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ROSSING CENTER
FOR EDUCATION AND DIALOGUE

מרכז רוסינג
לחינוך ולדיאלוג
مركز روسينج
للتربية وللحوار

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS IN ISRAEL AND EAST JERUSALEM



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JCJCR Director, Hana Bendcowsky, teaching at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

About the Rosing Center for Education and Dialogue

The *Rosing Center for Education and Dialogue* is a Jerusalem-based interreligious, peacebuilding organization, and our mission is to build the desire and capacity of Israelis and Palestinians to create truly shared societies for all groups. We believe that understanding, justice and equality will enable Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace, and we envision societies which embrace religious, ethnic and national diversity as an asset rather than a threat.

We launched our *Advocacy and Education Initiative* to address the escalating harassment Christian communities have faced for many years, in Jerusalem and other areas of the country. The Initiative is part of our *Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations* (JCJCR) program, which seeks to enhance understanding of Christianity and its unique status in the Holy Land, among local and international audiences. It also aims to foster better Jewish-Christian relations within this distinctive context. The *Advocacy and Education Initiative* is designed to provide local and international stakeholders with reliable information about the abuses suffered by Christians in order to help reduce the phenomenon. It comprises a data gathering process¹ to document attacks, and annual reports which analyze the data in light of the socio-political context and serve as advocacy tools. For now, the active monitoring of our *Initiative* is mainly focusing on attacks within Jerusalem, but we aim to extend our coverage to a wider territory in the coming years. Finally, data from our monitoring processes will be integrated into our educational curricula and resources to ensure that our programs accurately reflect the current situation.

¹ The data gathering process has been conducted in coordination with the *Religious Freedom Data Center* created by Yisca Harani.

Executive Summary

This report offers an in-depth analysis of the harassment and violence directed at Christian communities in Israel and East Jerusalem over the course of 2024. It documents a rise in incidents of intimidation and aggression, particularly targeting clergy and church properties. Additionally, the report examines the socio-political dynamics underpinning this troubling trend, providing critical insights into the factors driving these developments and recommendations to stakeholders about possible concrete steps to address them.

Out of the 111 documented cases of harassment, physical attacks emerged as the most prevalent category. Of the 47 recorded incidents, the majority targeted clergy, including monks, nuns, friars, and priests, who are often easily identifiable by their distinctive religious attire. **The most common form of physical harassment is spitting—a long-standing issue that has escalated from subtle incidents to openly aggressive acts. Clergy are now regularly harassed in public spaces, especially, but not exclusively, in areas such as Jerusalem's Old City.** We are pleased to report a growing willingness among clergy over the past year to report incidents, indicating a positive trend toward increased cooperation and trust. This progress has been observed despite ongoing skepticism regarding the accountability of local authorities and concerns that reporting may negatively impact their legal status.

The 35 known cases of vandalism and desecration which targeted Christian churches and monasteries included graffiti, stone-throwing, and arson, as well as instances of spitting within sacred spaces. Notably, nine incidents were documented in northern Israel, including the break-in at a Catholic retreat house where sacred items were damaged and replaced with Jewish religious objects. An uptick in attacks on

Christian signage was also observed, including the defacement of street signs and symbols associated with Christianity. Several Christian pilgrim groups wishing to visit Jewish holy sites, especially on Mount Zion, were denied access. Furthermore, in multiple cases Jewish religious individuals disrupted Christian processions with verbal abuse and insults.

In all known cases, the perpetrators are Jewish individuals, primarily young men from ultra-Orthodox and national-religious circles, but also seemingly marginalized individuals on the social periphery. Driving them to action is often a mixture of nationalist fervor and religious extremism, particularly among the *Hardal* (ultra-Orthodox Nationalist) groups.

Violent attacks involving physical aggression and property damage are often seen as "smash" events—high-profile incidents that attract public attention and demand a response. However, in many ways the greater threat lies in the more subtle "squeeze" events, such as spitting or verbal harassment. Though these acts may seem less severe individually, their cumulative effect is deeply exhausting, leaving Christians feeling increasingly threatened and unwelcome in their home. Adding to this trend are concerns over increasing restrictions on access to religious celebrations and pilgrimages, which authorities often justify as heightened security measures. These restrictions are compounded by a more impatient and often harsh attitude displayed by law enforcement officials responsible for managing public security during these events. All these factors have intensified fears of a gradual erosion of the *Status Quo* governing the rights and protections of Christian communities in Israel, along with their religious freedoms, further deepening their sense of unease and marginalization.

A survey the *Rossing Center* commissioned in December 2024 to assess the sentiments of Christian communities in Israel and East Jerusalem² confirmed growing concerns over the perceived erosion of the symbolic and physical spaces Christians have inhabited for millennia. While the rise in harassment against Christians does not appear to be part of an official political agenda, this troubling trend is unfolding in a climate marked by increasing state-backed nationalism and intolerance which has become normalized by the State of Israel.

The growing influence of extremist groups in Israeli politics has definitely contributed to an environment where religious minorities, including Christians, are increasingly vulnerable to harassment. Compounding these challenges, the socio-political climate and the devastating effects of the ongoing war have left Christians in one of their most precarious positions in recent history. While different Christian communities face challenges unique to their contexts, the survey highlighted a common concern for the future: nearly 48% of respondents under 30 said they are considering leaving the region. Among them, 77% cite escalating violence within Arab society and the broader deterioration of the socio-political situation as their primary reasons. The survey findings, though, also highlighted that despite these challenges, Christian communities remain committed to maintaining their presence in the Holy Land. However, without concerted efforts to promote inclusion, respect, and religious freedom, this longstanding presence could face significant erosion in the years to come.

² A separate report is dedicated to the analysis of the survey's findings.

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This Report Aims to be a Basis for:

- Building data-based, contextualized knowledge about the challenges faced by Christians in the Holy Land in general, and in Jerusalem in particular.
- Supporting policy advocacy efforts to foster the physical and perceived security of Christian communities.
- Creating and promoting new educational resources to expand the literacy about Christianity as lived in the Holy Land among the Israeli Jewish population and relevant stakeholders (local authorities, media, local educational institutions, etc).
- Promoting justice in Christian-Jewish relations. We will strive to do so by increasing awareness about intolerance towards Christians among the wide majority of Israelis who ignore the phenomena.

Terminology and Key Findings

We adopted the concept of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)³ and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The two key principles of FoRB are: freedom to have or not to have (including the right to change) a religion or belief; and the freedom to manifest it individually or in community, in public or private, “in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” Our monitoring efforts will gather and analyze incidents of harassment towards Christian communities, including violations of FoRB based on this understanding of freedom of religion. This may comprise abuses committed by state or non-state actors limiting individual and collective exercise of this freedom.



Celebrations of the 33rd Armenian Independence Day at Goverou Bardez (The Cows' Garden) in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem | Photo: Adi Marer

³ Art. 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>



Christians walking in the Old City of Jerusalem on the occasion of the Eastern Easter | Photo: Adi Marer

Overview:

numbers per categories of attacks*

Physical attacks



Examples include spitting, pepper spraying, hitting

Attacks on Church properties



Examples include graffiti, trespassing, damaging statues, throwing of stones and garbage within Church properties, arson.

Defacement of public signs



Harassment



Examples include verbal harassment, attacks and protests during Christian gathering, anti-Christian propaganda.

Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FOrB)



Examples include requests to remove religious symbols, limitations of access to religious sites, limitations in freedom of movement to attend religious services etc.

Representation of Christian communities in mainstream Israeli media and online harassment:

During 2024, we periodically tracked the dominant narrative regarding harassment of Christians and attitudes towards Christian presence in Jerusalem, as well as cases of online incitement. This included monitoring of mainstream Israeli media and social media channels in Hebrew and English to the best of our ability. We have observed a significant decrease in mainstream media coverage on the harassment of Christians compared to 2023. This decline is primarily due to the media's focus on the ongoing multi-front war. Additionally, the reduced number of tourists has led to fewer instances of blatant friction with groups of Christian visitors, like those reported in 2023, which previously garnered both local and international attention and condemnation.

*In almost all instances, verbal harassment and spitting occur concurrently, but in order not to inflate the overall number of incidents, we have categorized each incident according to the dominant nature of the attack.



The Coptic Church celebrates Palm Sunday at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

Socio-Political Context

Statistics

According to statistics released in December 2024 by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, as of December 31, 2024, the population of Israel is estimated at 10.027 million residents. Of this population, 7.707 million (76.9%) are Jewish, 2.104 million (21.0%) are Arab, and 0.216 million (2.1%) are classified as others, including foreign residents.⁴ Christians living in Israel are 180.300 (approx. 1.8% of the Israeli population), and 78.8% of Christian present in Israel are Arab, constituting 6.9% of the total Arab population of Israel.⁵ According to data released in December 2024, the Christian population grew by 0.6% in 2023.

