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DISSEMINATION BY THE LIVINGSTON GROUP, LLC

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We greatly appreciated the opportunity to introduce you to the Custos and to discuss current concerns and actions to address the treatment of the Christian Churches in Israel.

As discussed, Prime Minister Netanyahu did send a letter to the municipalities in August. The translated letter is as follows:

“In the course of the dialogue taking place between the State of Israel and the United States, we have been requested to cease conducting the legal proceedings taken by municipal authorities in Israel against Christian churches in connection with Arnona collection proceedings.

The issue of charging churches with Arnona is a matter of high political sensitivity, especially for the current administration in the United States.

In light of this, I have authorized Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar to urgently lead a direct dialogue between a team that includes representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Interior, and between the representatives of the municipalities and the Christian leadership in Israel.

In view of the above, and in light of the existence of weighty political and strategic considerations I ask you to examine a way, subject to law, to refrain from continuing the process of debt collection against the churches and from any step that would undermine the relations with it.”

To-date, the municipalities are continuing their efforts to collect the arnona (municipal tax). For example, after the letter was sent, the Jerusalem Municipality seized the bank accounts of the Greek Patriarchate.

Further, the Commissariat recently (1) filed a petition in court against the Nazareth Municipality after they seized 500,000 NIS in alleged arnona debts relating to the Terra Santa School (six other different Christian school have also filed lawsuits); (2) participated in a hearing in against the Jerusalem Municipality regarding education funds withheld due to alleged arnona debts; and (3) has received heavy pressure from the Tel Aviv Municipality to provide measurements for the St. Peter’s Church otherwise the municipality will impose arnona as it sees fit.

Given the measured letter and limited response, we began pursuing report language in the US Senate. See attached draft letter and report language for consideration.

We look forward to hearing back from you regarding your conversation and possible next steps.

THE LIVINGSTON GROUP PROVIDES REPRESENTATION FOR THE COMMISSARIAT OF THE HOLY LAND FOR THE USA, A CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, WASHINGTON, DC.

As you mark up the 2026 National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, please consider inclusion of the attached report language.

The 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.

I appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you on this and other issues moving forward.

Enclosure

DRAFT LANGUAGE

Christian Churches in Israel

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.