

THE ABSENT PILGRIM who just wants to come home



What shall I do if they give me a DENIED ENTRY stamp?

We wish you a Happy Christmas and are sorry we are unable to join you to celebrate... we are still waiting for permission to come home!

From the hundreds of foreign passport holders denied entry by the Israeli authorities and unable to be with our families at this special time of year

www.righttoenter.ps

As Christians worldwide celebrate the Christmas season, the Campaign for the Right to Enter notes with concern that foreign passport holders trying to join their families in oPt for the holidays are being denied entry and expelled by Israel. Even **religious communities are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their presence in the Holy Land**. In an apparent attempt to squeeze out Christian communities who have maintained their presence in the country for centuries, Israeli authorities have informed Church authorities that Arab clergy will no longer be issued multiple entry visas. Re-entry now requires repeating a full application process – one which may take up to a year or more. As a result, some 250 Catholic clergy serving in the country are in effect locked in the oPt for fear of not being able to return to their parishes if they leave and are thus cut off from families and unable to maintain regular contact with parishes and clergy in the rest of their Diocese (extending across Jordan, Lebanon and Cyprus).¹ Others, like Father Faris Khaleifat, the only Greek Malikite Catholic priest in the West Bank town of Ramallah, are "locked out" of the oPt and unable to reach their parishes.

The U.S. government estimates that there are about 35,000 Palestinian Americans living in the West Bank at any one time, and an additional 10,000 Palestinians with other foreign passports. All these people and their families remain separated or at risk, and Palestinian educational and social service institutions, humanitarian agencies and businesses remain vulnerable to the loss of critical personnel, until applications for entry and residency in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) are decided in accordance with a clear, transparent and internationally lawful policy.

As another year comes to a close and Israel continues to arbitrarily deny entry and persists in discriminatory treatment against those attempting to enter the oPt, the Campaign for the Right to Enter calls on third states, religious leaders and congregations worldwide to protest Israel's actions harming church communities, many of which have maintained a presence in the Holy Land for centuries, and to demand a clear, transparent and lawful policy for all foreign nationals wishing to visit and/or reside in the oPt.

For more information see www.righttoenter.ps

¹ See *Ha'aretz*, 26 October 2007: "Interior Ministry 'locks' clergy in territories" <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/917189.html>