, only those over a certain age are allowed access to Jerusalem during high holidays, while others must apply for a hard-to-obtain permit from Israeli authorities. The restrictions cause congestion and tension at Qalandia Checkpoint near Ramallah, and Checkpoint 300 near Bethlehem, the main crossing-points that are part of the separation barrier. This is the case especially during the Holy Month of Ramadan when tens of thousands of worshipers want to enter Jerusalem to pray.
- Palestinian Christians are the City's population at most risk today. Out of 952,000 residents in the East and West parts, and out of a population of 350,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem, not more than 10,000 Palestinian Christians are left. The effort by settler organizations to confiscate Christian property near Jaffa Gate, and the harassment in the New Gate area, threatens to push Christians out and to change the City's multi-religious and pluralistic identity.
- Moreover, Christians from the West Bank and Gaza have limited or no access to Jerusalem during Easter for worship and family visits. Easter in Jerusalem is marked with festivities that include scout parades, processions by religious clerics, and prayer services at the Holy Sepulcher and elsewhere that commemorate the events that unfolded with Jesus. Christians from the occupied territories lament the fact that they cannot be in Jerusalem during Easter.

What can I do to help?

- 1. Speak Out!** Raise the issue of East Jerusalem publicly; in the media, through social media, and during conferences and presentations. The Easter Initiative highlights the situation in Jerusalem; of violence, intimidation, and changing the City's multi-faithful identity. Use that information to call for a better future for Jerusalem and its inhabitants irrespective of nationality or religion.
- 2. Contact relevant diplomatic actors, elected members of your government, and Government of Israel interlocutors.** Tell them that all inhabitants of Jerusalem deserve a life with dignity, justice, and freedom.
- 3. Follow the World Council of Churches and EAPPI website and social media.** Look for updates, and use that information to call for protection of Jerusalem for the whole of civilization and God's children; a city without violence and intimidation, and one of a multi-faith identity.
- 4. Learn more:** Easter is a good time to not only look at the historical and biblical places, but to also understand more about the situation in Palestine and Israel today. We encourage you to learn more about the situation of communities living under occupation and show solidarity with those suffering and those working for just peace. We invite you to take practical steps to be in relationship with people through solidarity visits, institutional partnerships, church-to-church programs, and advocacy.

Useful References:

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