

Jerusalem's coadjutor says Christians must remain in Holy Land

DUBLIN, Ireland - The coadjutor of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said it is important for Christians to remain in the Holy Land.

"Our vocation is to remain despite our small number in the land where Jesus preached, redeemed humanity and founded the church," said Coadjutor Archbishop Fouad Twal.

"Together with your support, we will continue to stay and to keep our faith. Our mission is to be witnesses of the Gospel of love and reconciliation, being a bridge amid a Muslim and Jewish majority," said the archbishop, who was on his first visit to Ireland since becoming coadjutor of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 2005.

Archbishop Twal was in Maynooth for Mass July 21 celebrating the investiture of new members of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher, an organization dedicated to supporting the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and to responding to the needs of Catholics in the Holy Land.

Archbishop Twal expressed his gratitude to Irish members of the organization for their ongoing support and to Irish aid agencies such as Trocaire, the Irish bishops' overseas aid agency.

The archbishop also discussed a solution for peace in the Holy Land.

"Only a return to the negotiating table on an equal footing, with due respect for international law, is capable of disclosing a future of brotherhood and peace for those who live in this blessed land," he said. "All individuals must see their fundamental rights guaranteed - both the Israeli people and the Palestinian people are equally entitled to live in their own homeland in dignity and security."

Noting that "negotiations are the most civilized means in seeking justice," Archbishop Twal said the negotiations needed in the Holy Land "require real dialogue, mediated by an impartial party to the conflict."

"An agreement should not be made under threat; it will not be effective. And this is, unfortunately, what we see - threats and violence from both sides," he said.

"Working toward a negotiated agreement would result in great benefits for the

Israelis, in terms of security, and acceptance within the Arab and Muslim worlds. Peace and justice are reciprocal. Until now Israel won almost all the wars with the Arabs; until now Israel never won peace and security, because it relies only on its military power, rather than on international rules and resolutions.”

Welcoming Archbishop Tawal, Archbishop Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, president of the Irish bishops’ conference, said that only a just and lasting peace with the Palestinians will offer security to Israel.

Archbishop Brady also expressed concern over Christians fleeing the Holy Land.

“It is very sad to see so many Christians leave the Holy Land. What a shame to hear Bethlehem, so dear to Christians, now described as a vanishing Christian community, an isolated town, with boarded-up shops and surrounded on three sides by an eight-meter-high concrete wall,” he said.

“I believe the Christian presence in the Holy Land is a moderating influence and is essential to achieving peace,” he added. “The future of all peoples of the Holy Land depends on the securing of a just and lasting peace. Only a just and lasting peace with the Palestinians will offer security to Israel. Only a just peace will set Israel free from its present anxiety.”