

PROTEST OF THE THREE COMMUNITIES AGAINST THE CLOSURE OF THE AEDICULE OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER.

22 February, 2015

His Excellency

Mr. *Avigdor Lieberman*

The Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

State of Israel

Dear Mr. Minister,

The 17 of February, 2015, Israel police attached to the David sub Station of the Jerusalem Police suddenly effected entry into the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre and took it upon themselves to force closure of the Aedicule and Rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre Church, and to obstruct the entry of pilgrims and visitors. This closure took place from about 10:40 until about 14:30, and was reversed only with great difficulty. The stated reason for this closure was their unsupported allegation that "the structure of the Aedicule was not safe enough for pilgrims to enter". We the undersigned are absolutely astonished that such a forcible closure by Police could take place in the most important Shrine of the entire Christian world, suddenly, without any forewarning or official

communication from any competent authorities. Regardless of the technical issues allegedly involved, such an act amounted to total disregard for our rights in this Holy Place. In effect, it was a grave violation of the Status Quo and of Israel's international obligation and commitment to uphold it.

Regarding, the actual state of the stability of the Aedicule, we, far better than anyone else, know that the structure needs to be properly restored. Yet we have not been presented with any evidence that somehow some danger appeared, out of nowhere, that had not been there the day before that drastic police action. We ask ourselves how – and by whom – reports could have been made to the Police (!) without even consulting with us, the Three major Communities, whose Church this is, and who are therefore the ones with the right and responsibility to maintain it. And, if it were true that such a danger suddenly materialized, how did it seemingly disappear so soon. It is, of course, our own determination fully to meet international standards regarding the safety of pilgrims, and we are therefore entirely prepared to listen to anyone's legitimate concerns on this matter; but as you surely must understand, sending in a police force to impose closure of this Shrine, especially in the abrupt manner in which this was done, shows absolute contempt for our Communities and their rights, as well as for the faith that brings pilgrims from all parts of the world to pray and visit at this Holiest Place. We hope that it never happens again.

Yours sincerely,

**Greek Patriarch of / Custos of the Holy Land / Armenian
Patriarch of Jerusalem**

Jerusalem

CC.

Rav Nitzav Yohanan Danino, Police Commissioner, Israel Police Headquarters

Major General Moshe Edri, Comander Jerusalem District Police

Col. Avi Biton, Commander of the David sub Station, Jerusalem Police

H.E. Archbishop Giuseppe Lazzarotto, Apostolic Delegate

Mr. Michael A. Ratney, Consul General of the United States of America

Mr. Davide La Cecilia, Consul General of Italy

Mr. Juan José Escobar Stemmann, Consul General of Spain

Mr. Georgios Zacharioudakis, Consul General of Greece

Mr. Hervé Magro, Consul General of France

Mr. Bruno Jans, Consul General of Belgium

Mr. Mustafa Sarni, Consul General of Turkey

Dr. Alastair McPhail, Consul General of United Kingdom

Ms. Ann-Sofie Nilsson, Consul General of Sweden