



21st November 2024

Dear Friends,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Over five days, 15-19 November 2024, we travelled together, as fellow brothers in Christ, on a long-planned pilgrimage to pray and worship with the living stones of Palestine and Israel, listening to their voices, and offering solidarity with them in the shadow of the ongoing war in the region. As Archbishop Justin prepares to leave office, we give thanks that his final official visit to the Holy Land affirmed the prayerful solidarity of the Church of England with the Diocese of Jerusalem and all Palestinian Christians.

The last time we met in Jerusalem was just two weeks after the sudden eruption of war in the Holy Land in October 2023. Since then, the world has witnessed unimaginable suffering, death, destruction and displacement that has made Gaza simply uninhabitable. We give thanks that even in the midst of such horrors the Al Ahli Anglican Hospital in Gaza City continues to serve those in need. We stand united in our call for an immediate end to the war, the release of all hostages and prisoners and an end to forced displacement.

In Ramallah and Bethlehem we were profoundly shocked and shaken to hear from Palestinian Christians - lay and ordained, young and old, male and female - about their daily struggles to survive the ongoing occupation. Such is the despair we encountered that many, especially young adults, question their own future here. We fear for the long-term survival of the indigenous Christian presence in the Holy Land that stretches back to the time when our Lord walked this land. This existential challenge demands our focused attention and collective response.

We met with the Nassar family at the Tent of Nations outside Bethlehem City. We heard of their never-ending legal battles before Israel's Supreme Court to defend their ownership of their farm, which has been in their family since Ottoman times. In the Al Makhroul valley we met with the Kisiyia family, who are challenging through the Courts the demolition of their home and the confiscation of their land by settlers.

We met with the Nasir family in their home in Birzeit and heard of the ongoing administrative detention of their daughter Layan, a young Palestinian Christian from St Peter's Anglican Church, Birzeit. Layan has been detained since 4 April 2024 without legal proceedings, by order of a regional military court, based on classified evidence that leaves her facing unknown allegations. Layan's family do not know when she will be released, all the time without being charged, tried or convicted. There are thousands of Palestinians like Layan in administrative detention.

We thank all the families we met for their peaceful resistance and costly witness. These are not isolated cases, but part of a deliberate strategy of harassment and intimidation to force Palestinian families from the land. Reducing Palestinians to a position of despondent surrender, where they must either live under the yoke of occupation or emigrate, is deeply wrong and unjust. It will bring neither peace nor security.