

**ԲՈՂՈՔ ՔԱՂԱՔԱՊԵՏԱՐԱՆԻ ՆՈՐ ՕՐԷՆՔԻՆ ԴԷՄ:
Ս. ՅԱՐՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՏԱՃԱՐԻ ԴՈՒՈՒ ԳՈՅՈՒԵՅԱԻ**

**Statement on Municipal threats and the discriminatory “Church Lands Bill”
25.02.2018**

We, the heads of Churches in charge of the Holy Sepulcher and the Status Quo governing the various Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem - the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Armenian Patriarchate - are following with great concern the systematic campaign against the Churches and the Christian community in the Holy Land, in flagrant violation of the existing Status Quo.

Recently, this systematic and offensive campaign has reached an unprecedented level as the Jerusalem municipality issued scandalous collection notices and orders of seizure of Church assets, properties and bank accounts for alleged debts of punitive municipal taxes. A step that is contrary to the historic position of the Churches within the Holy City of Jerusalem and their relationship with the civil authorities. These actions breach existing agreements and international obligations which guarantee the rights and the privileges of the Churches, in what seems as an attempt to weaken the Christian presence in Jerusalem. The greatest victims in this are those impoverished families who will go without food and housing, as well as the children who will be unable to attend school.

The systematic campaign of abuse against Churches and Christians reaches now its peak as a discriminatory and racist bill that targets solely the properties of the Christian community in the Holy Land is being promoted. This abhorrent bill is set to advance today in a meeting of a ministerial committee which if approved would make the expropriation of the lands of churches possible. This reminds us all of laws of a similar nature which were enacted against the Jews during dark periods in Europe.

This systematic and unprecedented attack against Christians in the Holy Land severely violates the most basic, ab antiquo and sovereign rights, trampling on the delicate fabric of relations between the Christian community and the authorities for decades.

THEREFORE, and recalling the Statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem, dated 14 February, 2018 and their previous statement of September 2017, as a measure of protest, we decided to take this unprecedented step of closure of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Together with all Heads of Churches in the Holy Land we stand united, firm and resolute in protecting our rights and our properties.

May the Holy Spirit answer our prayers and bring a resolution to this historic Crisis in our Holy City.



THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem



FRANCESCO PATTON
Custos of the Holy Land



NOURHAN MANOUGIAN
Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem

PMO STATEMENT (COMMUNICATED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEDIA ADVISER)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat have agreed to establish a professional team led by Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, with the participation of all relevant parties, to formulate a solution for the issue of municipal taxes on properties owned by churches that are not houses of worship.

As part of the discussion between the Prime Minister's Office and the Jerusalem Municipality regarding churches' municipal taxes, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Jerusalem Mayor Barkat have agreed that a professional team led by Minister Hanegbi, including representatives of the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs and the Interior and the Jerusalem Municipality, will formulate a solution to the issue of municipal taxes (which do not apply to houses of worship). The team will negotiate with the representatives of the churches to resolve the issue.

As a result, the Jerusalem Municipality is suspending the collection actions it has taken in recent weeks.

In addition, following a request by the heads of the churches to enter negotiations regarding the sale of land in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Netanyahu has asked Minister Hanegbi to examine the issue. While the Minister is doing so, all legislative activity on the matter will be suspended.

Israel is proud to be the only country in the Middle East where Christians and believers of all faiths have full freedom of religion and worship. Israel is home to a flourishing Christian community and welcomes its Christian friends from all over the world.

STATEMENT ON THE RE-OPENING OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE 27 February 2018

We, the heads of Churches in charge of the Holy Sepulcher and the Status Quo governing the various Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem - the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Armenian Patriarchate - give thanks to God for the statement released earlier today by Prime Minister Netanyahu and offer our gratitude to all those who have worked tirelessly to uphold the Christian presence in Jerusalem and to defend the Status Quo.

After the constructive intervention of the Prime Minister, The Churches look forward to engage with Minister Hanegbi, and with all those who love Jerusalem to ensure that Our Holy City, where our Christian presence continues to face challenges, remains a place where the three Monotheistic faiths may live and thrive together.

Following these recent developments we hereby announce that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, that is the site of the crucifixion of Our Lord and also of His Resurrection, will be reopened to the pilgrims tomorrow, February 28th, 2018 at 4.00 AM

THEOPHILOS III
Greek Orthodox Patriarch

FRANCESCO PATTON
Custos of the Holy Land

NOURHAN MANOUGIAN
Armenian Patriarch