



## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (ELCJ)**

**Urgent Press Release - Monday, 11, March, 2002**

### **Israeli Tanks Re-Occupy Lutheran School in Bethlehem.**

**This afternoon, Monday 11 March, 2002, the Israeli army again occupied Dar Al Kalima Model School and Wellness Center, located on a hilltop in southern Bethlehem.**

**Around noon time the tanks rolled into the premises. Soldiers were seen entering the school buildings. We also have reports that snipers have positioned themselves on the roofs. As no one is allowed to get close to the site, we do not as yet have a full picture of what is going on in and around our school, says Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church and founder of the Model School.**

As far as we know no one has been injured or killed, due to the fact that there were no students in the school. Because of the ongoing heavy army operations all schools in Bethlehem remain closed since Friday, 8 March. We again want to make clear that no shooting has taken place, neither today nor in the past, from any of our premises in Bethlehem.

This is the second time within a few days that the IDF is occupying our school. The previous occasion was Saturday 9 March. In the evening the same day we were told by the army that they had left the premises. Yesterday Bishop Munib A. Younan managed to get permission to visit the school in order to confirm the said withdrawal and to assess the damage of the buildings. However, when getting close to the school, nobody was allowed by the IDF to leave the car. It was therefore not possible to enter the school yard or the buildings.

The Dar al-Kalima School and Wellness Center, are part of the educational work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Holy Land (ELCJ). It is part of the outreach ministries of our local congregation, Christmas Lutheran Church with the International Center of Bethlehem, and was recently built with the support of friends from several countries to help create hope and a better future for the children of Bethlehem. Currently there are 240 students enrolled in the school. The Wellness Center is due to open on 24 May 2002. One of its ministries is to bring healing to the many traumatized children and adults of Bethlehem area.

The occupation of our church property seem to be part of a pattern of military operations, where schools, hospitals, ambulances, medical personnel have been attacked. These actions are clearly breaching international law.

**We denounce in the strongest possible terms the Israeli re-occupation of our Dar al Kalima School, and demand the immediate withdrawal of the army from our church property, as well as from the Bethlehem area and other Palestinian territories.**

**Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, the Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem**

**Further information:**

**Dar al Kalima Website: [www.annadwa.org](http://www.annadwa.org) or phone +972-54-282162 or +972-67-255733.**