

May 18th, 2012

The Honorable
US House of Representatives
House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman,

It has recently come to my attention that you have signed on to a letter to be sent to PA Prime Minister Dr. Salam Fayyad, regarding the issue of the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem. I am reaching out today to let you know that you have been gravely misinformed on the particulars of the situation, and to complete the picture on this issue.

The First Baptist Church of Bethlehem is an Evangelical Church. Evangelical Churches, while allowed to practice freely, are not officially recognized by the PA, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Israel. They are not, as you state in the letter, discriminated against by the PA. They are not recognized in these three countries due to a factor of different reasons, the most significant of which are historical precedence and pressure and lobbying by the Traditional Christian churches, who do not wish to see Evangelical Churches, including Baptist Churches, recognized in Jordan, Israel, or Palestine for internal Christian matters.

Palestine has long been known for its religious tolerance, and the PA has worked tirelessly hand in hand with our Christian communities to ensure their rights and prosperity. Our laws regarding religious freedom and tolerance, and our *attitudes* as Palestinians towards this issue demonstrates our wholehearted belief in religious equality; we officially recognize 13 different churches and denominations in the occupied Palestinian territory, and all Christians are allowed to practice freely in our lands.

I commend you for acting on behalf of a group you perceive as being disenfranchised, although you have been misinformed on this particular issue. I hope this letter clarifies the details of the problem. If you still feel you would like to send a letter to our Prime Minister highlighting your concerns, the General Delegation of the PLO would be happy to officially transmit the letter to his office for you. I would also love the opportunity to visit your office and sit down with you to further discuss this issue, as well as the political process in general, at a time and date of your liking. My staff would be more than happy to work on the logistics of a meeting with yours.

Sincerely,



Maen Rashid Areikat
Chief Representative of the PLO - Washington, DC