



The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East  
The Diocese of Jerusalem  
The Rt. Revd Suheil Salman Dawani

The International Conference on Christians in the Holy Land  
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Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East

Salaam to you from Jerusalem!

I want to offer my deep appreciation to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Westminster, for their vision to sponsor an ecumenical conference which brings attention to the condition of Christians in the Holy Land.

Your willingness to sponsor this conference is testimony to your courage and commitment to your brothers and sisters in Christ, who maintain the faith in the land of our Lord's birth.

Despite the hardships they face, Arab Christians live with much faith. Their hope is in their faith and in their fellow Christians around the world who pray for them, support them and remember their presence in the land our Lord sanctified. Therefore, this conference is an important step in raising awareness of the Christians and for that I am deeply grateful.



Many voices will be heard during the next two days. My hope and prayer is that ‘the voice of peace with justice’ will be heard by politicians and decision-makers who affect the situation in my homeland and the people of my Diocese, so that decisions will be taken that will lead to a hope-filled future for the children of the Holy Land.

For Christians, the Land of the Holy One belongs to God. God’s people, Christians, Muslims and Jews are all called to be stewards of this sacred trust. I believe we all have a choice to make which will affect our future. We must choose what path to follow, the path that leads to strife, or the path that leads to peace and cooperation. The land is God’s, but the choice is ours.

We are privileged to live in the Holy Land and Jerusalem in particular, the city sacred to the three Abrahamic faiths. With this privilege, comes duties and responsibilities; all the residents of the land are entrusted with a holy responsibility to advocate for peace and promote mutual respect and acceptance among all God’s people. We must endeavour to recognize our differences and accept each other without prejudice or hatred. We have a duty to encourage an atmosphere of tolerance and peace, and maintain the indigenous layers and multicultural identity in Jerusalem so that it will be a model city. Jerusalem is the key to peace for our land and for the world.

The time is long overdue to rid ourselves of the negative agendas of exclusivity and self-righteousness. The time has come for the people of Jerusalem and the Holy Land to embrace a new future built on the solid foundation of faith that pilgrims, throughout the centuries, have come to discover. It is time for all of us to embrace this faith once again and dream such dreams for ourselves.



We are all created in God's image; we are all equal in the sight of God, regardless of race, religion, gender, social status, ability or wealth. When people live in inequality and oppression, with limited freedom, they lose their dignity as human beings; this causes anger and frustration. This frustration is amplified with many years of empty promises and false hopes.

People on all sides are exhausted from the political, economic and social stagnation that surrounds them. They are sceptical of endless negotiations that bring no results and the absence of a genuine peace further enflames their anger and frustration.

In recent months, we have witnessed the 'Arab Spring', an awakening throughout the Middle East; people are demanding to be heard; demanding respect for their dignity and human rights as equals before God and their neighbours. As Arab Christians, we join our Arab brothers and sisters in calling for justice and peace in our land; for a Palestinian state to be established.

As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers, to continue to provide hope where it is dim, to be voices of the voiceless, and to be advocates for a just and durable peace. We must work together with people of other faiths to encourage the politicians to put politics aside and meet midway, where all people are equal; the marginalized and the powerful, the poor and the wealthy, men and women, children and the elderly, regardless of faith or social status.

I am pleased to say that the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem strives to be a beacon of faith and tolerance for people regardless of who they are. Our ministries are providing valuable services to the community as well as a living example of hope for a better future. Our institutions together with other Christian establishments need to be recognized as key ingredients for a lasting peace.



In Education, we teach respect and peace to our students and their families. In Healthcare, we provide compassion and healing to patients, thus demonstrating the value of understanding and living in peace. Therefore, these institutions need to be supported as grassroots efforts for peace, as providing God's help and hope in a time of darkness and despair.

Last year, the Diocesan Princess Basma Centre for Disabled Children in Jerusalem sponsored an international medical conference on cerebral palsy in which there were contributions from medical experts from Palestine, Jordan, Israel, the US and Italy – Christians, Muslims and Jews – working together to bring hope to Palestinian children and their families.

Our hospital in Nablus, St. Luke's, has developed a cooperative learning arrangement with Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem to train nurses in the latest skills. This interfaith initiative is a vital and living example of the good that can be accomplished when cooperation and understanding replace hatred and fear.

