

Archbishop Nichols meets Mahmoud Abbas to discuss Middle East peace process



President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, met with Archbishop Vincent Nichols today in London to discuss the urgent need for progress on the peace process and the importance of the continuing support of the Church in England and Wales for all in the Holy Land.

President Abbas said that the presence of Christians in the Holy Land was vital as they are not viewed as a minority but an integral part of the Palestinian community. He thanked the Church in this country for its work in supporting a peaceful solution, for helping projects in Palestine and told of the Palestinian Authority's collaboration with the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem on house building projects to enable Christians to remain in Jerusalem.

He said he was encouraged by his recent talks with US Secretary of State John Kerry and reiterated the importance of a negotiated peace. He did, however, warn that the continuing expansion of settlements on Palestinian land posed a major threat to progress.

Archbishop Nichols said the work of the Holy Land Co-ordination, mandated by the Holy See, was an important sign of the Catholic Church's concern and support for all in the Holy Land. He also drew attention to Friends of the Holy Land, the UK charity that supports Palestinian Christians.

"I was pleased and honoured to meet with President Abbas and his delegation," the Archbishop said.

“This gave an added dimension to our many visits and the continuing work of the Holy Land Co-ordination, which will go out again in January. Promoting a just peace for all in the Holy Land is a crucial issue which affects the whole world.”

President Abbas called for further help from the archbishop and all Christians on the specific issue of Cremisan, where the building of the security wall and the appropriation of Christians' lands in Beit Jala (a suburb of Bethlehem) was affecting livelihoods and leading to accelerated emigration of Christians from the area.

Archbishop Nichols said that Christians in England and Wales would continue to pray for peace and for the people in the Holy Land, while continuing to support them in practical ways.

The Archbishop of Westminster was also accompanied by Archbishop Kelly, emeritus Archbishop of Liverpool, and representatives of Archbishop Justin Welby, the Rev Toby Howarth and Charles Reed

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