As for Jerusalem, the most recent data published by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research reports that in 2022, "Jerusalem was home to 597.000 Jews making up 61% of the city's population. The Arab population in Jerusalem numbered 384.700 residents – 371.400 Muslim Arabs and 13.000 Christian Arabs (96% and 4% respectively) – constituting 39% of the city's population".⁶ Furthermore, data released by the Central Bureau of Statistics on the occasion of Jerusalem Day in 2024 reported that at the end of 2023, 60.5% of Jerusalem's residents were Jews and Others (defined as "expanded Jewish population"), and 39.5% were Arabs. About 29.2% of all the city's residents were

ultra-Orthodox Jews, about half of the Jews and other populations in the city.⁷

Legal Framework

Israel has no formal constitution, but the *Declaration of Independence* is the fundamental document defining the character of the State. According to it, Israel "will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations".⁸ Due to the lack of a Constitution, legal principles are enshrined in a series of Basic Laws. For example, the 1992 "Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty" addresses the protection of human rights⁹ and describes the state as Jewish and democratic.

However, the "Basic Law: Israel The Nation State of the Jewish People", approved in 2018, declares that "the Land of Israel is the historical homeland of the Jewish people; the State of Israel is the nation state of the Jewish People, in which it realizes its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self-determination; and exercising the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish People."¹⁰

The law was criticized by legal experts and civil society

4 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population of Israel on the eve of 2025", https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2024/409/11_24_409b.pdf

5 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, "Christmas 2024 - Christians in Israel", https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2024/409/11_24_409e.pdf

6 Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, Report on Trends and Changes in Jerusalem, 2024 <https://jerusalemstitute.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024-%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%A0%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9A-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%A7-%D7%93%D7%99%D7%92%D7%99%D7%98%D7%9C%D7%99.pdf>

7 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, "Selected Data on the Occasion of Jerusalem Day, 2024", https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2024/165/11_24_165e.pdf

8 Declaration of Independence, <https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/about/pages/declaration.aspx>

9 Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty <https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawLiberty.pdf>

10 Basic Law: Israel - The Nation State of the Jewish People <https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawNationState.pdf>

organizations dedicated to safeguarding the rights of minorities, including the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries, which called attention to the “tension that exists in the wording of the declaration about the State being both ‘Jewish’ and ‘democratic’”¹¹ and to the fact that although the 2018 Basic Law “changes very little in practice, it does provide a constitutional and legal basis for discrimination between Israel’s citizens, clearly laying out the principles according to which Jewish citizens are to be privileged over and above other citizens.”¹²

Israeli state institutions are generally secular, however, a distinct separation between religion and state is lacking, impacting personal status in significant life domains such as marriage, divorce, and death. The administration of these matters is entrusted to leaders of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths, who preside over religious courts operating in accordance with the respective religious laws—*Halachah*, *Sharia*, and *Canon law*. The law officially recognizes only Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Baha’i faith and the Druze religion. Religious communities belonging to these main traditions are exempt from taxation on their places of worship, but municipalities may impose property taxes on religious properties that are not used for worship purposes (such as schools, pilgrim hostels, hospitals).

Lastly, in regard to missionary activity, it is often wrongly believed that the practice is outlawed in Israel, while the only restrictions declare that it is illegal to proselytize to a person younger than 18 without the consent of both parents, and to offer a material benefit to potential converts while proselytizing.¹³

Political Developments

The year 2024 remained marked by the ongoing conflict, with widespread devastation in Gaza, a rising toll of casualties and injuries on both sides, and the

continued anguish of Israeli families whose loved ones remain hostage. But over the course of 2024, the region also experienced an escalation in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, a surge in violence in the West Bank, and a growing sense of regional instability.

The fate of the Christian communities living in Israel and East Jerusalem has been directly affected by the ongoing, multi-front conflicts and their very concrete consequences on daily life, especially for those residing in areas impacted by aerial confrontations and rocket launches. The ongoing violence has exacerbated existing tensions and divisions between Jewish and Arab populations, and overall the range of challenges facing Christians are aggravated by the increasing polarization and ultra-nationalist political trends that have characterized the socio-political landscape for years, but were exacerbated in the aftermath of the October 7 attack. Beyond this, the widespread violence by criminal family activities within Arab communities has led to a dramatic increase in the number of murders. In 2021, the number of murder victims jumped to 108, and the upward trend continued in 2022. But over the past two years the number of murder victims increased by 120%, reaching 234 in 2023 and 227 in 2024. The failure of Israeli authorities to address this urgent issue has significantly contributed to creating a difficult and unsafe environment for many Christians, as reflected by the number of respondents in the Rossing Center’s survey who cited this as a primary reason for leaving.

Economic pressures have also been mounting. The conflict has consumed a vast amount of public economic resources, and the lack of pilgrims visiting the Holy Land due to regional instability and global concerns has severely impacted local Christian businesses and religious communities dependent on tourism. The Old City of Jerusalem, usually bursting



Greek Orthodox seminarians and visiting worshippers pray at the Stone of the Anointment in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

with visitors and believers of the three Abrahamic faiths, has been almost completely deserted since October 2023. The intensity of the economic crisis is especially felt in Jerusalem and traces its roots to the impact of the pandemic and the incomplete recovery of local businesses from prolonged lockdowns. This sparked a social emergency with peaks of poverty rarely seen among Christian communities in the Old City of Jerusalem. In 2024, Churches also had to face again the issue of *Arnona* (municipal taxes), since the municipalities of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ramle and Haifa sent warning letters or started legal actions against the Churches for failing to pay the required taxes on properties such as pilgrim houses, hotels, schools etc.

Lastly it is important to mention that Christians in Gaza, as well as everyone else there, have been facing extreme hardships for over a year. As one of the smallest religious minorities in the region, Christians in Gaza are caught in the crossfire of intense violence and military operations during the war. With churches and religious institutions damaged or destroyed along with private

"...Fear can generate incredible violence because it is the fear of one's very existence being at risk. From that fear, the violence and inhumanity we've witnessed this year have emerged..."¹⁴

**Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa,
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem**

houses, hospitals and educational institutions, the Christian community in Gaza faces not only the immediate brutality of war, but also a deeply uncertain future, as well as the prospect of the erosion of their presence in a land central to their faith. Even though this report does not cover the territories of Gaza or the West Bank, we choose to include a mention of communities located there, due to the vital connection between Christian families and communities within Israel and East Jerusalem and their relatives and co-religionaries in Gaza.

11 Statement of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land on the Nation State Law <https://www.medialpj.org/posts/assembly-of-catholic-ordinaries-calls-on-israel-to-rescind-its-nation-state-law-5e470fbf59a6f.html>

12 Ibid.

13 International Court of Jurists - Israel Penal Law, Art. 174a, 174b, 368a, 368b. <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Israel-Penal-Law-5737-1977-eng.pdf>

14 Vatican News, "A year after October 7 we implore peace", <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2024-10/pizzaballa-a-year-after-october-7-we-call-for-peace-for-humanity.html#:~:text=Yes%2C%20a%20terrible%20year.,for%20peace%20for%20all%20humanity.>

Worshippers gather at the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for Orthodox Good Friday observances | Photo: Adi Marer



Analysis

Introduction

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its repercussions have profoundly impacted the lives of Christians in Israel and East Jerusalem, just as they have affected the broader population. From economic hardships to the challenges of living in an increasingly volatile socio-political environment, the effects are far-reaching. The mutual fear that separated Jewish and Arab populations in the aftermath of the October 7 attack and war in Gaza blemished the entire year and affected local Christians as well. This tension was further intensified by the Israeli authorities' intense crackdown on any criticism of military actions in Gaza and expressions of compassion for the condition of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, some of whom are members of the Christian communities who sought refuge in churches for over a year and a half. Starting immediately after October 7, 2023, a significant number of arrests and interrogations has been targeting Palestinians - be they residents of East Jerusalem or citizens of Israel - but also some Israeli Jews who had expressed opinions about the war in Gaza via social media posts, or in contexts like their workplace or university campuses. Israeli media reported multiple cases of Palestinians, including citizens of Israel, who have been arrested by the police and treated as terror suspects in a way that has been criticized also by Israeli courts.¹⁵ Similarly, since October 7, 2023, there have been reported cases of Israeli citizens, including peace activists and ordinary individuals, facing harassment for expressing their opinions. This harassment has been carried out either by Israeli authorities or through

¹⁵ New York Times, "A Palestinian Professor Spoke Out Against the Gaza War. Israel Detained Her." <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/12/world/middleeast/palestinian-professor-israel-gaza-war.html>



Worshippers gather at the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for Orthodox Good Friday observances | Photo: Adi Marer

intense societal pressure¹⁶. The authorities' strict approach, coupled with a widespread perception that dissent from the mainstream narrative on the conflict is not tolerated, has created a climate of fear and self-censorship, affecting local Christians as well.

