

URGE THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY TO RESPECT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

*Current Signers: Forbes, McIntyre, Jordan, Lamborn, Gohmert, Fleming, Burton, Westmoreland,
Duncan (SC)*

Deadline: COB Friday, May 18.

Dear Colleague:

We are writing to bring your attention to the ongoing persecution of practicing Christians living under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Evangelical Christian churches face discrimination at the hands of the PA through the denial of legal recognition. The First Baptist Church of Bethlehem was first constructed in 1980, and since then the Church has served hundreds of Christians in Bethlehem, Israel. However, now the Church has been stripped of its rights as a religious institution and been deemed unlawful by the PA. This removal of legal status is much more than a formality.

Without legal recognition, members of the Church have been stripped of their legal rights and the PA now refuses to honor birth certificates, wedding certificates, even death certificates issued by the Church. Under PA jurisdiction, children are not even considered to be legitimate if they don't have recognized paperwork. While PA Prime Minister Fayyad continues to proclaim that that he and the PA respect the rights of Christian minorities, the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem remains unrecognized and its members discriminated against.

In response to the PA's continued disregard for the religious freedoms of the First Baptist Church, we invite you to join us in sending a letter to Prime Minister Fayyad to urge the processing of the Church's paperwork and the granting of legal recognition. Help us in sending a message to the PA that the safety and freedom of all civilians under their jurisdiction must be ensured. To sign onto the letter please contact Reed Eckhold (Rep. Forbes) at 5-6365 or reed.eckhold@mail.house.gov. Sincerely,

J. Randy Forbes
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Mike McIntyre
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

The Honorable Salam Fayyad
The Palestinian Authority
Ramallah
April 1, 2012

Dear Sir:

We are writing to express our grave concern regarding the treatment of religious minorities in areas under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction. It has recently come to our attention that the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem, which has been operating unhindered under both Israel and the Palestinian Authority for the past 35 years, has recently been prevented from carrying out its functions as a legal church.

Of particular concern is the fact that since 2010, First Baptist Church has been attempting to resolve its current status, but has been unsuccessful despite meeting all of the requirements for recognition. As you are aware, an unrecognized church cannot secure birth, marriage, baptism or death certificates for its members. As you are also aware, without these documents, citizens under your jurisdiction cannot vote, cannot apply for passports, and are precluded from receiving other basic services from your administration. Without recognition, members of the First Baptist Church do not have access to the basic rights and freedoms guaranteed to them by Palestinian Basic Law. By refusing the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem full recognition, the Palestinian Authority is denying the church members basic human rights including religious freedom.

The undersigned Members of Congress find it deeply troubling that the members of an entire church have been disenfranchised. It is our hope that this matter will be rectified in a timely manner.

We urge the Palestinian Authority to allocate the proper time and resources to ensuring the safety and freedom of all civilians under its jurisdiction.

We respectfully ask that you process the required documentation for First Baptist Church and recognize it as a legal religious denomination of the Palestinian Authority, thereby reinstating religious freedom to the church's members. We greatly appreciate your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,