

# FORUM OF HOLY LAND CHRISTIANS

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April 23, 2025

Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu  
Prime Minister of the State of Israel

Subject: absence of condolences from the Israeli government for the passing away of Pope Francis

Mr. Prime Minister,

This letter comes on behalf of hundreds of Christian citizens of Israel, especially members of the Forum of Holy Christians, a group of Christian clerics and laity that works for empowering the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

We read, with great concern and anger, about the decision of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prevent Israeli ambassadors and diplomatic missions from issuing mourning declarations following the passing away of His Holiness Pope Francis.

This decision, as the absence of a condolences message from the Israeli government, compose a grave affront not only to the Christian citizens of Israel but also to Christians worldwide, if not also to the entire humanity, which respected the late Pope, who was known in his tireless advocacy for peace, justice, human dignity, and interfaith dialogue.

Preventing official expressions of mourning at such a time is unconscionable and stands in stark contradiction to Israel's repeated declarations on respecting pluralism, all faiths and pluralism.

This action is particularly outrageous in light of the painful and growing challenges facing Christians living in Israel in various fields, such as dwindled subsidies to Christian schools.

We expect the government of Israel to recognize as a core responsibility the preservation, empowerment, and flourishing of the Christian community, while believing that silencing mourning for a global Christian leader sends a message of exclusion and abandonment.

Christians in Israel are loyal and integral citizens, who empower the Israeli society across all sectors, such as medicine, education, law, the civil service, hi-tech, academia, culture, and more. Their contributions to the prosperity, innovation, and resilience of the Israeli society are profound and enduring.

To deny them, and the Christian world, the basic dignity of mourning Pope Francis publicly can be interpreted as an insult to their essential role and sacrifices for the common good.

Even more disturbing is that this decision comes immediately after the deeply troubling events at the Holy Sepulcher Church this past Saturday, where Israeli police forces violently disrupted Christian worshippers who had gathered peacefully to await the Holy Fire — the holiest moment of the Orthodox Christian calendar, announcing the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Images and reports of Christian faithful being blocked, restricted, and assaulted at the very site of Christ's burial and resurrection have shocked Christian communities around the world and left a deep wound in the hearts of Israeli Christians.

These actions — the silencing of mourning and the violent disruption of worship — symbolize a growing disregard for the Christian presence in Israel and would have negative impacts on Israel's image and status worldwide, especially among Christians.

We therefore ask for the following:

☐ A clear message of mourning to the passing away of Pope Francis, and sending a senior personality to represent Israel in his funeral.

☐ A serious investigation into the police performance during Holy Fire ceremony, and apology for the misconduct towards Christians.

☐ Respecting the contribution of Christian entities to the state, and providing those with the means required for continuing their service, which is dedicated to the entire society.

We urge you to act swiftly and decisively to restore dignity, trust, and mutual respect. Failure to do so would deepen the sense of alienation felt by Christian citizens and could inflict further damage on Israel's moral standing internationally.

We remain committed to building an Israeli society, in which all citizens work for the common good on the basis of mutual respect.

It is time for the government to show that it is equally committed to preserving and honoring the Christian community of this land and the sacred values we uphold.

Sincerely yours,



Wadie Abunassar

Coordinator

On behalf of members Forum of Holy Land Christians and many other Christian citizens of Israel

Copies:

- Mr. Gideon Saar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel
- Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, Papal Nuncio in Israel
- Church leaders in the Holy Land