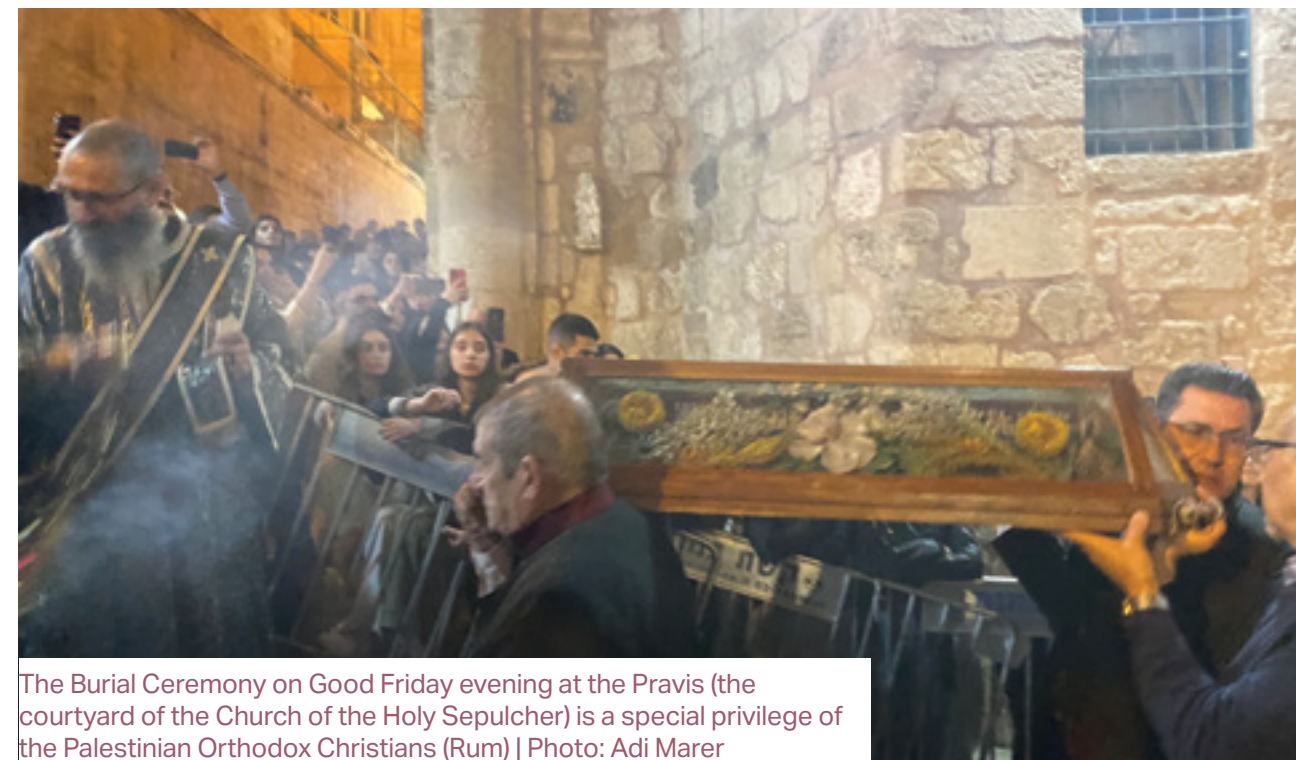
In a context so marked by violence and anxiety, the issue of harassment of Christians which had garnered attention both from the media and Israeli authorities during 2023, was understandably relegated to the back seat. It is hard to get energized about episodes of spitting or vandalism when a brutal, multi-front war is raging. Nevertheless, we at the *Rossing Center* believe that it is crucial - and perhaps even more crucial - to maintain the close attention of the world on the host of issues challenging Christian presence in this region. Jerusalem is a tinderbox, possibly now more than ever. Dynamics and relations between religious groups in the city

continue to impact global politics and international relations, and what happens in Jerusalem - and the Holy Land at large - reverberates around the world. A clear stance on interreligious dynamics here will therefore serve as a potent model for similarly complex shared societies in other regions affected by conflict.

In line with this commitment, over the past year, we have continued monitoring harassment towards Christians in its different forms. Besides this, to complement our ongoing data collection efforts, in December 2024 we carried out a survey to gain deeper insights into the most pressing issues and needs faced by local Christian communities¹⁷. The findings, to be published in a separate report later this year, reinforce the patterns identified through incident data, while offering a more nuanced understanding of the broader challenges faced by the diverse Christian presence in the region.

¹⁶ The Times of Israel, "Arab teacher arrested over Tik Tok dance says she was held in police car overnight", <https://www.timesofisrael.com/arab-teacher-arrested-over-tiktok-dance-says-she-was-held-in-police-car-overnight/>

¹⁷ The survey was conducted on a representative sample of 315 people among local Christians in East Jerusalem, Haifa, the area of the Galilee and in cities located in central Israel.



The Burial Ceremony on Good Friday evening at the Pravis (the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher) is a special privilege of the Palestinian Orthodox Christians (Rum) | Photo: Adi Marer

Trends

Data collected throughout the year regarding harassment shows that of the 111 attacks we could track, the wide majority fall under the category of physical attacks (which include spitting, hitting or pepper spraying) and attacks on Church properties (graffiti, throwing stones or garbage within Church properties, arson etc.). It is important to emphasize that the recorded incidents represent only a fraction of the actual occurrences, serving as the "tip of the iceberg" of daily realities on the ground. To better illustrate the effect of the ongoing harassment on the communities, we have adopted the definitions of "Squeeze and Smash" events¹⁸. Violent attacks which include physical violence or serious property damage fall under the "smash" category. These attacks often draw public attention and prompt a response, albeit sometimes limited, from the police and relevant authorities. Despite their destructive nature, such incidents can also foster a sense of

solidarity within the affected community as they unite to confront and address the challenges posed. But the greater danger is represented by the "squeeze" events, the small things that tend to be dismissed. Events that don't feel too serious and in general involve no physical harm: spitting, cursing, writing small graffiti on a Christian's house, or even graffiti calling for death to Christians on the wall of a monastery, a street sign with Christian content that is defaced, as well as someone preventing you from passing or entering a religious site. **The effect of these events accumulates, they are humiliating, exhausting, and make Christians feel threatened and unwelcome in their own home. Furthermore, it creates a norm which, once accepted, makes further encroachments on freedom of religion easier to be disregarded.**

During the reporting period, we recorded 46 physical attacks, which mainly targeted clergy: monks, nuns, friars and priests from the diverse religious orders present in Jerusalem and Israel,

¹⁸ We want to credit the Dutch organization "Care 4 You" for introducing us to this terminology.

who are easily identifiable as Christians due to their distinctive garments often featuring a visible cross. As was the case during the previous year, in virtually every interaction with clergy we were told that episodes of spitting take place on a regular basis. Even though spitting has been a known aspect of religious life in Jerusalem for decades, in recent years it has transformed from a covert act to perpetrators openly spitting at clergy, holy places, and even pilgrims, in broad daylight, before crowds and in the presence of security cameras. But in the second half of 2024 we started hearing something else. According to Christian clergy, incidents of spitting and verbal harassment have escalated even further in recent months, creating a highly concerning situation. Clergy members report a further increase in the frequency and aggressiveness of such encounters. and according to the testimonies we collected during our conversations, priests and nuns living in certain areas of Jerusalem - such as the Armenian Quarter and Mount Zion in the Old City - now face an almost certain risk of harassment each time they step outside. This raises serious concerns about the safety of religious figures and their ability to perform their duties without fear of intimidation or harm. Unfortunately, the immediate and transient nature of these attacks makes systematic monitoring extremely challenging. Moreover, there is a pervasive belief among Christian communities that reporting incidents to the authorities is futile, given a proven track record of dismissing claims or releasing suspects without appropriate consequences. This lack of accountability, combined with the fear that reporting complaints may jeopardize their legal status or visas, has historically discouraged victims from coming forward, creating an environment where such incidents can continue unchallenged. However,

despite skepticism and fear, it is encouraging to observe a growing willingness among clergy over the past year to report incidents, signaling a positive trend toward greater cooperation and trust.

According to the testimonies we collected during our conversations, priests and nuns living in certain areas of Jerusalem - such as the Armenian Quarter and Mount Zion in the Old City - now face an almost certain risk of harassment each time they step outside.

According to article 378 of the Israeli penal law, spitting is included in the felony of assault. In addition, article 144F states that "if a person commits an offense out of a racist motive [...] or out of enmity toward a public because of their religion, religious group, community of origin [...] then he shall be liable to double the penalty set for that offense or ten years of imprisonment, whichever is the lesser penalty."¹⁹ But victims are generally not aware of this legal aspect, and the wide majority choose not to report the incidents. Consequently, a common attitude among religious individuals, particularly those from Eastern traditions, is a form of acceptance of this insulting behavior, mostly out of humility. A smile and a silent blessing are typically the response to unknown passersby who engage

¹⁹ Israeli Penal Code, accessed through the OECD website <https://www.oecd.org/investment/anti-bribery/anti-briberyconvention/43289694.pdf>



Worshippers praying at the Stone of the Anointing in the Church of the Holy Spulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

in spitting. But this is not the sole form of physical attack documented during the reporting period. One particularly alarming incident occurred in September in Netanya, involving a young Jewish man who targeted two tourists. The assailant forcibly removed the crosses worn by the tourists, poured water on them, and subjected them to verbal abuse, including curses and spitting. He then threw the crosses and necklace on the ground. The entire episode was recorded by an individual accompanying the perpetrator, and the video was subsequently circulated on social media platforms before being picked up by news outlets. Another serious incident of physical violence took place in July, in two consecutive attacks on an Armenian restaurant located in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. In the first attack, two young men entered the establishment, causing property damage, injuring individuals, and directing curses and threats toward the Arab population, including a threat to "burn the place down." Approximately one week later, a second attack was carried out by a single individual who pepper-sprayed the restaurant's entrance. The substance caused diners to experience choking and gasping, forcing them to leave the premises coughing.²⁰

²⁰ See ANNEX I for details about the attacks.



