

# VOX

## A Christian Voice - a Human Concern

**"For a son has been born for us, a son has been given to us, and dominion has been laid on his shoulders; and this is the name he has been given, Wonderful-Counselor, Mighty-God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" Isaiah 9:5**

### *Christmas reflections for peace from Bethlehem*

At Christmas time, all Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ into the world: the Prince of Peace. Christians believe that the birth of Christ started the process of reconciliation between God and man and the restoration of a relationship of peace between all of God's children.

When Jesus began his ministry, he began with a very important statement of peace that is found in Gospel records saying:

'The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.' (Luke 4:18)

This passage announces the good news: a message of peace, liberty, freedom and favour from God direct to all people directly from the Prince of Peace – Jesus Christ.



**A Palestinian Christian child holding an olive branch, a symbol of peace, taking part in the HCEF peace Journey to Bethlehem 2006**

Photo: Courtesy-HCEF – used with permission

Today in Bethlehem, the citizens of this isolated city are seeking this peace, freedom, liberty and God's favour as they face a very hard political and economic situation in the city of Christ's birth.

These citizens of Bethlehem have thankfully been reminded that they are not forgotten. Many Christians from all over the world have answered the call to come to Bethlehem in solidarity and unity with the people living there. This Christmas has been the most successful tourist season since 2000 with some 30,000 tourists present for Christmas Eve festivities. The increased number of pilgrims was welcomed especially in light of the fact that, due to the building of the Wall and the isolation of city, Bethlehem has almost dropped off the list of holy sites that foreign Christian pilgrims consider as essential locations to visit. In addition, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs showed that the number of tourist buses entering Bethlehem monthly in 2000 was 2,742. In 2004, this number plummeted to 138 buses a month.

Today, this number is slowly improving, but these tourists often enter Bethlehem for a short tour of the Nativity Church to leave as quickly as they came. In addition, with the recent opening of the new terminal at the main checkpoint in Bethlehem, many who have passed through it describe it as an additional impediment to visiting Bethlehem.

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Jesus asks us to follow him to Jerusalem, where all roads lead ...

If we listen closely to that word, we realize that 'Jerusalem,' 'salaam,' 'shalom,' all mean peace.'

– Comments of His Grace Archbishop Patrick Kelly, V.P. of the Catholic Bishops Conf. of England & Wales in Bethlehem, 1/9/06.

We also need to remember one thing: the pilgrim can still visit Bethlehem, but the people living in Bethlehem generally do not enjoy the same freedom – they are still waiting for someone to proclaim to them the good news of peace, freedom, liberty and God's favour. Please join us in working for peace in the Holy Land so that the olive branches of peace are carried by all of the Holy Land's citizens, today and tomorrow.



Palestinian Christian youth join in the Journey to Bethlehem 2006

The poster says: "You know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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### **What can you do...?**

*VOX appeals to the world's Church leaders to pray and act to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians as a consequence of the extremely harsh measures and policies imposed by the Israeli occupying forces. Vox urges all national leaders, international governmental and non-governmental institutions to take action and pressure Israel to abide by international humanitarian law.*

VOX is an electronic newsletter representing a unified Christian voice of Church related organizations (CROs) who consent to this initiative. Vox's rationale is to monitor and report on the humanitarian situation on the ground in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Vox was initiated in March 2003 at the start of the Iraqi war in order to continue providing news about the ongoing deterioration of Palestine's living conditions. VOX embraces The East Jerusalem YMCA, YWCA of Palestine, DSPR (Department of Services to the Palestinian Refugees, The Middle East Council of Churches), the Near East Council of Churches Gaza, Sabeel Liberation Theology Center, Justice and Peace Commission Jerusalem, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem, Caritas Jerusalem and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

For information, please contact the sender of this message if your CRO is interested in joining VOX or for any comments.

# VOX NEWSLETTER