

Bethlehem, June 26 2012

Open letter from Bethlehem to the members of the World Heritage Committee

*“Consecrate the legal and moral principles of UNESCO and protect the Old City of Bethlehem, Palestine”*

More than 2000 years have passed since the messenger of peace was born in Bethlehem. Though peace is still missing, the people of Palestine continues to carry the message of hope, justice and peace brought to us by Jesus Christ.

After 45 years of illegal Israeli occupation, a window of opportunity has been opened: countries like yours can make a difference and invest in peace by recognizing the State of Palestine on the 1967 border and support our effort to protect our city, Bethlehem, and list it as World Heritage in Danger. This is our overdue right.

Since last October, our beloved country, Palestine, has been a full member of UNESCO. We considered this step as a message of hope for the preservation of our city and its holy sites. Now that day has come; we ask you to join us in protecting our city, Bethlehem, and its rich heritage. Help us preserve the Church of the Nativity and other holy sites so that their message of peace to humanity can be preserved.

Bethlehem, its Old City and Churches have been victims of deliberate Israeli military attacks, in 1967 and again between 2001 and 2002. Most of what was restored by the international community after the Oslo Accords was signed in

1994 was destroyed by Israeli occupation forces. Our nomination as a World Heritage Site is not only a right, it is a need.

We call on you to lend Bethlehem your voice and vote in favor of the inclusion of Bethlehem as a World Heritage Site. The time for our long overdue admission is now. The international community has a legal and moral responsibility to protect our sites. We believe that this is a step in the direction of peace, providing historical justice to our city, its holy places and its people.

When Palestine presents its case, send message to our tormented land; your positive vote will mean that there are no exceptions to the commitment the world has made to protect and preserve world heritage. From Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace was born and from here, his message of peace, justice, and forgiveness has shined onto humanity ever since.

This is a historic moment that will be remembered for generations to come. Your support and vote will be decisive. Consecrate the legal and moral principles of UNESCO and protect the Old City of Bethlehem, Palestine.

Signatures:

1. Bethlehem Municipality
2. Beit Jala Municipality
3. Beit Sahour Municipality
4. Al Khader Municipality
5. Ad-Doha Municipality
6. Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce
7. Antonian Charitable Society – Bethlehem
8. Al Ibrahimi Society – Bethlehem
9. Orthodox Society – Bethlehem

10. Saint Afram Society – Bethlehem
11. The Union of Bethlehem Neighborhoods
12. Organization of Scout Groups (Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Arab Orthodox and Lutheran groups from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour).
13. Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation
14. Orthodox Club – Beit Jala
15. Orthodox Club – Beit Sahour
16. Orthodox Club – Bethlehem
17. The Arab Education Institute – Bethlehem
18. Al Ihsan Arab Orthodox Society – Beit Jala.
19. Ain Karem Society – Bethlehem
20. Siraj Center for Holy Land Studies
21. Arab Orthodox Housing Society – Beit Sahour
22. Alternative Tourism Group – Beit Sahour
23. Sain Vincent Charitable Society – Beit Jala
24. Wi'am Center – Bethlehem

Signatures of thousands of Bethlehemites, including priests, professors, artists, students, sportsmen, workers and others.