Latin Church Good Friday liturgy at the Stone of Anointing in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

In line with observations from 2023, church properties remained the second most common target of attacks in 2024, with 35 reported incidents. These attacks included graffiti, arson, and the throwing of stones or garbage within church monasteries or on private church-owned land. This category also encompassed acts of desecration and disrespect, such as spitting inside places of worship, or demonstrative and repeated spitting near the entrances of Christian compounds, including the Armenian Patriarchate and the Church of the Flagellation in the Old City. A new element with respect to the previous year, is that we observed an increase in the number of attacks on monasteries across various regions of the country. Over the reporting period, we tracked nine incidents involving different forms of attacks on properties located in the region of the Galilee. These incidents ranged from repeated stone-throwing attacks on monasteries to an attempted theft of money from the Franciscan church in Tabgha. One notable case involved a small house located on Catholic Church grounds, designated as a space for silent retreat, which was broken into and occupied by unidentified individual/s.

The intruder/s caused significant damage, discarding sacred objects and replacing them with religious Jewish items.

Incidents of sign defacement also increased compared to the previous year, with several cases of repeated attacks reported at sites such as the Benedictine Abbey in Latrun and the Well of Mary in Ein Kerem. These acts typically involve spray-painting over signs to obscure or erase Christian symbols and references, including words like "Jesus," "church," or "monastery," as well as depictions of the cross or the symbol used on street signs to indicate a church. Furthermore, we recorded cases of harassment of pilgrims, such as denial of access for groups of Christian pilgrims wanting to visit religious Jewish sites on Mount Zion, as well as Jewish religious individuals disrupting Christian processions yelling obscenities against Jesus or Christians in general. Israeli law criminalizes verbal harassment and considers the infliction of injury to religious sentiments a criminal offense. This includes "publishing or saying something that is liable to offend the religious sentiment or faith of others."²¹ However, as seen in cases of spitting attacks, such incidents are particularly challenging to document. Victims, often caught by surprise, overwhelmed with shock and humiliation, rarely can record the event as it unfolds.

In all instances of incidents tracked during the reporting period, the perpetrators have been identified as Jewish individuals. The majority are teenagers or young adults, including uniformed soldiers, while a minority consists of older men and even children. The attackers are overwhelmingly male, with minimal involvement by women, who mostly serve as witnesses or supporters and rarely participate actively. The assailants can be classified in two main groups: those who engaged in spitting on or near clergy and churches,

curses and verbal harassment, and those involved in more severe actions such as graffiti, vandalism, and physical attacks. The first group typically consists of ultra-Orthodox ultra-nationalist individuals, referred to in Hebrew as *Hardal*, the most religiously and socially conservative end of the Religious Zionist sector, together with the most nationalist components of the Ultra-orthodox world. This group may include students from prominent yeshivas (Talmudic colleges) in Jerusalem, as well as young men who have been defined by the authorities and the media as *Hilltop Youth*.²² Presently, these groups play a more dominant role in the phenomenon of spitting. On the other hand, more serious attacks typically emanate from marginalized individuals on the social periphery, those who have not found their place within existing frameworks, including members of communities on the very fringes of Haredi society. The rise of the phenomenon among *Hardal* groups is linked, on the one hand, to their increased presence at intersections between Christians and Jews, showcasing sovereignty in the city, especially in areas like the Muslim Quarter and Mount Zion.

Further, within the current political landscape of the Israeli government, the influence of the *Hardal* sector and extreme religious Zionists can be seen having significant impact on government decisions. Representatives of extremist national religious and *Hardal* groups in the Knesset provide support and legitimacy for harassment and attacks. Attackers come from a variety of locations: some live in settlements - either within Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem or in the Occupied Territories - while many reside in West Jerusalem or other parts of Israel. And although they may support settlements, in Israeli terminology they cannot all be labeled as settlers. Lastly, it is crucial

to note that this report does not seek to generalize the entire Jewish Orthodox society. This behavior is not normative, and the majority of Orthodox Jews, regardless of their views on Christianity or other religious minorities, do not engage in these actions.

Comparing the data collected this year to that of last year, we observed that in both periods, the majority of verbal harassment and spitting incidents were directed at foreign Christians. This observation aligns with the results of our survey conducted among local Christians, nearly 90% of whom reported never experiencing harassment by Israeli Jewish citizens on account of their Christian identity. In a context of heightened intolerance toward diversity and deep mistrust between Jewish and Arab populations in Israel, such a high rate of respondents reporting no harassment is noteworthy. However, the survey highlighted the complexity of realities in Jerusalem, where 20% of respondents reported experiencing harassment due to their Christian identity, compared to only 5% in the Galilee and 2% Haifa. Additionally, 42% of respondents in Jerusalem reported feeling uncomfortable displaying religious symbols, such as a cross, in predominantly Jewish environments, in contrast to 15% of respondents living in Central Israel or 18% in the Galilee.

This data sheds light on the situation in Jerusalem, a city that serves as the hub for a significant number of foreign clergy who frequently encounter daily tensions and friction with more religious Jewish Israelis, particularly in the Old City. At the same time, local Arab Christians in Jerusalem navigate a distinct and multifaceted dynamic shaped by the city's unique social and religious fabric. Unlike their counterparts in predominantly Christian towns in the Galilee, they

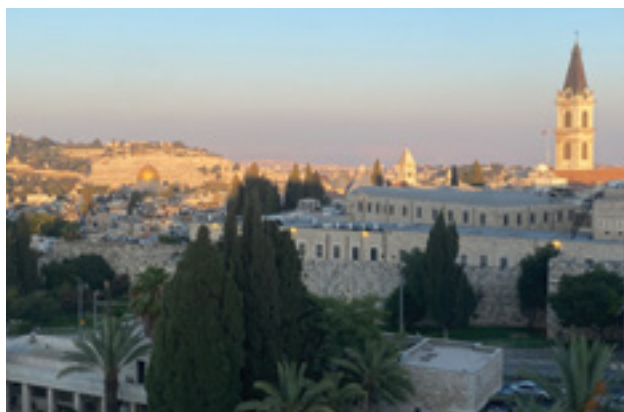
are in regular contact with Jewish Israelis, which significantly increases their exposure to potential discrimination or harassment by ultra-religious and nationalist segments of society. This heightened vulnerability stems from their layered identity as both Arab and Christian individuals, placing them at the intersection of multiple socio-political tensions.

It is important to highlight that the targeting of Christianity is not part of the political agenda but is linked to a socio-political climate that year after year is rapidly becoming less tolerant of diversity. The ongoing shift towards the far-right, a growing sense of nationalism, and the emphasis on Israel primarily as a state for the Jewish population have collectively undermined both the legal and perceived sense of equality for any minority within the country. The attacks outlined in this report are in fact connected to a set of broader issues that the Churches have been grappling with. These challenges encompass escalating difficulties in securing visas for foreign clergy, ongoing debates concerning the state's proposed changes to the fiscal status of Church properties, and initiatives aiming to convert Church land surrounding the Old City into a national park. In particular, in 2024 the issue of Arnona (the property tax collected by municipalities) became prominent once again. In June, the leaders of the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches appealed to the Israeli Prime Minister to request he intervene after the municipalities of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ramla and Nazareth threatened or initiated legal actions to compel churches to pay the tax, reigniting a longstanding dispute.

Historically, churches in Jerusalem have been exempt from Arnona for properties used for religious purposes, a privilege rooted in agreements dating back to Ottoman rule and upheld through subsequent administrations, including under Israeli governance. The churches argue that imposing Arnona on their properties violates these historical agreements and threatens their financial viability, as many properties are used for worship, education, and charitable activities rather than commercial purposes. The municipalities

21 US Department of State, "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, Israel, West Bank and Gaza" <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/israel-west-bank-and-gaza/>

22 Hilltop Youth is a definition applied to extremist, right-wing young men, who are usually driven by nationalist positions but often consider themselves also anarchists, who establish or live in illegal outposts in the West Bank and carry out violent attacks against Palestinians.



View from the rooftop of the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, one of the properties potentially subject to municipal taxes | Photo: Adi Marer

contend that exemptions should not apply to properties generating income, such as guesthouses, but the Churches argue that they are being unfairly targeted, especially at a time when the institutions are grappling with financial pressures due to the broader economic challenges facing a region at war. The standoff has deepened mistrust and raised concerns about the preservation of the delicate *status quo* governing church-state relations in Jerusalem, and indeed, the status of Church properties remains the central issue in negotiations between the Vatican and Israeli authorities, an ongoing process since 1993. The outcome of these discussions will not only impact the Catholic Church but also might shape relations between the State of Israel and all Christian denominations.

