

HEADLINE

EMBARGO: Thursday, 22 January 2026, 11:00 AM (Jerusalem Time), 09:00 AM (UK time)

"You are the salt of the earth": International Catholic Bishops Call for Justice and an End to Occupation in the Holy Land

Following a week-long pastoral visit to Israel and Palestine, the bishops of the Holy Land Coordination have released their final communiqué, calling for an immediate end to the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and urging the international community to revive meaningful negotiations toward a two-state solution. The statement, titled *"You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world,"* highlights the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the "relentless" system of occupation in the West Bank that threatens human dignity of all who live there.

The Holy Land Co-ordination is an annual pastoral and ecclesial meeting of bishops from Europe and North America, rooted in prayer, reflection, advocacy, and attentive listening to the Christian communities and peoples of the Holy Land.

The delegation, which included Most Rev. William Nolan, President of Justice & Peace Scotland and Archbishop of Glasgow, spent five days "listening at the margins" through encounters with Bedouin communities, Christian villages under pressure, and Palestinian and Israeli peace activists. Their journey began with visits to Bedouin communities in the West Bank where they witnessed firsthand the intimidation and property destruction caused by extremist settler violence. The itinerary also included a visit to Taybeh, the only completely Christian town in Palestine, where residents described a campaign of land seizure, settlement expansion, and attacks on olive trees, a significant source of livelihood, which is driving mass emigration of residents.

Archbishop Nolan shared his reflections on the current situation there following these encounters and from further meetings with figures such as Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and a video dialogue with Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, the parish priest of Holy Family Catholic Church in Gaza. He described a land scarred by conflict but held together by a fragile hope:

"We come to a country which is traumatised... All sides, whether it's the Israeli side or the Palestinian side, have been traumatised by years of conflict, and even more so by the atrocities of the 7th of October attacks and then by the Gaza war. It's very difficult for people, when they're suffering themselves, to see the pain of the other side.

"This land is for everyone who lives here and that has to be accepted by all sides.

"[In the West Bank], we went to visit some Bedouins who are under great pressure... there are Israeli settlers who are causing so much harassment by their violent actions, destroying people's livelihoods. There's a campaign to try and disrupt the lives of

“Palestinians on their land, to encourage them to go away and to disappear. It seems to be left completely unhindered by the authorities.

“Life here will not improve until the occupation comes to an end. At the heart of the problem is this: the Palestinians live under a military occupation in the West Bank and in Gaza... we do need them to be given a state of their own.

“There are many impressive people here working for justice and peace, and they’re the people that give us hope. Everyone wants peace... if only everyone could realise that the only way to peace is through justice.”

Central to the Bishops’ visit were dialogues with those working for reconciliation and human rights within Israeli and Palestinian society:

- **The Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue:** A Jerusalem-based interreligious organisation where the bishops discussed the promotion of interreligious and political dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The Center works toward fostering a sense of shared identity and mutual understanding, envisioning societies that embrace religious and national diversity as an asset rather than a threat.
- **Rabbis for Human Rights:** Representing the voice of Jewish tradition in the field of human rights, this non-partisan organization brings together over 170 rabbis and students from all denominations. They are uniquely activist, putting pressure on policymakers to safeguard human rights for all, including Palestinians in the territories, rooted in the conviction that every person is created in the image of God.
- **The Parents Circle - Families Forum:** The bishops met with this group of Israeli and Palestinian parents who have all lost children to the conflict yet find the strength to advocate together for reconciliation and justice for all peoples. Their inspirational witness offers a powerful reminder that dialogue and forgiveness remain possible even amid immense trauma and profound grief.

The Bishops use the statement to urge global governments to exert pressure on Israel to uphold the "rules-based international order" and to revive meaningful negotiations for a two-state solution. Echoing the call of Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, the delegation also invites the international community to return to the Holy Land on pilgrimage as a tangible sign of support and solidarity.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

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Holy Land Co-ordination background

At the end of the last century, the Holy See proposed that bishops from various countries coordinate their interests and involvement in the life of the Churches in the Holy Land. It was suggested it would be preferable for bishops from countries that have historically influenced events in the Holy Land to organise this themselves.

The visit from 17th – 22nd January 2026 marked the 25th time the Co-ordination have visited the region.

The essence of the Coordination is captured by the "4 P's": Prayer, Pilgrimage, Pressure, and Presence.

Prayer serves as the framework for the annual meeting, which includes daily Eucharistic celebrations, often in different Catholic rites. The bishops visit the Holy Land to pray with and for the Christian community. Upon returning home, they encourage their local communities to pray for their Christian brothers and sisters.

Pilgrimage: The bishops will visit some of the Holy Places and often hear pleas to encourage pilgrimages from their home countries. There has been a concerted effort by bishops' conferences to promote pilgrimages as an essential means of supporting the Christian community in the Holy Land.