For the past ten years, the Diocese has run the Kids4Peace program, which provides opportunities for Christian, Muslim and Jewish children to meet, to live and play together, learn about each other and develop respect and understanding for one another. These relationships shape their attitudes for life and provide hope for the future. This grassroots approach to building peace is the focus of peace education in our diocesan schools and is lived out in the care provided in our healthcare institutions.

In Jerusalem, we have a Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. Membership includes the Heads of Churches, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs of the Palestinian Authority.



The Council provides a valuable forum for discussion among religious leaders to share their views on issues of common concern for everyone.

In this diverse atmosphere, knowledge of the other will flourish, eyes will be opened, experiences and stories will be exchanged, thus opening minds, eyes and hearts to our mutual humanity, banishing fear and replacing it with hope.

These examples demonstrate that God's people are not sitting by the wayside, waiting for politicians or anyone else to create a path for peace. As religious leaders, we are not about a political agenda. We are concerned with the lives of our people and our deep desire to live peaceful and productive lives in our land.

The three Abrahamic faiths depend upon one another to provide a unified voice for peace. The three faiths are different, but we all agree on one thing that our love for God is expressed in how we love our neighbour.

The question posed to Jesus of "who is my neighbour?" continues to be vital to us in the Holy Land today. My response would be the person who lives next door, the person who shares my land, the person who God expects me to respect and love as God loves me, even when that is difficult. All of these people are my neighbour. Here, we are reminded of the verse in 1 John (4:20), which says; *"He who does not love his brother (neighbour) whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen."*

If we neglect to engage with our neighbour as an equal in the eyes of God, we fail not only our neighbour, but God as well, which is unacceptable to me.



This is not about politics. It is not about Jews, Muslims or Christians. It is about a way of life that transcends politics and rises above religion, race or nationality. This is about a way of life, which is holy and which affirms the life that God has given to each of us as His precious children. We must empower and support religious leaders and politicians to stand for truth, justice and peace for the people of the Holy Land and for the Holy City of Jerusalem as an example for all. We must advocate for Jerusalem to be a city open to everyone in order to maintain its multicultural identity, which is critical to preserving the pluralistic nature of the Holy Land's many fabrics. It should be a city where no walls or checkpoints prevent worshipers from their sacred places. Obstructing the Christian faithful from their places of worship severs the narrative of the Nativity, Crucifixion and Resurrection and shatters the Christian community and the identity of the city.

The Christian presence has been and continues to be a fundamental aspect of the fabric of Jerusalem and the Middle East since the first Pentecost. Christians are a voice of moderation, but are dwindling due to the hardships and political realities that exist. Leaving to find a better life and future is becoming more common. This erosion of the Christian presence undermines our ability to become bridges for peace, advocating for mutual understanding and respect in an area where religious fundamentalism is growing.

Strengthening the Christian presence in the Holy Land and in Jerusalem will require critical and sincere steps. One of the important issues faced by families, especially in Jerusalem, is when a married couple cannot live together due to the complicated policies of residency, and the nearly impossible task of obtaining family reunification papers.



Many Christian families are forced to leave Jerusalem for this reason, thus amplifying the problem of a dwindling Christian community in the Holy City. The Christian presence needs to be accepted as a vital factor for the future of Jerusalem, and all the political parties must take this matter seriously.

The Christian presence will not be improved without widespread support of Christians worldwide and our Muslim and Jewish neighbours. Without active and genuine support, the indigenous Christian presence in the Holy Land and in Jerusalem, in particular, will cease to exist. Unless the situation changes, Christians of the Holy Land who trace their roots back to the time of Christ, will be no more than a memory. There will no longer be a vital, living, witnessing Church, instead churches will become museums. The time for change is long overdue; the time for change has come.

Once again, I am thankful for this opportunity that allows for the voices of the Christians of the Holy Land to be heard. We encourage you to visit us, empower and support us as we struggle to maintain our presence in the birthplace of Christianity.

May God grant all who truly seek peace and pursue it, the courage and wisdom to actualise a durable and just peace for all of God's people, beginning in Jerusalem.

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