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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem

URGENT MESSAGE

from

**Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan
Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem,
working in Palestine, Jordan and Israel
April 16, 2002**

URGENT PRESS RELEASE

April 16, 2002

At 11:45 am Tuesday morning, April 16, 2002, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers invaded the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah, Palestine. Despite signs indicating this building was a Christian school, the soldiers blasted open gates and the front door and entered the school. The whole city of Ramallah is under 24 hour curfew so neighbors could only watch the soldiers' actions and telephone the pastor of the Lutheran Church of Hope, the congregation which owns and operates the school, located on church property. Rev. Ramez Ansara, the pastor of the church and school, lives only a short distance away but is unable to go to the school because of the curfew. No students, teachers, staff or guard is present in the school; the school has been empty for more than two weeks. No gunmen has ever used our School of Hope or any of our institutions or churches because they are oases of promoting peace education, moderation and reconciliation.

The incursion is continuing now at 2:45 pm, despite many telephone calls by Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (ELCJ), working in Palestine, Jordan and Israel. Bishop Younan called many people in the Israeli government and military, as well as foreign diplomats and partner churches in an effort to stop the incursion as soon as possible. Neighbors are reporting the sound of guns and sledgehammers being used inside the Lutheran school, and hearing glass being broken.

Bishop Younan and the Lutheran church denounces such acts and demands that the international community and the State of Israel secure the protection and the sanctity of church compounds and properties, including schools. "It seems that this is not a war against terrorism," Bishop Younan stated. "This seems to be a war against the hope and

the future of the Palestinian people. We demand that every institution that gives hope to the Palestinians must be protected and strengthened. We also demand full withdrawal of the Israeli army from the re-occupied territories in order that Palestinian society may operate in the normal way like other societies in the world and that children and youth may go again to school and university and revive the remaining hope in them.”

Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen
Communications Assistant for the ELCJ

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