

Israel Attempts to Silence the Archbishop of Jerusalem Before Christmas?

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[Archbishop Atallah Hanna](#), of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, was allegedly the victim of an [Israeli assassination attempt](#) on December 17, just days before Christmas, when an [Israeli gas canister](#) was fired into his church in Jerusalem. He was rushed to the hospital suffering from partial paralysis due to the effects of the poisonous gas.

The Israeli occupation authorities have long held him in disdain because of his outspoken criticism of the occupation of Palestine, and the suffering of its people. Hanna stated last month,

“The occupation in Jerusalem is treating us as if we are guests and foreigners in our own city. This is the embodiment of [apartheid policies](#) and practices against our people in Jerusalem specifically and in Palestine more generally.”

On December 6 he stated, “We will remain in Jerusalem, defending our religious sites and endowments. We reject the policies of the occupation. [We will not surrender](#). Our motto will always be freedom and dignity for the Palestinian people. Our religious sites will remain ours. Jerusalem will remain ours.”

At the recent [Feast of Saint Barbara](#) celebration, [Archbishop Hanna](#) proclaimed Christmas’ message of hope and consolation for the Palestinian people in a time of suffering. “Despite our grief and suffering, we will continue to love life and struggle for freedom.”, he said. He urged the world to stand up with the Palestinian people and help them claim their right to live in peace and freedom. “There can be no peace without justice and without fulfilling the Palestinian people’s aspirations,” he stressed in the ancient village of Aboud, where Jewish colonial settlements were built in recent years. He added his “call upon all the churches of the world, in the west and east, to urgently defend Palestine, the children of Palestine, and the Palestinian cause. Let our message this Christmas be to free Palestine and the Palestinian people.”

Recent apartheid conference

The ‘[First International Conference on Israeli Apartheid](#)’ was held on November 29 in Istanbul. The occupation of Palestinian land and the treatment of Palestinians as second-class citizens was discussed, and Archbishop Hanna was one of the most outspoken attendees, which was sure to catch the glare of the Israeli officials.

[Archbishop Hanna](#) said,

“The city of Jerusalem is the city of the three Abrahamic religions...Christian and Muslim Palestinians living in Jerusalem suffer from the occupation, suffer from repression, tyranny, and oppression.”

Comparisons were made to the international outcry which toppled the apartheid government of South Africa, which included boycotts of their products. The current ‘Boycott, Divest, Sanction’ movement, BDS, was a central theme while calling for principals of equality, justice and dignity for all, and the use of all lawful means to achieve their goal.

[Ali Kurk](#) said, “International law is ineffective, as the law of power rules,” referring to the US-EU support for Israel’s apartheid system, and of Israel’s policy of evacuating Palestinian homes in occupied East Jerusalem and either allowing Jewish settlers to inhabit them or destroying them.

The ideology of racial and cultural supremacy is the cause of apartheid. [Rima Khalaf](#) said Israel is “the only nation in the world to confer whole citizenship according to inherited faith.”

Archbishop Hanna cautioned that Israel is conducting a slow [ethnic cleansing campaign](#) in Jerusalem, to turn it into a strictly Jewish town. The Christian residents of the city have been disappearing, and now are just 1% of the population. Hanna explained the time has come for both Christians and Muslims to join forces since they are both oppressed from the “Israeli” apartheid, which prevents access to places, jobs, resources, and often health care.

The Israeli occupation

The [demographic change](#) instituted by Israel is bent on destroying the two-state solution and utilizes violence and apartheid. Many have voiced support for the one-state alternative where Palestinians are equal to Israelis and apartheid is abolished. Palestinians living under occupation have documented violations of individual rights and international law that Israel has committed. The Palestinian struggle involves political and human rights, against settler colonialism, and is not based on religious differences.

In 2017 47,000 Palestinian Christians were living in Palestine, referring to the Occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. 98% of Palestine’s Christians live in the West Bank, mainly in Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem, while 1,100 live in the Gaza Strip. The Christian population of Palestine today is 10 times less than 70 years ago.

“[The Holy Land: A Palestinian Christian Perspective](#)”, was the title of a conference held in Johannesburg on October 15. Israel’s strategy to drive all Christians out of their Palestinian homeland is based on immense economic hardships, [permanent siege and apartheid](#), and the severing of communal and spiritual bonds.

The [Bethlehem Bible College](#) is a Protestant Evangelical institution headed by [Jack Sara](#), who said, “We are proud of our Palestinian heritage and our national identity.” [Archbishop Hanna concurred](#), “It is important that Palestinian evangelicals communicate with fellow evangelicals around the world and to talk about the Palestinian cause. I disagree that all Christian evangelicals adopt the Zionist narrative.”

Bethlehem and Christmas 2019

70 years ago, [Bethlehem](#), the birthplace of Jesus Christ, was [86% Christian](#). The city’s mayor

reports as of 2016 the Christian population of Bethlehem has dropped to 12 %, just [11,000 people](#). Israel has built more than 30,000 housing units, and the number of [Jewish settlers in Bethlehem](#) today is about [165,000](#), with 51 miles of the [separation wall](#) running through Bethlehem.

[Archbishop Hanna](#) had a strong message for Christians throughout the world, “In a few days, Christians will be celebrating Christmas all over the world. The streets and town squares will be decorated with lights, adornments and Christmas trees in Europe and the world. I would like to remind all Christians all around the world: there is no point in celebrating Christmas if you do not pay attention to what is happening in [Palestine as it is the birthplace of Christ](#) and where Christianity originated and spread its message throughout the world. The [nativity grotto](#) is in Bethlehem. The true light of Christmas emanated from Bethlehem.”

The American and European Christians

Former United Nations human rights investigator [Richard Falk](#) stated Israel is continuing the heritage of European-style colonialism by changing entire demographics. Equally disturbing, Israel’s most ardent supporters in the United States and elsewhere are devout Christians. [Thomas Getman](#), former director of World Vision in Jerusalem, said that 80 percent of US evangelicals misrepresent the Bible for political gain.

“We reject America’s unjust decisions which come in support of Israeli policies and the occupation of Jerusalem.”, said Archbishop Hanna.

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