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Palestinian Foreign Ministry: Israel's arbitrary prevention of the Latin Patriarch's entry to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Palm Sunday is a crime affecting both the Christian and Muslim worlds and requires urgent international intervention

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine strongly condemns the Israeli occupation authorities' prevention of His Beatitude the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, and the Custos of the Holy Land, Father Francesco Ielpo, from accessing the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in occupied Jerusalem to perform Palm Sunday Mass. This constitutes a dangerous precedent that undermines freedom of worship and targets the indigenous Christian presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Ministry affirms that this arbitrary prevention – which has not occurred for centuries against church leaders performing their religious rites – constitutes a crime and an illegal military measure, and is a blatant violation of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them freedom of worship. It also represents a disregard for the sentiments of hundreds of millions of people around the world, and affects the feelings of Christians and Muslims alike who share in the sanctity of Jerusalem and its religious and historical significance. It further constitutes a violation of the existing legal and historical status quo.

The Ministry warns of the danger of this precedent, which represents an infringement by the occupying Power of its existing obligations, and reveals an escalating policy in occupied Jerusalem aimed at forcibly displacing the Palestinian people and Judaizing the holy city, and threatens to deprive believers of the ability to practice their religious rites, even on the most sacred of occasions.

The Ministry calls on the international community and its institutions to take immediate and practical steps to stop this crime and the Israeli occupation's escalatory policy in the occupied city of Jerusalem. This includes exerting pressure on Israel's extremist government and enhancing international presence on the ground to preserve the Palestinian Christian presence, ensure they are not deprived of their rights, and guarantee respect for freedom of worship and access to holy sites, and the protection of the existing historical and legal status quo therein. It also calls for providing international protection for the Palestinian people and for their Islamic and Christian holy sites, in light of the continued, systematic, and widespread Israeli assaults, crimes, and violations.

For more information, please contact the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific.

