

PIN Bulletin For Local Organizers

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Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?



The Road to General Convention in the Era of COVID 19

Many readers of the PIN Bulletin may have a fairly clear idea of the way church policy is established at General Convention ... at least at the past X Conventions.



COVID 19 requires new procedures and innovative approaches to old familiar patterns. One major innovation involves the legislative committees to whom resolutions and memorials are submitted. The work of these committees has traditionally taken place on-site at Convention, in a series of hearings designed to aid the committees in editing submissions before positive or negative referral to the two Houses (Deputies and Bishops) for debate and final vote.

In 2022, the legislative committees will engage in Zoom-style hearings, for which those testifying in favor of submitted resolutions must register to participate. The on-line hearings are scheduled to begin in the latter part of February.

This means that PIN is actively reaching out now to people within and outside of the Episcopal Church who are able to provide strong testimony in support of resolutions on matters urgent to Palestine.

At least 5 resolutions on Palestine have been forwarded to General Convention from dioceses of the Episcopal Church. These resolutions address Zionist apartheid, equal rights for all people in the Holy Land, the right to boycott on behalf of Palestinian rights, Christian Zionism, and the application of the Leahy Law to Israel. We hope to submit a fifth drafted by PIN national, a memorial calling on the Episcopal Church to support BDS. We will need to recruit strong testimony in

support of all of these.

These new on-line hearings present a challenge to the legislative committees as well as the sponsors of resolutions. The schedule for the sessions with the legislative committees has not been set and a number of details have yet to be clarified. PIN leaders are monitoring developments closely.



We are grateful for the good work of the dioceses that have submitted resolutions and for those committing to testify. Let us together call the Episcopal Church to a more prophetic witness on behalf of Palestinian human rights.

In The News

On Dec. 14, Episcopal News Service posted a Statement:

" Anglican archbishop, other heads of churches and patriarchs issue Statement on the current threat Holy Land Christians Face. " [Here](#)

is the statement in full. The Most Rev. Hosam E. Naoum, the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, joined in issuing the Statement. EPF PIN is grateful for the courage of church leaders in the Holy Land for speaking truth to power in a dangerous situation with multiple threats against their communities.



The Statement begins:

Throughout the Holy Land, Christians have become the target of frequent and sustained attacks by fringe radical groups. Since 2012 there have been countless incidents of physical and verbal assaults against priests and other clergy, attacks on Christian churches, with holy sites regularly vandalized and desecrated, and ongoing intimidation of local Christians who simply seek to worship freely and go about their daily lives. These tactics are being used by such radical groups in a systematic attempt to drive the Christian community out of Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land.

The statement does not define "fringe radical groups" and this may be confusing to U.S. readers in our Islamophobic context. It is also an opening for Israeli authorities to twist the meaning of the statement. But for Palestinians, no definition is necessary, due to the daily experience of Jewish settler/right wing attacks on Christians and Muslims alike, backed up by border police and IDF forces. "The growth of settler communities" referred to in the statement is a nod to the expanding violence and systematic government policies aimed at driving non-Jewish communities out of the Holy Land.

The Statement's focus is on violence against Christians, speaking for a community whose numbers are in steep decline. The numbers of Christians in Jerusalem in particular have dwindled to a level bordering on extinction -- a real possibility within a generation. Today it is estimated that Christians are less than 1% of Jerusalem's population -- a decline from 11% in the middle of the 20th century. To learn more about the policies and "maneuvers to seize property" that are driving away Christians, click [here](#). The Statement corroborates these maneuvers: "Yet radical groups continue to acquire strategic property in the Christian Quarter, with the aim of diminishing the Christian presence, often using underhanded dealings and intimidation tactics to evict residents from their homes, dramatically decreasing the Christian presence, and further disrupting the historic pilgrim routes between Bethlehem and Jerusalem."

A *Times of Israel* article [notes](#) that the "radical groups" unnamed in the Statement would include Ateret Cohanim, a religious-Zionist organization that works to populate the Old City and other East Jerusalem neighborhoods with Jewish residents by purchasing properties from non-Jewish owners.

Pilgrimage and tourism are an economic life-line for Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims. As the Statement indicates, a recent report by the University of Birmingham *"highlighted that Christian pilgrimage and tourism contributes \$3bn to the Israeli economy."* In the West Bank, Christmas visitors in Bethlehem are crucial to the economy. This year, COVID has accentuated the dependency of Palestinians on Israeli government regulations. Last week, Christian leaders accused Israel of discrimination after closing the borders to tourism but allowing Jewish "Birth Right" groups into the country. An official with the Catholic Church [said](#) church officials were shocked and angered by the Israeli decision. He said the church, along with other denominations, have appealed to Israel's Tourism Ministry to allow Christian pilgrims to travel through Ben Gurion airport for the holidays. The exploding Omicron variant has made this appeal moot.

The Statement ends with an appeal to the authorities of Israel, Palestine and Jordan to engage with Church leaders to:

Deal with the challenges presented by radical groups in Jerusalem to both the Christian community and the rule of law, so as to ensure that no citizen or institution has to live under threat of violence or intimidation.

Begin dialogue on the creation of a special Christian cultural and heritage zone to safeguard the integrity of the Christian Quarter in Old City Jerusalem and to ensure that its unique character and heritage are preserved for the sake of well-being of the local community, our national life, and the wider world.

This appeal demands a response from the churches in the West, as well. This week the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, published an [article](#) in the *Sunday Times* with the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, Hosam Naoum. With united voices, the two Archbishops reiterated the call of the Statement by Church Leaders and Patriarchs for "governments and authorities in the region to listen to church leaders in their midst: To engage in the practical conversations that will lead to vital Christian culture and heritage being guarded and sustained. The time for action is now!"

PIN agrees: the time for action is *now*, not only on behalf of Christians but for the human rights and full civil rights of all Palestinians. We salute Archbishop Naoum

for his courage in speaking out, not only in Palestine/Israel but also in the *Sunday Times*. We pray for him, for his church, for all the churches and cultures hoping to survive and thrive in the Holy Land. We pray for ALL the people between the river and the sea, that a new vision for living together as members of the one human family may arise in 2022.



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