

Palestine National Council

Speaker Office

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المجلس الوطني الفلسطيني

مكتب الرئيس

الرقم :

التاريخ :

H. E. Mr. Ismail Kahraman

President of the Asian parliamentary Assembly

Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly

Memorandum

On the Decision of the Israeli Occupation Authorities to Impose Property Taxes on Assets Owned by Church.

The Israeli occupation municipality in Jerusalem, on 24-2-2018, decided to collect property taxes from the churches in the occupied city of Jerusalem and from monasteries, religious shrines, institutions, real estate and land belonging to them, to be applied retroactively from 1967. This came in the framework of the insistence of the occupation authorities to continue their plans to Judaize, then end the Christian and Islamic presence in the occupied city of Jerusalem.

The occupation municipality of Jerusalem announced that it will collect about 191 million US dollars from 887 assets and properties owned by these churches including hospitals, schools, homes and residences of monks, priests and bishops, and end the tax exemptions for church-owned properties existed since Ottoman times. The occupation municipality threatened to put liens on churches bank accounts and confiscate their properties if taxes were not paid, In addition, the decision will burden churches and their property in the occupied city, especially since these institutions do not receive any compensation from government agencies or from the Palestinian National Authority. But manage their financial affairs by themselves and provide many services, which include not only religions but also social ones to those in need of the community of occupied Jerusalem.

The Palestine National Council affirms that the Israeli occupation authority with this arbitrary and illegitimate measure has flagrantly violated all existing international conventions, historical customs and obligations guaranteeing the rights and privileges of the Churches, with the aim of changing the historical and legal status of the Holy Places, including Christian religious institutions through ending the tax exemptions for church-owned properties and through the issuance of laws granting the occupying power the right to confiscate or purchase or, at least, cement its grip on church properties in the occupied city.

The Council stresses that the Israeli decision, which was not known in the history of churches in the city of Jerusalem in which the Israeli occupation authorities announced it would freeze the decision that recently spurred the crisis, whereas collection of property taxes will be halted until a final decision is reached. The Israeli decision aims to pressure and restrict more than 130 educational, medical and community institutions affiliated with them, and impose a new reality through systematic plans to liquidate Christian presence in the holy city, the eternal capital of the state of Palestine, along with a series of measures and policies targeting Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Islamic sanctities. US

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President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital appears to have emboldened Israel to adopt fresh steps aimed at cementing its grip on the occupied city.

The Council considers that the Israeli measures to impose taxes on churches an aggression against Jerusalem, its Christian and Islamic sanctities, which are invalid, since they stem from an illegal occupation. This is an attempt to pressure the Christian religious institutions to leave the city of Jerusalem and cut their religious, humanitarian and spiritual role in the service of the Palestinian Jerusalemite community.

The Council notes that following the occupation authorities unprecedented measures, the heads of Christian churches in Jerusalem announced their absolute rejection of this decision, deciding as a measure of protest to take this unprecedented step of three-day closure of the church of the Holy Sepulchere which is considered the holiest site in Christianity, to protest against this blatant interference in church affairs.

The Palestine National Council affirms :

First : The Council calls on the international community to pressure the Israeli government to abolish and not just freeze this false measure which violates agreements and the historic status quo that has existed since the Ottoman period in the holy city, as symbol of coexistence and tolerance of the Christian-Islamic religions.

Second : The Council warns of the approval of the Knesset Ministerial Committee for legislation of the church land bill that would allow Israel, the occupying power, to expropriate land in the occupied city, and therefore demands that the IPU take decisive action before it is too late.

Third : The Council appeals to the Vatican and the world to intervene quickly to force the Israeli occupation to stop the harassment and persecution of churches to seize their property.

Looking forward to hearing from you

Sincerely

Saleem AL-Za'noon

Speaker of the Palestine National Council