

West Bank Churches Set Focus on Peace in Palestinian Election

The participation of Christians in the Palestinian election was in fact very active, according to AsiaNews. **Bernard Sabela, a sociologist at Bethlehem University** who is a member of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), pointed out that in the 9th January elections, some 23-25,000 voters casting their ballots. "In some Christian villages, priests did not tell their parishioners how to vote but they did tell them that they themselves had gone to vote before mass," Sabela said. "What worries Christians is what worries every Palestinian, namely reaching peace between Palestine and Israel," he said.

Posted: Thursday, January 13 , 2005, 0:00 (GMT)

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A view of the meeting room during the meeting. (WCC)



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, U.S. Congresswoman Lois Capps (D-Ca.), and Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan (left to right). (WCC)



Former US President Jimmy Carter talking with Jerusalem church leaders. Leaders from the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental churches are seen here. (WCC)

The recently concluded election of the Palestinian President has sparked new hope for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict deadlock. The upcoming Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, has promised to seek peace with Israel, ending Arafat's chaotic rule.

This success in the peace-making process is attributed to the effort of West Bank Churches which promote peace through the message of Christ, according to the former US president Jimmy Carter, an international monitor for the Palestinian elections.

A gathering was held on 10 January in Jerusalem of members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), local church leaders, and local Jewish and Muslim partners.

Former US president Jimmy Carter and US congresswoman Lois Capps, both invited as guests to the conference, acknowledged the work of EAPPI.

According to Capps, justice for the Palestinians does not entail the opposite for the Israeli people, therefore churches don't suppress one and lift the other, but to keep both up in harmony.

Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan echoed the standpoint of the West Bank churches, "Don't be pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli. Be pro-justice, pro-peace, and pro-reconciliation."

13 heads of Jerusalem Churches were all represented at the conference - three Patriarchs and 10 Archbishops. Among them, five are Orthodox, six Catholic, and two Protestants.

Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah delivered his comments on the election, saying that in the Holy land of two people - Palestinians and Israelis and three religions - Jews, Christians and Muslims, a way for peace has not been found.

However, the Patriarch said, "Despite all that, we are still hoping because we are Christians. We believe in God and that God is good and in his goodness one day will put an end to evil and wars and violence in this land."

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