

April 23, 2025

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Fara Registration #6344

In March 2025, a fair leasing bill was introduced and is being fast-tracked in the Knesset that will disproportionately impact the Christian Churches in Israel. The bill proposes significant changes to long-term lease agreements, effectively restricting the Churches ability to negotiate new leases or sell properties to fund or maintain church-owned assets and activities. It represents a form of legal and financial pressure that diminishes the Churches autonomy and ability to function.

In addition, several municipalities in Israel have initiated legal actions against the Christian Churches in Israel, demanding millions in municipal taxes. These actions include court proceedings, frozen bank accounts, withheld essential annual school funds, and foreclosure orders on church properties.

These proceedings are contrary to the status quo and to historical and contemporary agreements that provide the Christian Churches in Israel with a special legal and tax status. The number and potential magnitude of the proceedings are an unprecedented escalation against the small population of nearly two percent of Christians and the greater Christian presence in Israel.

The special status allows the Christian Churches in Israel to invest in and serve the local Christian and broader communities through churches, eldercare, hospitals, schools, and more. Without the exemptions, these social services and the people they serve are gravely compromised. Further, it allows for the Christian Churches in Israel to care for the many Holy sites in Israel that are offered, with few exceptions, free of charge to pilgrims.

In 2018, direct engagement by the US Government, other governments, and religious leaders with the Government of Israel helped encourage Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to intervene to suspend adverse legislation and to suspend the threat of municipal taxes. The Prime Minister also established a special committee headed by then Minister of Regional Cooperation Tzachi Hanegbi to formulate a sustainable resolution. The committee, however, did not progress.

We urge the US Government to work with the Government of Israel, as before, to resolve this issue now and in the long-term. The enduring presence of Christianity in Israel has long been a priority of the Government of Israel and significant to the millions of Christian pilgrims that visit annually from the United States and around the world during times of peace.

May 12, 2025

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A Fair Leasing Bill will be discussed at a special Knesset session on Tuesday afternoon (morning here).

The session has been organized to “discuss the obstacles related to the continuity of leases on church owned lands.” It will include representatives from the Ministries of Finance, Justice, and Interior, and select organizations that represent the leaseholders.

It is anticipated that this discussion will lead to a negative outcome for the churches in Israel.

The Fair Leasing Bill exclusively targets lands belonging to the Christian minority in Israel. This bill was originally introduced in a different form in 2018 and, following widespread criticism and the intervention of then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was ultimately shelved.

It is also part of a broader pattern of systematic targeting of Christians in the Holy Land of Israel, harming their basic property rights and unraveling the delicate fabric of coexistence that has been preserved between the Christian minority and the State of Israel. See below and attached for background.

The churches are calling on the United States to issue a letter or statement before the discussion tomorrow urging the Prime Minister to halt the discussion on this discriminatory legislation which poses an existential threat to the protectors of the Christian community and heritage in the Holy Land.

Any public or private objection raised by the US Administration is greatly appreciated.

September 17, 2025

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Report language is critical as the Christian Churches in Israel are collectively facing systematic targeting by multiple municipalities, threatening their presence and ability to serve and unraveling the delicate fabric of coexistence between the Christian minority and the State of Israel.

The United States and Israel are committed partners. As such, it is important to address issues of mutual and global interest like the enduring Christian presence in the Holy Land. The Christian Churches in Israel can play a positive, practical role in ensuring the stability in Israel and the region.

The Committee notes with concern the ongoing challenges faced by Christian Churches in Israel, including the imposition of the arnona (municipal tax) on religious institutions by multiple municipalities. The Committee is further concerned by reports of increasing pressure on the Christian institutions to compel them to pay the arnona, including legal proceedings, freezing and seizing of bank accounts, withholding of annual school funds, and issuing foreclosure orders. These actions by the municipalities are contrary to historical and contemporary agreements that provide for a special legal and tax status. Further, they contradict the status quo which dictates the negotiation of a comprehensive agreement on disputed issues at the federal level and stays the enforcement of arnona by municipalities.

Additionally, the Committee is alarmed by the recent violence affecting Christian holy sites and communities, including the tragic strike on the Church of the Holy Family in Gaza that resulted in casualties and damage to sacred property. Such incidents, coupled with unresolved aforementioned disputes, threaten the sanctity of religious practice and the stability of interfaith relations in the region.

The Committee recognizes the long-standing contributions of Christian institutions to education, health care, humanitarian relief, and the preservation of holy sites, and underscores their integral role in Israel and the broader region. The Committee therefore urges the Government of Israel to take all necessary steps to cease the legal proceedings and other actions related to the arnona taken by the municipalities, ensure the protection of churches and Christian communities, and safeguard access to and preservation of Christian holy sites.