

## **Pax Christi International on the Question of Jerusalem**

Statement of the Executive Committee,  
Brussels, 14 November 2006

1. Pax Christi, the International Catholic peace movement with 95 member organisations active worldwide, supports the 13 Christian religious leaders of Jerusalem in their position on the «Status of Jerusalem» (29 September 2006) as an «open city» for all<sup>1</sup>. A new and concerted effort to reach a definitive agreement that respects and assures the special status of Jerusalem is urgently needed. Unilateral actions should be rejected and international solutions are needed to secure a definitive and just peace for the city and for the two peoples and three religions who are its major stakeholders. The current political and religious status of Jerusalem is unsatisfactory. Pax Christi International is calling upon the United Nations to convene an international conference during which the Palestinian and Israeli governments, along with other international interested parties, will begin negotiations to assure the rights of two peoples and three religions to live together in Jerusalem in harmony, respect, mutual acceptance and cooperation. Representatives of major stakeholder political groups and religions should be involved in the process of establishing a just and durable solution to the Jerusalem question.

### **Wall and Isolation Makes Normal Life Impossible**

2. In UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947 the international community decided that Jerusalem should have special status and a «corpus separatum» was designated for the whole area of greater Jerusalem that would be under UN trusteeship<sup>2</sup>. However, after the war of 1948, Jerusalem became divided between the Western part that was controlled by Israel and the Eastern part that was controlled by Jordan. In the war of 1967, Israel occupied the Arabic Eastern part of Jerusalem, together with the rest of the Western side of the Jordan River. Israel claimed Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel and annexed the city, contrary to international law. The international community and Pax Christi International do not accept the claims of Israel over Jerusalem.

3. Israel has continued to build vast Jewish-only settlements on occupied Palestinian land and in the Eastern part of Jerusalem. Palestinians have not been granted building permits by the Israeli Jerusalem municipality and a number of their houses in East Jerusalem have been demolished under the claim that they are unlicensed. The Israeli E-1 plan that connects

<sup>1</sup> Read statement in document ME.105.E.06 or at [www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=7430](http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=7430).

<sup>2</sup> Read United Nations Resolutions on Jerusalem 181 of 1948; 242 of 1967; and 478 of 1980: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_the\\_UN\\_resolutions\\_concerning\\_Israel/Jerusalem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_UN_resolutions_concerning_Israel/Jerusalem).

the very large Ma'aleh Adumim settlement to Jerusalem cuts the West Bank in two and has completed the encircling of East Jerusalem. Access into and out of Jerusalem is restricted as is the movement between the North and South of the West Bank. Walls now divide Jerusalem and separate it from its hinterland. The city is no longer the heart of life as it should be. Many Palestinians have been expelled from the city.

4. The «security fence» is in most parts a concrete wall that winds for hundreds of kilometres through the land. It divides people from their workplaces, farmhouses from their land, villages from sources of water. The «fence» has seriously harmed the Palestinian economy and has *de facto* meant the annexation of more land, often the most fertile areas. Border controls make normal life impossible. Bright young people see no future and many join the flow of talent abroad. Religious places such as Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahur are now much more isolated from Jerusalem by this wall. For Christians, the town of Bethlehem is inextricably linked to Jerusalem.

#### **Jerusalem Is Religious and Political**

5. The future of Jerusalem depends from its double status: political and religious. On the political level, two nationalities, Israeli and Palestinian, are present and have political rights in the city. On the religious level, three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have religious rights, and both political entities must guarantee religious freedom for all believers, local and international. Exclusivity from any side, political or religious, will harm the identity of the city and the harmony, which is needed among all concerned. Jerusalem cannot be only Israeli or only Palestinian, neither only Moslem, Christian or Jewish. All should share it.

6. Historically, Jerusalem has for the most part been in the hands of one political power corresponding to or supported by one religion. This has often been a source of war. Exclusive control of Jerusalem will continue to nourish wars. To reach a position of stable peace, each of its claimants, Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Moslems, should feel at home there and should enjoy equal freedom, rights and duties.

#### **Two Nationalities and Three Religions**

7. Can Jerusalem, with its five distinct components, be united in peace? Despite the existing forced military and political unification, Jerusalem remains divided into two populations, deeply separated by the conflict. However, the city could become truly reunified by recognizing two legal political parts, each with its own political capital, working to assure equal rights for all. The areas housing holy places would have a special arrangement agreed to by the two political parties and the three religions. Divided in this way Jerusalem can be unified to continue the process of building peace and reconciliation among its two peoples and three religions.

### **Give Jerusalem a Special Status**

8. Because of its pluralistic and religious importance Jerusalem requires a special status to give it definitive stability and ensure that it will never again be a source of war between peoples and religions. For this to happen, the five components of the city must be taken into consideration, be given due respect must be guaranteed to national or religious differences.

9. The special status of Jerusalem must include components that correspond to her double status, political and religious. Such components include the right of freedom of worship and conscience for both individuals and religious communities; equality of all inhabitants before the law; the retention of the rights of property ownership, custody and worship by religious communities and the geographic unity of the holy places within the city boundaries.

10. Because of the universal significance of Jerusalem, the international community, including the United Nations, must be engaged in safeguarding the stability and permanence of this status. Jerusalem is too precious to be dependent solely upon municipal or national political authorities. Experience shows that an international guarantee is necessary. Jerusalem requires a unique status, which will distinguish it from all cities of the world.

### **Jerusalem Should Be an Open City**

11. Finally, ways must be found that keep Jerusalem open to all without exception. Any system of security must acknowledge this. Jerusalem is first of all a spiritual capital for the three religions, for those who come from around the world and for those who are Palestinians and live near Jerusalem.

12. Religion cannot be an agent of war. True religion is an invitation to reconciliation, mutual respect and love. The endeavour to recognise and accept the other should lead believers of the three faiths to a common ideal of holiness. It is on this deep level of holiness that the unity of the city can be built. This is the ethical and religious value, which should guide measures taken by all political leaders in determining the future of Jerusalem.

13. In continuously striving for a peaceful transition in which the rights of all the peoples in the region can be respected, Pax Christi International hopes that the political leaders will be able to take the difficult decisions needed. Peace must begin in this holy city of Jerusalem!