

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church
in Jordan and the Holy Land*



الكنيسة الإنجيلية اللوثرية
في الأردن والأراضي المقدسة

2 July 2024

On behalf of the ELCJHL, I strongly condemn the Jerusalem Municipality's new decision to impose municipal taxes (Arnona) on church properties. This decision is a dangerous attack to the Christian presence in Jerusalem and will impact each Christian who calls the holy city home.

As part of our calling to serve our neighbor, it is Christian churches which provide significant contributions to Jerusalem and the Holy Land including investments in schools, hospitals, housing for the elderly, and support for the vulnerable. The Ottoman authorities recognized these contributions as lifting a burden in the community usually placed upon the government, and concreted local churches' exemption from municipal taxes placed on non-religious properties. This agreement was agreed to by consequent British, Jordanian, and Israeli authorities when they took power, taking into further account the lack of outside financial support for churches in contrast to their Muslim and Jewish counterparts.

Churches in the Holy Land are providing extensive social services, schools, and medical facilities thanks only to the profits from Guest Houses and renting of church property. A municipal tax placed upon these properties would force local churches to take on great debt and cease social, educational, and medical services in the community. Christians struggling to bear our collapsing war-torn economy would be forced to leave the Holy Land forever, driving the local Christian population further toward the brink of extinction.

Apart from the devastating and immediate effect this decision would have on the indigenous Christians of this country, it was made assuming sole sovereignty over East Jerusalem, which Israel does not legally have.

This resolution furthermore comes in the wake of increasing violence toward Christian clergy and property, including a spitting incident with one of our own staff. A move which breaks centuries of Jerusalem's "status quo", this decision ignores the importance and necessity of Christian existence in Jerusalem and in fact seeks to drive it out.

Two thousand years ago, our Savior walked through Jerusalem preaching what would later be written as our Gospel. As descendants of the earliest Christians, we are called to continue living out the Gospel in Jerusalem through our crucial community service and outreach to the global Church.

I call upon the Jerusalem Municipality to retract their decision, and place stock in the importance of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. The first step toward a peaceful future in our shared country cannot be a desire to extinguish the other. I further call upon our partners in the global church to use loud voices in condemning this potentially fateful decision.

1 Corinthians 16:13

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong."

Bishop Doctor Sani Ibrahim Azar