The Churches also perceive as threatening to the *status quo* a pattern of increasing restrictions of access to religious celebrations that involve large gatherings of worshippers, such as the Eastern Easter ceremony of the Holy Light, or the feast of the Transfiguration celebrated by the Greek Orthodox Church on Mount Tabor, in the Galilee. The Holy Light ceremony, a tradition spanning over a thousand years, holds immense symbolic significance for local Christians and draws tens of thousands of attendees. However, it has

become a point of contention between the Churches and Israeli authorities. The ritual involves the passing of the Holy Fire among pilgrims gathered in the tightly packed church of the Holy Sepulcher—which has only a single exit—and in the surrounding alleys of the basilica. According to the police, ensuring safety during the event has been the priority, especially after the tragic 2021 incident at Mount Meron, where 45 men and boys lost their lives in a crowd crush during a Jewish religious gathering. On the other hand, the Greek Orthodox Church, which has hosted this sacred liturgy for centuries, strives to accommodate as many faithful as possible to witness the annual miracle of the Holy Light. This clash of priorities often creates tension between authorities and church leaders, leaving both sides dissatisfied. Since the Mount Meron tragedy, authorities have significantly reduced the number of attendees at the Holy Fire ceremony, cutting the traditional crowd of 8,000 by half. In 2024, only 4,200 pilgrims were permitted to access the areas near the Holy Sepulcher, with fewer than 2,000 allowed inside the church for the ceremony.

In general, Christians have voiced concerns over the overall lack of effective dialogue between authorities and religious leadership. This was exemplified by the handling of the Feast of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, where worshippers were barred from the site due to the lack of fire department approval and the absence of an event manager—requirements instituted by the police for any mass gathering following the Meron disaster. But Christians also lament the aggressive presence of armed police forces within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher during the Holy Fire ceremony, which many see as an affront to the sanctity of their place of worship. While these measures cannot be defined as outright violations, they are perceived by the Christian community as a

"The recurrent Israeli portrayal of Christian prayers and religious ceremonies as private events necessitating security measures—an approach distinctly detached from the spiritual essence of these occasions—serves as a persistent excuse to impede Christians from exercising their faith".²³

lack of cultural sensitivity and the slow increase of systemic pressure on the life of Christians. This has fueled perceptions of unequal treatment compared to other religious groups, and a gradual erosion of the ability to fully express their religious identity. But despite all of the above, and especially the concern Christians feel about the authorities' approach to managing ceremonies that have been peacefully conducted in the past, it is important to note that 72% of respondents to our survey affirmed that their freedom to worship remains largely intact.

The apparent contrast in the data reflects the challenging reality Christians must navigate: while their overall freedom of religion is ostensibly guaranteed, they have experienced a gradual, subtle erosion of both their symbolic and physical spaces over the years. Christian communities have been proudly rooted in the Holy Land for two thousand years. However, in recent years they have increasingly expressed serious concerns regarding

the combination of forces that could drive younger generations away. Our survey found that 48% of respondents under 30, and 52% of respondents under 45, are considering leaving the region. The primary reasons for these considerations include the surge in violence within the Arab sector of Israeli society, the Israeli authorities' failure to address mafia-style crime gangs which are deeply disrupting the life of living in Israel, and an increasingly hostile socio-political climate where democratic institutions are under attack and hostilities among national groups are at their peak. Additionally, the current economic crisis exacerbates the situation, presenting further concrete challenges to the local Christian youth's future prospects.

We believe that the surge in overt animosity towards Christianity can be attributed to the unique and intricate dynamics characterizing Jewish-Christian relations in the Holy Land. This region stands as the only space where the historical majority/minority relationship has undergone a reversal, with Jews constituting the majority tasked with safeguarding the rights of Christians in their midst. While Jewish identity was historically molded by centuries of perceived inferiority vis-à-vis the Christian world, the contemporary scenario, where Christianity no longer poses a threat and a robust, independent Jewish state is established, has fostered a new and unapologetic attitude among Orthodox Judaism and its authorities. As argued by Hebrew University senior lecturer Karma Ben Johanan in her book "Jacob's Younger Brother," "Orthodox Jews are not "raising the fences" out of fear of Christianity and "gentile" culture; on the contrary, they part ways from previous, more lenient positions toward Christians precisely because they no longer fear them. The new freedoms brought by the post-World War II liberal ethos gave rise to initiatives of rapprochement and friendships that were previously unimaginable, at the same time that they surfaced old resentments that were repressed under a thick barrier of cultural

²³ Statement by the Greek Orthodox Jerusalem Patriarchate on Israel's Impediments to Freedom of Worship, <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/chronicle/statement-by-the-jerusalem-patriarchate-on-israels-impediments-to-freedom-of-worship/>

and political inferiority”.²⁴This renewed sense of Jewish identity finds its most extreme manifestation in right-wing ultranationalism, which has become a significant factor in Israeli society. This trend has been particularly evident among members of the current government and has been further intensified by the collective trauma experienced since October 7, 2023.

In this complex landscape, Christians see themselves as a community deeply rooted in millennia of history, an integral part of the region’s social fabric, and “a small sign of a different way of living and relating.”²⁵ The survey we conducted in December 2024 highlighted that despite the numerous challenges they face, Christian communities remain committed to preserving their presence in the Holy Land, and it is crucial to ensure their continued existence.

Hotspot: Mount Zion

Mount Zion serves as a focal point for interfaith and intercultural encounters, as religious traditions have converged in this compact space. Byzantine traditions locate the Room of the Last Supper and the room of Pentecost on the top of the hill, but an old tradition anchored in the medieval structure associated with King David's Tomb has made the area significant for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, each leaving their mark through the construction of religious, public, and private buildings. Since 1948, the Mount Zion area has been under the sovereignty of the State of Israel. Churches own part of the land including monasteries, churches, and cemeteries, while portions of the site are managed by various authorities, such as the Authority for Holy Places (David's Tomb) or the Ministry of Interior (the Upper Room), while other sections are leased to institutions and private individuals.

The prayer rights in the David's Tomb complex have been reserved for Jews since 1948. Non-Jews are prohibited from holding prayers in David's Tomb or the

Upper Room above it, except for specific occasions when Christians are allowed to conduct brief prayers as was customary before 1948.

Between 1948 and 1967, Mount Zion became a center of Jewish pilgrimage due to its proximity to the Old City, which was then inaccessible. After 1967, with access to the Western Wall restored, Mount Zion's relative importance declined, and it suffered from infrastructural and planning neglect. During Jewish holidays, particularly during the High Holidays and the feast of Shavuot, large crowds visit Mount Zion, including tour groups and individuals, sometimes late into the night. The David's Tomb complex, which has undergone several renovations, has also been subjected to acts of vandalism, including damage to Ottoman-period ceramic tiles, the concealment of archaeological remains incorporated into walls and the presence of problematic individuals who sometimes exhibit aggressive behavior.

Lack of governance has led to issues such as loud Saturday evening "Melave Malka" gatherings using amplified sound systems until midnight, which disturb neighbors. During holidays, large plastic sheets are stretched to create separate passageways for men and women, not only in prayer areas but also in adjacent spaces. On Rosh Hodesh (the first day of the month according to the Jewish calendar) a group organizes "Hallel" prayers in the courtyard with sound equipment, and individuals set up booths offering brochures, collecting charity, and more. The extensive activity in the historic structures of David's Tomb and the adjacent courtyard has resulted in the area being dirty, with water from cleaning and rain failing to drain properly, leaving puddles in the hallways. Many leased buildings are neglected and deteriorating. Many idle individuals loiter in the area, some even sleeping there, alongside numerous visitors from all three religions—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—though local Muslims

visit less frequently. **In recent years, the number of problematic and extremist individuals on Mount Zion has increased, resulting in vandalism of religious buildings and cemeteries, spitting on clergy, verbal abuse, and physical harassment of Christian clergy and tourists, as well as sexual harassment of women and disturbances to groups.**

The Greek Garden, an open area belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, has become a special hotspot in the area. It is designated as "private-public land," and the municipality has not allowed the Patriarchate to enclose it, leading to neglect, people sleeping there during holidays or permanently, littering, and damage to church property, such as the fence surrounding the basketball court of the adjacent Greek Seminary. Over recent decades, a tradition has developed among certain religious Jews of praying near the Dormition Monastery wall, which a rabbinic figure identified as connected to David's Tomb. Candles, prayer books, and brochures are scattered, and people come to pray near the monastery's external wall.

Ministry of Interior's Responsibilities

Since the beginning of the war sparked by the October 7 attack, the Interior Ministry, responsible for opening the Upper Room to visitors and ensuring its security, refrained from assigning a security guard, citing a manpower shortage. Even after security personnel returned to their posts and reservists were released, no guard was assigned until months later.

Despite the Interior Ministry's commitment to keeping the site of the Upper Room open year-round except on the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) (as stated on the ministry's sign at the entrance), an initiative led by the Tomb's caretaker resulted in the Upper Room being closed during the Feast of Shavuot. This was done without prior warnings of potential issues, reflecting a lack of trust in police capabilities to maintain public order at the site. This action disrupted visitors and could set a precedent for altering the *status quo* that has existed since the site was opened to Christian visitors after 1967.

