

Muslims and Christians pray together for just peace in Al Aqsa Mosque

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Muslims and Christians were gathered together in Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on 27th July. Side-by-side for just peace in the Holy Land. After almost two weeks of tension, violence and killings in Jerusalem. Meetings between church leaders and the Islamic leadership inside the mosque plaza were cheered by the community even amid wafts of tear gas and the rumble of explosives from time to time. Catholic Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah, who was supposed to be heading the Christian delegation, was denied entry through Lions' Gate and, instead, sent his message.

In solidarity with the Palestinian Muslims, church leaders visited Al Aqsa Mosque, after the removal of all obstacles placed around the Haram al-Sharif after the 14 July killing of two Israeli policemen at one of the gates.

The visit from church leaders to the mosque was initiated by Christian organizations, including Kairos Palestine and Sabeel under the umbrella of the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine. The initial plan was to hold prayers along with the evening Muslim prayers taking place in the street below Lions' (St Stephen's) Gate for the past few days. Then religious and community leaders in Jerusalem collectively decided to hold prayers in Al Aqsa Mosque as a joint manifestation of free access to this Holy Site. On behalf of the visiting delegation, Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem thanked God "for his mercy and the Jerusalem community and religious leaders for their steadfastness," congratulating them "for this victorious day of nonviolent resilience."

Mufti Mohammad Hussein, in response spoke to the masses saying that "any attack on Al Aqsa or the Holy Sepulcher will be faced by the unity of the people in Jerusalem as one." Patriarch Sabbah, who was denied entry, sent his message, which in part read: "Sacred places are places for prayer. They must not be transformed in places of war...People who pray in their own sacred places need no other people to take care for their security."

He also wrote: "They can by themselves care for their own security and public order inside their holy places." Sabbah continued, "The incident in the mosque seems to be a single Muslim-Jewish event. In reality, it is part of the general Israeli-Palestinian endless conflict. It is part of the Israeli military occupation in East Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories. Therefore, this incident of the holy mosques means an urgent necessity to end this endless struggle between the two peoples."

Sabbah concluded: "Israel needs friends who have the courage to save it, leading it to a permanent just peace in Jerusalem and in the region. Peace or war in Jerusalem is peace or war in the world."

Rev. Dr Mitri Raheb, president of the Diyar Consortium, said after the prayer "Unforgettable night at al-Aqsa demonstrating faith in the space of empire and Christian-Muslim unity as tool of creative resistance."

WCC reiterates plea for dialogue and open access to worship at Holy Sites, WCC press release 22 July, 2017