



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

H.E. Mr Shimon Peres
Minister for Foreign Affairs
State of Israel

13 June 2002

Your Excellency,

I refer to the meeting which took place between yourself and representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Executive Committee on 10 June 2002. Matters arising from that meeting related to the LWF's humanitarian activities in Israel-Palestine are addressed in a separate letter. The purpose of this letter is to highlight concerns related to the current overall situation in Israel-Palestine and, in particular, its impact upon the communities and properties of the Lutheran churches in the region.

The Lutheran World Federation is a federation of 133 member churches in 73 countries. One of these member churches is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (ELCJ). The congregations of this church are primarily located in Beit Jala, Bethlehem, East Jerusalem and Ramallah.

As the members of the LWF Executive Committee visited these communities, we were shocked by the level of destruction which we observed and by the human suffering which is obviously being caused by the damage to infrastructure and by the continuing incursions, curfews and closures. It is clear to us that in the current situation large sections of the Palestinian population have been reduced to an extremely marginal situation politically, economically and psychologically. The circumstances in which these communities are living are desperate, and productive of desperation. This is a situation which cannot contribute to the future security of the State of Israel.

The violence suffered by Palestinian civilians is mirrored in the violence perpetrated against Israeli citizens, such as the bus bombing in Megiddo Junction on 5 June, in which 16 people died. This brutal act was an example of the intensity of hatred being expressed in this conflict. The LWF abhors and denounces the use of violence, especially violent acts targeting civilians.

During our stay, we visited some of the churches, schools and other facilities of the ELCJ in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Ramallah, and observed for ourselves the damage suffered by these institutions in the context of the overall violence. In the light of what we

./..



saw and heard at the Dar al-Kalima school and the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and the Hope Lutheran school in Ramallah, we were left in no doubt that during 'Operation Defensive Shield' IDF personnel perpetrated what can only be described as gratuitous vandalism of these premises. We find it unacceptable that claims for compensation by the churches and institutions concerned are rejected on the basis that they relate to the consequences of acts of war. I ask the Government of Israel to ensure that these claims are seriously and properly considered by the appropriate authorities.

Despite our dismay at seeing the destruction and hearing the reports of this vandalism, we were very much encouraged by the hope and faith of the communities concerned, who are working together to repair the damage, to build for the future, to restore their communities, and to encourage each other in circumstances in which most other societies might have abandoned hope. I ask that, at the same time as the Government of Israel legitimately pursues its security interests, it act affirmatively to encourage hope in the Palestinian people rather than to foment desperation. It is through supporting hope of a better future for Palestinian communities that true security for the State of Israel will be found.

Yours respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed within a hand-drawn oval. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Ishmael Noko'.

Ishmael Noko
General Secretary