Window to Mount Zion Project

Over the past decade, the “Window to Mount Zion” project of the Jerusalem Intercultural Center, has organized quarterly meetings led by JIC Director of Partnership, Tami Lavie. These meetings include representatives from all Jewish and Christian institutions, as well as the Dajani Muslim family, which owned most of the compound until 1948 and still retains its family cemetery. Municipal, police, and enforcement representatives also participate to address problems, enhance cooperation, and prepare for anticipated challenges. With the support of the “Window to Mount Zion” project, cooperation has resolved issues in recent years, such as managing Lag Ba’Omer bonfires traditionally lit by children in the Greek Garden. Tami Lavie and project volunteers actively work to maintain peace and respect on Mount Zion, especially during holidays, addressing specific issues with the authorities and advancing future plans, including making the Upper Room accessible to people with disabilities and training security personnel in interfaith and intercultural sensitivity. Furthermore, the project now includes an outreach initiative targeting rabbis who lead institutions known for their association with hostile acts. This effort aims to foster dialogue, sensitize students and community members, and raise awareness about the illegitimacy of such behaviors.

Conclusion

Mount Zion is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in the abundance of sacred sites for the three religions, their proximity, and the diverse institutions and individuals active on the mount. The opportunity lies in presenting Jerusalem as a place of interreligious and intercultural encounter—a model of shared space that respects and celebrates diversity. Efforts should focus on removing extremist elements and strengthening education and awareness for visitors to Mount Zion.

24 Karma Ben-Johanan, *Yacob's Younger Brother - Christian-Jewish Relations after Vatican II*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2022, 193.

25 Patriarch Pizzaballa: 'A year after October 7 we implore peace' - Vatican News



Ethiopian worshippers ascend the stairs to reach the Golgotha section of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

Methodology

The *JCJCR Advocacy and Education Initiative* seeks to monitor criminal and non-criminal incidents of harassment and violence towards Christian communities and individuals. This includes cases of harassment in its different manifestations, physical assaults, attacks against property and violations of freedom of religion. Our initiative aims to cover territories within Israel and East Jerusalem at the best of our capabilities.

In 2024 we collected data from several sources:

- directly from the victims, a category which comprises the religious leadership of local Churches, religious and lay members of local communities, pilgrims, and Christian tourists.
- from partners working in the field.
- from media reports.
- from the Police.

During the second year of activities for the *Advocacy and Education Initiative*, our monitoring efforts expanded significantly. By building on established relationships of trust with religious leaders and lay individuals, we deepened our outreach within Christian communities and tracked incidents that would have otherwise gone unreported. Since last year, our incident database has been shared with the *Religious Freedom Data Center*, created by Mrs. Yisca Harani, with whom we have partnered for data collection. Establishing a unified list of attacks was essential to avoid duplication or dispersion of information and to compile a reliable body of data on these attacks. All the information we collected about attacks is securely stored on our digital platform and incidents can be reported through an automated form, but more often, attacks are reported directly to us via phone or text message. Upon receiving a direct incident report, the staff at the *Rossing Center* or the Religious Freedom Data Center reach out to the victim or the representative of the targeted institution to gather more details

about the attack and offer support. In line with the information required by authorities, we make every effort to document all pertinent details to ensure thoroughness. We follow up on the outcomes of claims, particularly in criminal incidents, to the best of our ability.

The *Religious Freedom Data Center* relies on a network of Israeli Jewish volunteers, each in contact with one or more religious communities both within and outside Jerusalem. Through their contribution it was possible to record attacks directed to communities located in rural areas or in the region of the Galilee. Furthermore, civil society organizations such as the *Jerusalem Intercultural Center* and *Tag Meir*, played a role in fostering intercultural relationships and spearheading initiatives to demonstrate solidarity with communities targeted by religious Jewish extremists.

Finally, throughout 2024, we monitored media coverage addressing attacks and the challenges faced by Christians in the Holy Land. Our objective was to collect a comprehensive array of reports to conduct an assessment of the overall discourse within the Israeli media concerning the harassment of Christian communities.

We want to stress that due to the very nature of the incidents, our report offers only a partial view into a structural, pervasive issue. Many attacks go unreported daily, either because victims deem it useless to report to the authorities, or because it is very difficult to track down and apprehend the perpetrators of incidents such as verbal harassment or spitting. Therefore, one of the goals of our *Advocacy and Education Initiative* has been to increase the awareness among Christian communities about the legal standing of incidents and the importance of reporting them - first and foremost to the police, and subsequently to us or our partner organizations.

Recommendations

Enhancing police intervention, boosting the presence of police officers in critical areas, and promoting awareness of attacks on Christians.

Identifying perpetrators through collaboration between police officers in the field and technological tools such as body cameras and street cameras. Investigating incidents, including seemingly minor ones like spitting, to establish deterrence. Instructing officers to handle spitting cases in accordance with legal standards and emphasizing the importance of not dismissing any reports.

Offering training regarding Christianity to members of local police, municipality and other relevant authorities in order to build literacy and improve their ability to communicate properly with Christian leadership and members of the communities.

This will limit frictions and avoid incidents which may fall under the scope of Freedom of Religion or Belief, such as the escalating tensions surrounding the celebration of the Holy Fire ceremony at the Holy Sepulchre during the Greek Orthodox Easter. These programs may encompass brief reviews, lectures, or a series of lectures, meetings, and tours. They aim to provide a communication channel for consultation, fostering shared dialogue to enhance understanding and relationships with Christian denominations.

Establishment of two official positions - one within the municipality and one within the national government – as liaisons to the Churches' leadership.

Both local and national authorities currently lack a

designated liaison to address any questions or issues concerning the Christian communities. While there are specific officials responsible for certain matters, there is a gap in addressing broader issues. Many problems either go unresolved or fail to reach the appropriate person who can provide assistance. Therefore, we strongly advocate the appointment of a coordination person in the municipalities of mixed cities and government offices. These individuals will need knowledge of the special status and unique challenges faced by churches and Christians, facilitating assistance, referrals, and communication with relevant parties. The *Rossing Center* is happy to offer training and ongoing consultation services, as needed. It is noteworthy that in the past, such a liaison position existed within the Municipality of Jerusalem but was discontinued over 10 years ago. However, the Christian communities department at the Ministry of Interior is currently overwhelmed with existing obligations.

Improve curricula about Christianity in the public education system.

We acknowledge that the rise in attacks against Christians can be attributed, on one hand, to an implicit message that non-Jewish minority groups do not merit respect or recognition, allowing extremists to exploit the atmosphere to target not only Christians but also other vulnerable groups. On the other hand, a lack of awareness about the issue, unfamiliarity with Christianity and Christians in Israel, and a failure to comprehend the sensitivities contribute to these attacks going unnoticed by most Israelis. Whether due to indifference or insufficient knowledge, many Israelis do not respond or condemn these incidents. To foster delegitimization of these attacks and

encourage widespread condemnation, it is crucial to address the issue through educational initiatives. This involves promoting exposure, providing education, facilitating access to knowledge, and incorporating information about Christians in Israel into the school curriculum. These efforts collectively contribute to increased awareness and a proactive approach to tackling the problem.

Ensuring appropriate coverage in mainstream media and social media messaging.

Communication tools and social media play a pivotal role in raising awareness, shedding light on a subject, and fostering discourse around it. Presently, most information is disseminated to the public through official and social media channels rather than traditional educational methods. Media platforms serve to acquaint the general public with instances of assault and harm against Christians, as well as the responses from state authorities, the police, the attorney's office, and various government agencies. Leveraging both traditional and social media enables the dissemination of reliable and well-organized knowledge about Christians in Israel to the broader public. Social media in particular serves as a tool for cultivating a reciprocal dialogue between content creators and their audience. It encourages engagement and activism among the public, fostering a dynamic conversation that motivates participants to take actions contributing to the eradication of the identified issues.

Stronger condemnations from the authorities and religious Jewish leadership in order to communicate support and solidarity to the Christian leaders and the communities at large.

Taking a strong stance and disseminating it through influential figures, elected officials, and representatives is instrumental in conveying a

message that delegitimizes attacks and harm against minority communities. Specifically for Christian communities, expressions of support and concern coming from Jewish Israeli authorities demonstrate recognition of their belonging to the Holy Land, their societal role, and the value and esteem that the majority society places on their presence in the region.

Encouraging Christian communities to report and be aware of the importance of not dismissing attacks.

We are unable to accurately assess the extent and severity of the phenomenon without the collaboration of church leaders, members of religious communities, employees at Christian sites, tour guides, and tourists. As previously mentioned, there exists a reluctance to report, either due to fear or because clergy may not find it worthwhile, as outlined earlier. The essential key to combating and eliminating the phenomenon lies in the cooperation of these communities, facilitated by the encouragement and support of church leaders.

Increasing awareness and understanding among diplomatic representatives regarding Jewish-Christian relations in Jerusalem.

We acknowledge the necessity for broader engagement from the international community to have a more substantial impact on Israeli authorities. To elevate the priority of this issue, we propose encouraging churches worldwide, Christian communities, diplomats, and aid organizations, among others, to actively address this matter. This involves raising awareness among their peers in their respective countries, fostering media exposure, and exerting pressure on Israeli authorities to address the phenomena seriously. It is imperative to treat incidents of attacks with the utmost seriousness, issue official condemnations, and ensure that captured attackers are brought to justice.



