

For Immediate Release

18 April 2009- Holy Fire Saturday

All Jerusalem Christians were denied entry to the Holy Sepulcher

This Holy Fire Saturday 2009 and for the first time Israel prevents all local Jerusalemite Christians from accessing freely the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Old City of Jerusalem. For the fifth year Israeli forces built up check points around the area surrounding the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and barred local Christians from normally performing their prayers and practicing their ancient traditions. The Israeli authorities is imposing this new arrangement of blocking the movement to the Church in this Holy day which changes the Status Quo, that has been the norm of governing and arranging the celebrations for the past hundreds of years.

It is becoming obvious that local Palestinians and especially Christian Palestinian are being singled out. Less than a week ago, thousands of Jewish worshipers flocked in the Old City of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover - Pesach. Israel has granted full access to all Jewish worshipers wishing to arrive to the Holy City. The Palestinian Christians who arrive to the Old City for Easter are ought to be allowed to access freely their Holy Sites that Israel controls by force.

Jerusalem should never be left to one party to rule over it. Especially a party that is eager to use brutal power against women and children celebrating the Holy Easter. Today, just like last year, children and elderly people were humiliated and brutally blocked from celebrating this Holy day. The space was never the issue. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher has hosted all of the worshipers (locals, pilgrims, and tourists) without any reported incidents.

The lack of coordination between the different Churches in Jerusalem is coming to the advantage of the Israeli authorities, who have for so long acted in a divide and rule manner. The price today is being paid dearly by the indigenous Jerusalem Christians whom are being pushed to leave their home and City and Holy Places.

Such violations by the state of Israel should stop. The steps taken against Palestinian Christians are illegal. We call upon the Consulates, Embassies, Christian Churches and organizations, and human rights organizations, to intervene immediately, so that freedom of religion and worship in Jerusalem is granted to all faiths.

The Laity Committee in the Holy Land/East Jerusalem

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