Pressure or persuasion refers to the actions taken after the annual meeting when bishops speak at high levels to their governments, parliamentarians, and Israeli and Palestinian ambassadors about a wide range of issues impacting the lives of Holy Land Christians. In line with the Holy See's approach elsewhere, the bishops do not seek special privileges for Christians but rather advocate for dignity and justice for them and for others in similar conflicts.

Presence is crucial; the bishops return to the Holy Land every year to remind the Christian community that they are not forgotten by their brothers and sisters worldwide.

FINAL COMMUNIQUE FULL TEXT AND BISHOP SIGNATORIES

Final Communiqué of the Co-ordination of Episcopal Conferences in Support of the Church of the Holy Land

17 – 21 January 2026

"You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world" Matthew 5:13.14

Our pilgrimage was to a Land where people are suffering trauma. We began with a visit to Bedouin communities living on the margins of society in the Occupied West Bank. They shared their experiences of a life on the periphery, being observed but often not encountered, their movement heavily restricted by rapidly expanding settlements encircling them on the surrounding hills.

We heard stories about Israeli settler attacks and their continual violence and intimidation, theft of livestock and demolition of property, leaving many unable to sleep at night for fear of further violence. When we asked them who sees their struggles and their cry to live in peace with their neighbours, they replied: "Nobody sees us."

Our journey continued with Mass in the only completely Christian town in Palestine. They, too, told us of their suffering: endless attacks from extremist settlers, uprooting of their olive trees, the seizure of their land and intimidatory acts that make their daily life unbearable, driving many into mass emigration.

In the twelve months since our last visit, the Land of Promise is being diminished and challenged. Gaza remains a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. The people of the West Bank we encountered are demoralised and fearful. The courageous Israeli voices which speak out for human and civil rights are increasingly threatened; advocating for marginalised voices is a costly solidarity. We fear that soon, they too will be silenced.

As Christians, it is our calling and duty to give a voice to the voiceless, and to bear witness to their dignity, so that the world may know their suffering and be moved to advocate for justice and compassion.

The settlements in the West Bank, illegal under international law, continue to expand by commandeering the land of others. The universality of human rights applies to all without exception. Instead, it is relentlessly replaced by a system where dignity and protection depend on one's civil status.

We affirm Israel's right to exist and for Israelis to live in peace and security; equally, we call for these same rights to be upheld for all those rooted in this land. We hope that efforts for peace will prevail over violence, and that there will be no more acts of terrorism and war. We also urge our governments to exert pressure on Israel to uphold the rules-based international order and to revive meaningful negotiations toward a two-state solution for the benefit and security of all.

We were deeply moved by the faith and steadfastness of local Christians and also by people of other faiths who work to sustain the hope of their communities. They remind us that it is our shared vocation to be “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” and to strive for peaceful coexistence and security across the Holy Land.

We also witnessed the courage of those Jewish and Palestinian voices who, despite immense challenges and their own trauma, continue to advocate for justice, dialogue and reconciliation. Hearing from parents who have lost a child to conflict and can still find a way to forgive, offers a powerful witness to the possibility of peace and reconciliation. Few experiences are more devastating. When such a mother or father pleads for an end to violence, the world must listen - and act.

The people of the Holy Land cry out for our help and prayers; they long for an end to their suffering. Stand with them. Recognise their plea for dignity. Help foster genuine dialogue between communities. Heed the call of Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, to come on pilgrimage as a sign of our love, support, and solidarity with them.

As we leave this Land, we do so with our hearts full of compassion for those who are suffering and inspired by those who, by their pursuit of justice, keep the hope of peace alive.

Our Lady Queen of Palestine and of all the Holy Land, pray for us.

Rt Rev Nicholas Hudson

Bishop of Plymouth

Moderator of the Holy Land Coordination

Chair of the International Affairs Department, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Rt Rev Nicolo Anselmi

Bishop of Rimini

Italy

Most Rev Udo Bentz

Archbishop of Paderborn

Germany

Rt Rev Peter Burcher

Bishop Emeritus of Reykjavik

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland

Rt Rev James Curry

Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster.

International Affairs Department, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Rt Rev Paul Dempsey

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Rt Rev Michel Dubost C.I.M.

Bishop Emeritus of Evry-Corbeil-Essonnes.
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Most Rev Antoine Herouard

Archbishop of Dijon
Co-President of Justice & Peace Europe, Vice-President of COMECE
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Rt Rev Joseph Kopacz

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Most Rev William Nolan

Archbishop of Glasgow, President of Justice & Peace Scotland

Rt Rev Christian Rodembourg M.S.A.

Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe
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Most Rev Joan Enric Vives Sicilia

Bishop Emeritus of Urgell
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