Orthodox Church Via Crucis procession through the Christian Quarter in the Old City. Processions are often disrupted by spitting or verbal harassment of participants. | Photo: Adi Marer

ANNEX I: Detailed List of Known Attacks

Physical attacks: Examples include spitting, pepper spraying, hitting.

January 6, Old City, in between Damascus Gate and Station III Via Dolorosa. A Franciscan friar, identifiable by his religious habit, was walking toward the third station of the Via Dolorosa, approaching from Damascus Gate. During his walk, he encountered a group of young ultra-Orthodox teenagers. One of them inquired whether he was a Christian, to which he affirmed. In response, several members of the group began spitting conspicuously on the ground. After the friar had walked approximately five meters beyond the group, they proceeded to shout blasphemies directed at the name of Jesus.

February 3, Old City, Zion Gate. Father Nikodemus Schnabel, the Abbott of the Dormition Abbey was walking near Zion Gate with a guest. He was dressed in a monk's robe and wearing a cross necklace. During their walk, a young religious Jewish man approached Father Nikodemus, cursed at him, and spat on him. The same individual then tried to prevent the priest from taking a photograph. Another religious Jewish man directed an offensive comment at Father Nikodemus, saying, "F*** Jesus."

The incident occurred while Natalie Amiri, a correspondent for the German TV network ARD, was interviewing Father Nikodemus. Amiri captured much of the confrontation on video and later shared it on Instagram. As Father Nikodemus and Amiri continued their walk through the Old City, they were approached again by the same two men in the Armenian Quarter. The men spat at the priest for a second time, verbally insulted him, and one of them physically kicked him. A video shows Father Nikodemus confronting them,

saying in English, "You have no right to touch me and spit on me," while one of the men attempted to block Amiri's camera. The priest added, "The police are always asking. I need a picture of his face."

One of the young men aggressively approached Father Nikodemus, shouting profanities. An older man intervened, attempting to de-escalate the situation and convincing the aggressor in Hebrew to step back. However, the suspect warned the older man to "watch out." He then told onlookers, "I did that to the priest because they are Christians, brother, and this is what I do to them."

An armed Israeli man eventually intervened, physically guiding the aggressors away from Father Nikodemus. As they left, one of the men yelled, "F***ing Jesus," in English. The individuals were later arrested by Israeli police.

Another video, filmed by Amiri after the initial spitting incident, shows Father Nikodemus attempting to photograph the young men's faces for the police. The photos were later submitted to law enforcement, leading to the identification and arrest of the suspects.

February 27, West Jerusalem. A priest was punched by a Jewish man while he was trying to help him to get up from the sidewalk. It is not clear if the attack was fueled by anti-Christian sentiment, as the priest was wearing regular clothes.

February 29, Old City, Christian Quarter. A boy on a school trip, wearing a kippah and identified as an American Jew, spat on a woman upon hearing her speaking Italian on the phone and assuming she was a Christian. When the woman approached the group's teacher to address the incident, the teacher ignored her.



Syriac Orthodox liturgy at a chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

March 3, Old City, Christian Quarter. A procession of Armenian priests was making its way from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the Armenian Quarter. As the procession passed through David Street, an ultra-Orthodox man, approximately 50 years old, spat on the ground behind the clergy.

March 4, Old City, Jewish Quarter. A foreigner who volunteered at store in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City suffered repeated attacks by Haredi individuals. On one occasion, they broke into the shop, pepper-sprayed and punched him in the face. Then, a group of Haredi children arrived and began barricading the door to the shop. In the days that followed, the volunteer was spat on from the synagogue located above the store and had liquids poured on him while opening the shop door. The volunteer was essentially forced

to leave due to ongoing intimidation, as the attackers repeatedly showed up during business hours, calling the volunteer a "missionary," which negatively affected the business. Some of the assailants would even walk by and display knives.

The volunteer lived in the Jewish Quarter, and was also attacked multiple times for being a Christian. The incidents began after a conversation the volunteer had with Haredi boys from the neighborhood, about damage to the statue of Jesus at the Second Station of the Via Dolorosa. One of the Haredi boys commented that it was "good." The volunteer disagreed, stating that it was not right because Jesus had not done anything wrong. It was then discovered that the volunteer was a Messianic Jew, which led to a violent outburst. The group shouted at him, attempted to break into the store, blocked his exit, and hurled derogatory remarks at him. The young attackers screamed that

a Christian should not be in the area, while the adults passed by without intervening. Sean believed that the adults actually encouraged the young people to attack him. Security personnel from the Muslim Quarter and police officers informed him that such behavior was "normal," which led him to not report the incidents.

April 28, Old City, Jaffa Gate. As a procession of Armenian priests made its way from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre back to the Armenian Patriarchate, an ultra-Orthodox boy, around 14 years old, spat in the direction of the procession near Omar Khattab Square, close to the railing at the entrance to the Tower of David. The policeman accompanying the procession intervened and removed the boy.

April 28, Old City, Armenian Quarter. As the Armenian priests returned from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the Armenian Patriarchate, three ultra-Orthodox individuals passed by outside. Two of them spat on the ground in front of the Patriarchate.

April 30, Old City, Via Dolorosa. A Jewish individual spat at a Via Crucis procession organized by a community from the Galilee.

April 30, Old City, Jaffa Gate. The same community that had traveled to Jerusalem from the Galilee to pray in Jerusalem was harassed by three young boys, who spat in the direction of a priest within their group.

April 30, Old City, Armenian Quarter. As a procession of Armenian priests made its way back to the Patriarchate from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a religious man spat at them three times. When asked for an explanation, he refused to respond.

April 30, Armenian Quarter. A Jewish boy was standing in the street when the procession

of Armenian priests passed by on their way to the Armenian Patriarchate. As they moved past, he walked in the opposite direction while spitting.

May 7, West Jerusalem. Ultra-Orthodox women aggressively spat on Basque nuns who were accompanied by a priest, his wife, and about ten Christian children. They spat and cursed directly at the group, leaving their clothes covered in spit. The incident, which was not filmed, took place along the wall between Jaffa Gate and Safra Square, closer to the square. The visitors were left shocked by the attack.

May 31, East Jerusalem. While a member of the clergy was running, two Haredi children, likely around 8-9 years old, passed him on scooters and spat at him. This incident occurred in the upper part of Nahal Tsofim Park.

June 1, Old City, Station III Via Dolorosa. A Franciscan friar was harassed and spat at by several young Haredi Jews.

June 5, Christian Quarter. A Capuchin Franciscan friar reported that on Jerusalem Day, while walking just past Jaffa Gate, two boys spat in his direction. Ironically, he told them, "Well done," and walked away.

Later that same day, as he was walking down the street in the Christian Quarter, a group of yeshiva students, accompanied by adults and a policeman, was singing and dancing. As he passed the group, three of them noticed his religious habit and spat on him. He asked the police officer who was present at the scene if he had noticed what had happened and to intervene, but the officer did not take any action.

June 13, Old City, Jewish Quarter. Ultra-Orthodox young men spat at and cursed an 80-year-old Franciscan nun who was walking in the Jewish Quarter.

June 23, Old City, Armenian Quarter. An Orthodox Jew spat in front of an Armenian priest walking in the Armenian Quarter. Another Jew cursed the priest, telling him to "get out of here."

June 24, Old City, Mount Zion area. While entering the Greek Garden, an area adjacent to the Greek Orthodox monastery on Mount Zion, a Jewish man shouted at a procession of Orthodox Christians, "Go back to Europe. May your name perish," and spat.

June 24, Old City, Mount Zion area. A group of Jewish pupils arrived at the Greek Garden park on Mount Zion, just as a procession of Greek Orthodox Christians was returning to their seminary, to which the park belongs. One pupil spat in the direction of the procession, but the teachers refused to speak with the Hotline volunteer who witnessed the incident.

July 8, Old City, Christian Quarter. A Christian woman and her husband were walking on St. Francis Street near the entrance to St. Saviour Church when they saw three Jewish men spitting on the statue of the Holy Mary situated in front of the church. Two of the men appeared to be about 20 years old, while the third man was in his sixties. They were wearing colorful kippot and tefillin, and the woman described them as "settlers." After spitting on the statue, the men also spat on the floor inside a gym on the same side of the street, whose door was open. Noticing that the woman and her husband were staring at them, the men began laughing and insulted them by saying "death to Arabs" before walking away. The woman alerted the owner of the gym, who said they would check the security camera footage.

July 13 Old City, Armenian Quarter. At 23:00, as the restaurant called the "Armenian Tavern" was about to close, only a few people remained.

Suddenly, two young men entered the restaurant with a loudspeaker playing loud music. One appeared to be a hilltop youth with wild sideburns and a large kippah, and the other was dressed in ultra-Orthodox attire with a white shirt and black pants. They tried to push their way into the restaurant, and when one employee tried to block their way, they shouted, "Don't touch me," and cursed. One of them also tried to reach the kitchen. They continued to shout and curse about Arabs, saying, "We'll burn this place down." The owner tried to push them back out of the restaurant with the help of an employee, but the two shouted that they wouldn't go up the stairs until the owner and the employee backed off. The restaurant's owner didn't want to confront them, so they started to go up, and on the way, they grabbed a stack of chairs that were on the stairs near the entrance door and threw them down, breaking the chairs and causing the employee who tried to go up the stairs to fall. Before leaving, they broke an antique vase worth several thousand shekels. The owner and the employee tried to chase after them, but the chairs on the stairs blocked their way.

