



Above in Brown: The Affected Lands
Below: View of the Olive Tress



Appeal from the Holy Land

"We, people of Bethlehem, are called 'absentees' on our own land."

Where in the world is it possible to be denied access to your own land and then called "absentees"? This is happening to us, land owners and farmers in Bethlehem.

Our land is grabbed by Israel against all principles of international law and human rights. In flagrant defiance of successive United Nations resolutions; despite the 2004 judgement of the International Court of Justice; and despite pressure of international public opinion, the present Israeli government headed by Netanyahu is fully engaged in implementing its expansive settlement program in the occupied Palestinian territories. Since the construction of the separation wall in 2002, the forces of occupation have confiscated large areas of Palestinian land in the Bethlehem area.

Bitter irony

No less than 182 Bethlehem land owners and farmers have been prohibited access to their lands in the northern part of the city. They have not been allowed to harvest their olive trees and cultivate their lands - behind the separation wall - unless they could obtain permits issued by the Israeli authorities. However, during 2010 and 2011 these authorities stopped issuing permits for land owners and farmers to enter their lands and harvest their olive trees. The Israeli authorities claimed that these lands of Bethlehem behind the wall lie within the boundaries of Jerusalem. Please note that Jerusalem was expanded illegally after Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967. The area of robbed lands exceeds 7000 dunums (1 dunum = 1000 square meters).

The land owners have been informed officially that Israel now considers the owners of these lands as "absentees." Their lands have been put under the authority of the Guardian of Absentee Property in Israel, one step away from formal confiscation. This procedure is an act of piracy in broad daylight which completely violates human rights and international law. First we are denied access to our lands; then we are defined as "absent". What bitter irony!

Not turning a blind eye

We bring this information to your attention and appeal to you and all people of goodwill to put pressure on Israel in order to stop its policy of aggression and apartheid against the people of Bethlehem. Present and future generations will never forgive turning a blind eye to this ugly crime perpetrated by Israel against the people of Bethlehem, the city of peace and love.

During this Christmas season, we wish to express our deepest appreciation for any help to protect the lands of our Holy City.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The People of Bethlehem
Christmas season, 2011