



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Holy Land Coordination in 2017: 50 years of occupation



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The Holy Land Coordination, comprising representatives of episcopal conferences from various countries of the world, was established at the invitation of the Holy See at the end of the twentieth century in order to visit and support the local Christian communities of the Holy Land. This year, the visit of the Coordination took place **January 14 to 19** preceded by two days of a **group delegation in Gaza**. **Msgr. William Nolan**, bishop of Galloway (Scotland), commenting on the difficulty of the situation in the Gaza Strip with the limitations to freedom, the still visible debris and few prospects, noted that "in this situation the actions of the local Christian community acquires social relevance, through schools, a hospital, with the material help of many benefactors ", thereby supporting the solidarity work that many carry forward for the entire population starting with the small Christian community.

The general program of the Coordination began on the eve of the **World Day of Migrants and Refugees** celebrated by Msgr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa in St. Anthony's church in Jaffa. The words of the Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate, referring to the tens of thousands of Christian migrants in the territory of Israel were particularly poignant: "You are an integral part of our Church in the Holy Land. You are a sign of the beauty, diversity and universality of the Church. "

This year the Coordination's program was underpinned by the **50 years of occupation**. They visited the city of **Hebron**, the only Palestinian city that has a Jewish settlement at its center with a few hundred settlers, whose presence has imposed severe restrictions of movement for the Palestinian population, the closure of businesses and abandonment of houses. Speaking on the sidelines of a visit organized by the Israeli NGO "Breaking the Silence" which brings together former Israeli military and aims to raise awareness about the abuses suffered by Palestinians, **Msgr. Riccardo Fontana**,

Archbishop of Arezzo, confesses that he saw a "desperate and resigned people". "Israelis and Palestinians suffer greatly, some for fear of attacks by the occupying military, but I think they are two peoples who want and have the right to peace. We must help them in this direction, even with solidarity, closeness and prayer".

In fact, the **final communiqué of the Coordination, published on 19 January**, focuses on the responsibility that everyone has towards this situation and we can read it below:

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE HOLY LAND COORDINATION 2017

Fifty years of occupation demands action

For fifty years the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza have languished under occupation, violating the human dignity of both Palestinians and Israelis. This is a scandal to which we must never become accustomed.

Our Coordination has called for justice and peace every year since 1998, yet the suffering continues. So this call must get louder. As Bishops we implore Christians in our home countries to recognise our own responsibility for prayer, awareness and action.

So many people in the Holy Land have spent their entire lives under occupation, with its polarising social segregation, yet still profess hope and strive for reconciliation. Now, more than ever, they deserve our solidarity.

We all have a responsibility to oppose the construction of settlements. This de facto annexation of land not only undermines the rights of Palestinians in areas such as Hebron and East Jerusalem but, as the UN recently recognised, also imperils the chance of peace.

We all have a responsibility to provide assistance for the people of Gaza, who continue to live amid a man-made humanitarian catastrophe. They have now spent a decade under blockade, compounded by a political impasse caused by ill-will on all sides.

We all have a responsibility to encourage non-violent resistance which, as Pope Francis reminds us, has achieved great changes across the world. This is particularly necessary in the face of injustices such as the continued construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land including the Cremisan Valley.

We all have a responsibility to promote a two-state solution. The Holy See has emphasised that *"if Israel and Palestine do not agree to exist side-by-side, reconciled and sovereign within mutually agreed and internationally recognised borders, peace will remain a distant dream and security an illusion."*

We all have a responsibility to help the local Church, its agencies, volunteers and NGOs. In the most testing circumstances they show great resilience and carry out life-changing work. It is our faith in God that gives us hope. It is the witness of Christians in the Holy Land and especially the young people we met that inspires us.

The Bible tells us: “*You will declare this fiftieth year to be sacred and proclaim the liberation of all the country’s inhabitants*” [Leviticus 25:10]. During this fiftieth year of occupation we must pray for the liberty of everyone in the Holy Land and practically support all those working to build a just peace.

Bishop Declan Lang, England and Wales (Chair of the Holy Land Coordination)

Archbishop Riccardo Fontana, Italy

Bishop Stephen Ackermann, Germany

Bishop Peter Bürcher, Bishops’ Conference of the Nordic Countries

Bishop Oscar Cantú, United States of America

Bishop Christopher Chessun, Church of England

Bishop Michel Dubost, France

Bishop Lionel Gendron, Canada

Bishop Felix Gmür, Switzerland

Bishop Nicholas Hudson, Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community

Bishop William Kenney, England and Wales

Bishop William Nolan, Scotland

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