

Secretary of State Rubio
Department of State
Via: The Office of International Religious Freedom,
Maxwell Stoneman StonemanMH@state.gov and Joycelyn Narayan NarayanJ@state.gov
And The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Elena Scott-Kakures ScottKakuresE@state.gov

June 16, 2026

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to you as leadership from Franciscan communities in the U.S. where we serve in more than 150 ministries located in 29 states. We feel a heavy burden of history as we witness the nearly 2,000 years of the continuous presence of the indigenous Christian community in the Holy Land being uprooted and heading toward eradication. The [attack last week](#) by illegal Israeli settlers in Taybeh is but one more harrowing example. This follows on the previous month's [documented attacks in Taybeh](#) and similar attacks on other Christian communities in Beit Sahour as well as rising violence directed to the [Christian communities in Jerusalem](#).

Our Roman Catholic Tradition compels us to reach out to you as a fellow Catholic. Your decisive action is needed to help stem the tide of religious extremism and preserve the Christian presence in the Holy Land. Specifically, we request that you use all diplomatic leverage to persuade the Israeli Government to stop policies that empower, protect, and provide impunity for radical Israeli settlers. They sow fear among the Palestinians-Christians and Muslims-throughout the West Bank, damage private property, and inflict bodily harm on them. A way to mark the beginning of such a diplomatic effort, considering the latest attacks, would be to appeal to the Israeli Government to (1) remove the Taybeh Juncture new settler outpost and (2) dismantle the Taybeh Hilltop Youth settlement. These outpost expansions are among many that have preceded the latest rounds of violence.

The Christian community in the Holy Land plays a disproportionately large role in providing health care, education, and other social services, not only to Christians, but also to Muslim and Jewish people, serving as an indispensable bridge between the diverse communities of the Holy Land. Over the past many years, through pilgrimages and other forms of solidarity, we have developed deep relationships with numerous Palestinian communities. Their witness has inspired us to better live our own Franciscan, Christian vocation.

A primary cause of the rise in violence against the Christian communities is traced to the illegal expansion of settlements. Outposts, like those mentioned above in Taybeh and other Palestinian communities, represent a first encroachment that leads quickly to settlers launching attacks. Unfortunately, the Israeli Defense Forces seem unable, or perhaps unwilling, to curtail the expansion and violence. We appreciate that President Trump made his opposition to the expansion of the settlements clear and recognized their destabilizing role, stating on September 25, 2025: *"I will not allow Israel to annex the West Bank. Nope, I will not allow it. It's not going to happen. It's been enough. It's time to stop now."*

We fear the violence against Palestinians by radical Israeli settlers is growing to a breaking point. The implications of a Holy Land without a mediating Christian community is dire. In our

desperation we make this appeal to you, which includes our prayers that all can have the courage and strength to take the difficult actions necessary to make peace possible.

Sincerely,

Very Rev. Lawrence Hayes, OFM, Provincial Minister
Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Very Rev. Michael Heine, OFM Conv., Minister Provincial
Province of Our Lady of the Angels

Very Rev. Paul Langevin, OFM Conv., Minister Provincial,
Province of St. Bonaventure

Very Rev., Martin Day, OFM Conv., Minister Provincial
Province of Our Lady of Consolation

Very Rev. Brother James Reiter, OFM Conv., Minister Provincial
Province of St. Joseph Cupertino

Very Rev. Robert Perez, OFM Cap., Provincial Minister
Province of the Sacred Stigmata of St. Francis

Br. James Peterson, OFM Cap., Provincial Minister
Province of St. Mary

Very Rev. Steven Kropp, OFM Cap., Provincial Minister
Province of St. Joseph

Very Rev. Robert Marva, OFM Cap., Provincial Minister
Province of St. Augustine

Very Rev. David Songy, OFM Cap., Provincial Minister
Province of St. Conrad

Very Rev. Joseph Seraphin Dedrick, OFM Cap., Provincial Minister

Very Rev. Emil Tomaskovi, S.A., Minister General,
Franciscan Friars of the Atonement

CC,

Ambassador Michael Huckabee

Senator James Risch, Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Representative Brian Mast, Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Representative Gregory Meeks, Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee