

The Most Reverend Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury

Saturday, October 21, 2023

Most Reverend,

We are utterly perplexed by the public statements coming out from your office on the current situation in Palestine. It has become clear to us that our voices as Palestinian Anglicans are not being heard in Canterbury and our interests are being relegated. Therefore we have decided to address you directly. We have also become aware through social media of your presence in our country. It is very unfortunate that we did not have a chance to participate in the Sunday Prayers conducted in Jerusalem due to the Israeli occupation' closure of our cities despite the fact that we were only 10 kilometers away.

Our community is small but extremely significant. As members of our Palestinian society, we Anglican Christians are fighting for our identity which, along with the Palestinian identity, has been under constant attack ever since the onset of the Israeli State. We are very proud of our identity as Palestinian Christians and of our resilience. We express this through our active and leading roles in the struggle for human rights, national liberation, state building and for a just and lasting peace. Those are just endeavors that are rooted in values that we have learnt and embraced from our Church. Through these active roles we remain rooted in our Palestinian society as Anglican Christians. Our continued presence means the existence of the Anglican communion in the birthplace of Christianity and therefore, we would expect that our existence and struggle for justice and liberation as Palestinians, Christians and Anglicans would be accurately portrayed and more publicly supported from your side.

Similarly, to our brothers and sisters in Gaza who, in times of dire need, took sanctuary in the Ahli Hospital and the Anglican church in Gaza, to our great disappointment we have come to the conclusion that we are left to fend for ourselves.

The fact that statements coming from your office have referred to us as "Anglicans in the West Bank, Israel and Gaza" rather than by our national identity as Palestinians gives us cause for concern. We could not but remember the reference to the "non-Jewish communities" made in the Balfour Declaration to our Palestinian people, as well as the historical struggle that the Palestinian Episcopal communities had until 1976 for recognition of our national rights. We are afraid that domestic British ecumenical and political considerations are more relevant in your decision making process than the accurate recognition and implementation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in general, and of the Anglican Palestinian community in particular. These matters might for some seem as mere semantics but for us directly concern our identity and the steadfast struggle to fend off against attempts to ethnically cleanse our presence from Palestine.

Most Reverend,

These statements as you well know relate to a context that did not begin on October 7th of 2023. The Palestinian catastrophe began on November 2nd of 1917 with the Balfour Declaration leading to the Nakba on May 15th of 1948. The fact that the largest parish of the Jerusalem Bishopric was built in 1949 in Amman, Jordan is exemplary to what happened to our Anglican community during the Nakba; our Churches were shut down by the Israeli occupation in Jerusalem (Saint Paul), Jaffa, Akka and Beisan and the remnants of their communities praying in Amman and Beirut are all you have to know in order to realize that we have carried the cross of injustice for 75 years.

This is not a conflict as it has been described in your statement but like all our Palestinian people we are suffering from the Israeli occupation, oppression, lack of opportunities economically and movement restrictions. This is the consequence of a Jewish supremacist system that negates our right to self-determination and return to the homes from which we have been forced to leave since 1948. In the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip there has been an occupying power since 1967 and a people under occupation and in exile.

Most Reverend,

Our position unequivocally opposes all attacks against civilians regardless on national, ethnic or religious identity and calls for the full implementation of international humanitarian law.

What we would expect from our Church is to fully condemn the systematic denial of our rights and calls to annihilate our people, especially as these are being publicly expressed by the current fascist Israeli government, rather than attempting to create a balance between the oppressed and the oppressor. We are convinced that a strong voice in support of justice from our Church would, at least, help in providing protection to our people.

Please allow us to pose the following question: Does the Church not believe that what has been taking place is not the result of 75 years of systematic denial of the inalienable rights of our people while the whole world is simply watching? Doesn't the Palestinian people have the right to self-defense? We are calling for the same truth and justice the Our Lord Jesus taught us in the Bible.

We don't remember a single statement from our Church referring to the well documented crimes of the Israeli occupation as "evil and heinous crimes", even when Anglicans have been affected. When the State of Israel, the occupying power, is supported unconditionally in its war on our people in Gaza this can amount to sanctioning and giving it a green light to continue committing war crimes, including the forceful displacement, massacres, and other crimes against humanity. Deplorable examples such as the bombing of our Arab Ahli Hospital and the Orthodox Porphyrius Church, and killing thousands of civilians should be called for what they truly are: a genocide of the

Palestinian people and a serious threat to extinguish the Christian presence from Gaza for the first time in 2000 years of Christian history.

Most Reverend,

We are proud members of the oldest Christian community and proud Palestinians. We sincerely believe that it was our duty to let you know that we feel abandoned as Palestinians, and we hope that along with this letter we were able to convey our feelings and concerns.

Abandoned were our brothers and sisters in Gaza who took urgent medical care at our Ahli Hospital and refuge under the sanctity of our church. Our presence as Anglican Christians is a pillar of the Palestinian society. This must continue.

We therefore implore you to call for an immediate halt of Israeli attacks in Gaza and the unconditional entry of humanitarian aid, water and fuel to the besieged Gaza Strip.

We also implore you to enshrine the sanctity of our churches, affiliated institutions and properties, and to vehemently challenge any past and future aggressions to our churches and institutions. Those are the basis to pass on our Anglican Christian identity within the Palestinian fabric.

Sincerely,

The Ramallah Anglican Congregation.

The Birzeit Anglican Congregation.

Palestine