

Palestinian Evangelicals Achieve Legal Recognition

Munir Kakish, President of the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in Palestine

There has been a wonderful development for the Evangelicals in Palestine. For the first time the Evangelical churches have gained legal recognition in Palestine.

Pastor Munir Kakish, President of the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in Palestine (West Bank), East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, which is a member body of the EBF, writes:

‘Let me explain briefly the background of the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in Palestine. 23 years ago, in January 1997, the major Evangelical churches with their pastors in Palestine formed a council in order to present a unified front for requests and interactions with the Palestinian Authorities (PA). Then other Christian organisations joined. Currently we have 23 members and we form a united voice of the Evangelicals in Palestine.

When we had requests for recognition by the PA, they were unwilling to deal with the many churches, and wanted one voice to handle the requests of the Evangelicals. So we told them that by establishing the Council we have formed one voice representing all Council members. We wrote a constitution for our Council. Nearly all Evangelical Churches and Evangelical Christian organisations joined. We reported to the authorities the names of the local churches and Christian organisations who are members of the Council, and what we do – charitable work, schools, Bible Schools, study programs, and other Christian ministries. Our constitution has been written to protect the needs of the local Evangelical churches and Christian organisations. Also, we want to protect ownership of church properties and properties of other Christian organisations.

We stressed as Palestinian citizens that we have the right to practice our civil rights. We wanted the rights declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that there be no discrimination against our own people.

We wanted the PA to convey to the historical churches some of these rights declared by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We wanted our religious freedom to worship God freely in our churches. It is written in our constitution that we do not interfere in any political or military party or factions.

We were persistent in asking for recognition publicly and privately. We kept on knocking at the doors. We were persistent in trying to obtain our rights as Palestinian law requires no discrimination among its citizens.

God brought a prime minister and an official to be head of the Christian churches in the government and they stood by us. They confirmed to President Mahmoud Abbas to sign the Presidential Decree which we agreed on together.

The Council has been requesting official recognition from the Palestinian authorities to grant us our civil rights as a religious group. Bishop Tendero of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) helped by visiting the authorities in order for them to grant us legal recognition. We appreciate his help. Also,

Mrs. Debbie Fikes worked with me in visiting authorities and tried to convince the PA to grant us the recognition. Also, many friends around the world stood by us and supported our legitimate requests.

On Nov 3rd 2019 the Palestinian Authorities granted the Evangelicals in Palestine legal recognition. We have been granted our civil rights as a religious organisation. Now the Evangelical Churches can issue marriage certificates, open bank accounts, and purchase church property to be registered in the name of the church and the organisation instead of individual persons.



*Bishop Tendo and Pastor Kakish,
showing the formal decree at the WEA Conference in Jakarta, Indonesia Nov. 11, 2019*

This is a historic moment as other countries nearby do not have recognition and this places the Palestinian Authorities as a leader for religious freedom and civil rights in the region.

Palestinian President, President Mahmoud Abbas, signed the official decree. Our hearts are full of thankfulness to God!

We want to thank President Mahmoud Abbas and Dr. Ramzi Khoury, Head of The Higher Presidential Committee of Churches' Affairs, for making the Evangelical Council a legal entity in Palestine.

I urge you to pray for the Palestinian authorities and the Palestinian people. We are against injustice, tyranny, violence and racism and we are for fairness, justice and peace for our Palestinian people the Israelis and the other peoples in the Middle East.

'Blessed are the peacemakers' and our Council is an advocate for peace.

The Bible tells us pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

Tony Peck, EBF General Secretary, commented,

'This is a wonderful outcome of religious freedom after many years of campaigning and prayer by the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in Palestine, led by its inspirational President, Munir Kakish. We are proud to have this Council as an EBF member and in the midst of the very challenging context in which these churches seek to witness to the Risen Christ, we rejoice with them. We will go on praying for peace with justice for the Palestinian people and for brothers and sisters in Christ there.'