Enough is Enough

In response to Israeli steps towards breaking the Status Quo, the heads of the Churches of Jerusalem issued a strong statement and closed the doors of Holy Sepulchre on Sunday March 25, 2018. The statement and closure of one of Christianity’s holiest sites “Until Further Notice” has temporarily stopped the debate at the Knesset to pass a bill to allow the Israeli State to confiscate land sold by the churches to private investors.

Due to the Jerusalem Municipality trying to collect millions of dollars of back taxes, liens have already been placed on some of the churches’ assets and frozen some of their bank accounts.

Enough is Enough. JAI asks its partners and friends to stand against this systematic campaign of discrimination and persecution. Please read and share this statement and our Action Alert on Defending the Christian Presence and Properties. Tell your political representatives that they must act now before it is too late and the Holy Land becomes a Christian theme park minus its people.

Statement on Municipal Threats and the Discriminatory “Church Lands Bill”
25.02.2018

We, heads of Churches in charge of the Holy Sepulcher and the Status Quo governing the various Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem—the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Armenian Patriarchate—are following with great concern the systematic campaign against the Churches and the Christian community in the Holy Land, in flagrant violation of the existing Status Quo.

Recently, this systematic and offensive campaign has reached an unprecedented level as the Jerusalem Municipality issued scandalous collection notices and order of seizure of Church assets, properties, and bank accounts for alleged debts of punitive municipal taxes. A step that is contrary to the historic position of the Churches within the Holy City of Jerusalem and their relationship with civil authorities. These actions breach existing agreements and international obligations which guaranteed the rights and privileges of the Churches, in what seems as an attempt to weaken the Christian presence in Jerusalem. The greatest victims in this are those impoverished families who will go without food and housing, as well as children who will be unable to attend school.
The systematic campaign of abuse against Churches and Christians reaches now its peak as a discriminatory and racist bill that targets solely the property of the Christian community in the Holy Land is promoted. This abhorrent bill is set to advance today in a meeting of a ministerial committee which if approved would make the expropriation of the lands of churches possible. This reminds us of laws of a similar nature which were enacted against the Jews during the dark periods in Europe.

This systematic and unprecedented attack against Christians in the Holy Land severely violates the most basic, an antique and sovereign rights, trampling on the delicate fabric of relations between the Christian community and the authorities for decades.

Therefore, and recalling the statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem, dated 14 February, 2018 and their previous statement of September 2017, as a measure of protest, we decided to take this unprecedented step of closure of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Together with all Heads of Churches in the Holy Land we stand united, firm and resolute in protecting our rights and properties.

May the Holy Spirit answer our prayers and bring a resolution to this historic crisis in our Holy City.

Theophilos III Francesco Pattoon Nourhan Manougian
Patriarch of Jerusalem Custos of the Holy Land Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem

The reference to the Status Quo relates to documents from the Ottoman Empire that outline the importance of Christian Churches in Jerusalem and how they should be protected. These documents include how they should not be taxed and how their properties are to be protected. The changes proposed by the Jerusalem Municipality and possibility the State of Israel thus, violate the Status Quo.