*Kerstbrief aan Palestijnse christenen*

*In december 2023 stuurde de Werkgroep Kerk in de Samenleving een Kerstbriefbrief aan dertien kerken en oecumenische contacten in Palestina en Jerusalem. Een voorbeeld van de tekst van die brief vindt u hieronder.*

**Christmas letter to sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel**

***“… if one part of the body suffers,*all the parts suffer with it…”**

***1 Corinthians 12:26***

**Bishop Munib A. Younan
Lutheran Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land**

**Muristan Road, P.O. Box 14076, Jerusalem, Israel, 9114002**

**Email: communication@elcjhl.org**

**Brussels, 20 December, 2023**

**Dear Bishop Munib Younan,**

**It is with great pain in our hearts that we learnt that this year’s festivities on Manger Square around Christmas had to be cancelled. No parades with bagpipes. No decorated Christmas tree symbolising light in the darkness…**

**It is indeed deep darkness which has enveloped your part of the world since the horrendous events on 7th October and their aftermath. Many thousands of people have lost their lives, thousands more are injured, the vast majority of people in Gaza ‘live’ in absolutely dehumanising circumstances and there is no end in sight for their suffering.**

**On the West Bank, the occupation continues unabatedly, more and more land is taken away from Palestinians, settler violence is increasing, more often than not with impunity.**

**We are hearing stories of increased aggression in Jerusalem against Christians and, in our part of the world, we are very concerned about the rise of anti-Semitism that is resulting from all these developments.**

**At Christmas, we read in the Gospel of Luke the story Mary and Joseph who were forced to travel south from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We read about Jesus who was born in a country under occupation and whose family had to flee for their lives. This story rings many bells when read through the eyes of those who are presently living in the area where Jesus was born.**

**Dear sisters and brothers, we thank God for the role of the churches and ecumenical organisations in your region. With your persistent emphasis on non-violent ways to address even the worst injustices, you give a remarkable Christian witness in a part of the world in which violence is regarded by many as the preferred way to solve conflicts. How wrong these latter are! Real peace – salaam , shalom – can only be achieved when the root causes of the conflicts are named and addressed, head on.**

**In these days just prior to Christmas, we search for sparkles of light, signs of hope, a star over Bethlehem but all we see is death and destruction. Where is the Prince of Peace?**

 **Kyrie eleison.**

**Yours in Christ,**

**Rev. Yolande Bolsenbroek**

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