The next morning, the Armenian Tavern's owner filed a complaint with the police. The police asked if he could identify the attackers if they were put in a lineup. They also said they would send someone the next day to collect more information, but they only sent a link to upload the videos. The incident started to gain attention after it was posted on social media, provoking condemnation and coming to the attention of Israeli media. Eventually two suspects were arrested, but the restaurant owner was not updated after that and apparently the police closed the report without further action.

July 19, Old City, Armenian Quarter. At 22:00, a young man with an ultra-Orthodox appearance—dressed in a black and white tank top, black pants, a black kippah, and side curls—walked down the street near the Armenian Tavern restaurant. His



Ethiopian Christians walking in the Christian Quarter of the Old City | Photo: David Heger

attire was unusual for a Shabbat evening. As he passed by the restaurant, he discreetly sprayed its entrance with pepper spray, holding the canister behind his back. He took three steps forward, then turned back, sprayed again, and continued walking. Inside, diners began choking and gasping from the gas, forcing them to rush outside, coughing. Six tourists emerged in tears, and the restaurant became uninhabitable. The attacker appeared to have planned the assault, carrying pepper spray—raising the question, why did he have it in the first place? His method was calculated: he sprayed discreetly and walked away before the gas took effect. He targeted the restaurant's only entrance, which is located below street level, ensuring the attack had maximum impact.

The restaurant's owner immediately called the police, who arrived promptly and began searching

the area. After closing, the owner went to the police station to provide details and hand over video evidence. While there, someone announced that a suspect had been found and the owner of the Armenian Tavern asked to see him, but the officers refused, even though in a previous case, they had offered to conduct a lineup.

July 19, Old City, Christian Quarter. An Armenian priest was on his way to a meeting called by the heads of the Churches Senator Chris Van Hollen, a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Near Jaffa Gate, the priest was spat by a Jewish man who shouted that Jerusalem must be cleansed of Christians. The priest chose not to file a police complaint, believing it would be futile, as such attacks are frequent.

July 20, Old City, Station II Via Dolorosa. A group of religious Jews was walking along Via Dolorosa Street. As they passed in front of the Church of the Flagellation, they began spitting and making deliberate spitting noises. One of them said, "Christians should be killed."

August 1, Natural Reserve in the Jerusalem area. A Jewish individual spat at a monk who was taking a walk in the natural reserve.

August 8, Old City, near the New Gate. A group of nuns was spat on. A nearby police officer witnessed the incident and attempted to apprehend the suspects, but they fled and could not be identified.

August 8, West Jerusalem. Four nuns were walking in pairs towards Notre Dame, right before the gate of St. Louis hospital, two people with ultra-Orthodox appearance passed by them. One of them spat at them. The nuns felt humiliated and frightened, and they did not make it to take a picture of the suspects.

August 10, West Jerusalem. Two nuns were driving and stopped at the traffic light on the corner of Shivtei Israel and HaNeviim Streets, waiting for the light to turn green. When the light changed and the car started moving, two Jewish kids threw stones at the car. One stone landed on the roof, while the other hit the window on the driver's side, which fortunately was closed; otherwise, the stone would have hit one of the nuns directly. The car was not damaged, and the sisters did not report the incident to the police, because they felt that they "only got a bit scared."²⁶

²⁶ It is important to mention that such incidents often occur on Shabbat in this area of town, which borders the Ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim. Cars are often targeted for violating the Jewish religious law prohibiting driving on Shabbat. Therefore, it is difficult to consider this incident as purely anti-Christian.

Sometime in September, Old City, Christian Quarter. A local Palestinian Christian was walking back home near Jaffa Gate with a Catholic monk. A Jewish boy, around 15 years old, approached them and spat on the ground in the direction of the monk, who had his cross visible. The local Christian noticed that not far away were standing two policemen whom he knew because of his work. So he called them over to tell what had just happened, and they stopped the boy. They immediately checked with the office overseeing street cameras, who confirmed the spitting incident. The policemen informed the monk that he could file a report, but seeing the boy shivering with fear, the monk and the local Christian only asked the policemen to have the boy apologize. The boy did so, and the local Christian told him in Hebrew that it's simply not nice to spit on people.

September 13, Christian Quarter. A Catholic nun was walking in the Christian Quarter when a young religious Jewish man spat on her dress. Following him, a woman also spat at her.

September 13, West Jerusalem. A Catholic nun was walking towards the French consulate when a group of 4-5 religious Jewish teenagers, dressed in black and white, with skull caps and ritual tassels, approached her. They walked in such a way that forced the nun to move to the side, and one of them spat in her direction.

September 15, West Jerusalem. A foreign Christian got spat at at the bus station on HaNeviim Street near the Swedish Theological Institute.

September 22, Old City. An Armenian procession of priests, monks, and seminarians walked towards the Armenian Patriarchate. A few religious nationalist Jews were standing in front of the David District police station. A young man wearing a kippah and with side curls spat on the ground after the procession passed and stepped on the spit, twisting his foot as if crushing it.

September 28, Netanya. According to social media postings, a young Jewish man attacked two tourists, removed their cross, cursed them, poured water on them, spat, and threw the cross on the ground. The original video was posted on the attackers' social media, and then circulated widely. A police complaint was filed by the victims.

October 17, West Jerusalem. A Capuchin friar was walking through the park near Yemin Moshe, when two Jewish teenagers spat at him. He did not have the time to take out the phone to capture the moment, and did not have a verbal interaction with them.

October 19, West Jerusalem. Three Catholic nuns were standing on HaNeviim Street when a few Jewish individuals walking down the street stumbled and began shouting and cursing. One of them approached the nuns and spat at them rudely. The nuns were frightened because one of the individuals in the group was carrying a weapon.

October 20, Old City, Christian Quarter. Two Armenian priests were walking in the morning from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher when a couple of religious youngsters, sitting on the stairs of the David's Tower Museum, began "clearing their throats" and spitting on the ground. The priests felt intimidated.

October 22, Old City, Armenian Quarter. Three national religious Jewish young men spat towards a monk who passed nearby.

October 22, Old City, Armenian Quarter. A couple of ultra-orthodox religious Jews spat on the floor after an Armenian monk passed nearby.

November 30, West Jerusalem. As a woman was walking down Emile Botta Street, two young men approached her. They greeted the person walking in front of her by saying "Shabbat Shalom," and after passing him, both of them spat at the woman. When she asked why they did it, they replied, "Because of the cross."

November 30, Old City, Jaffa Gate. A woman was walking down the street from Jaffa Gate in the company of another adult and three children, when two women spat on her.

December 2, West Jerusalem. Upon leaving the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem, two young boys spat on a foreign Christian.

December 7, Old City, Armenian Quarter. A religious Jewish man spat on an Armenian deacon at the entrance to the Patriarchate. The deacon reacted to the insult, but around ten other Armenian men who were present intervened, separating them and chasing the man away from the area, amidst mutual curses and shoving.

December 19, Old City, Armenian Quarter. An Armenian priest and seminarians were walking from the Armenian Patriarchate to the building hosting the seminary when two young men dressed as Orthodox Jews spat at them.

December 26, West Jerusalem. A Greek Orthodox priest from the monastery located in the Valley of the Cross park was taking his daily walk when two men on bicycles passed by and spat at him.

Attacks on Church properties: Examples include graffiti, trespassing, damaging statues, throwing of stones and garbage within Church properties, arson.

January 12, West Jerusalem. A group of 3 or 4 young boys belonging to the religious ultra-Orthodox sect known as Berlander set fire to the wall surrounding the Romanian Church, which is located on the border of the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim.

January 24, West Jerusalem. Two glass beer bottles were thrown into the courtyard of the Catholic Polish Monastery, located adjacent to the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim.

March 20, West Jerusalem. Near the Greek Orthodox Monastery of San Simon stands an abandoned building surrounded by a fence. Several youths entered the building and threw stones towards the monastery. The monk living in the compound called the police, who arrived after a long time. They located the youths but claimed they could not take action because the youths were minors. The minors said they threw stones at the monastery because they thought it was empty, even though this is visibly not the case, as the compound is well-maintained and organized, and besides the clergy, two families live there.

April 15, Lower Galilee. Large stones were thrown over the wall into a Franciscan monastery, landing in an area where the monks living there walk, potentially endangering their lives.

April 28, Tabgha. An attempt was made to steal money from the Church of Mensa Christi. Three young men entered the church and tried to take money from the donation box. The church father saw them and asked them to leave, but it wasn't easy. Fortunately, hawkers in the area helped the abbot get the men out to the sidewalk.

May 6, Galilee. Large stones were thrown over the wall and into a Franciscan monastery.

May 16, West Jerusalem. Around 22:25 the people living in the compound of the community of the Sisters of Saint Joseph on HaNeviim Street heard several loud crashes coming from the outside. Alerted by the noise, members of the community walked into the courtyard and found several garbage bags which had landed just inside the main gate of the compound. The wall and the gate of the compound are quite tall, and it was surprising to see the effort it must have taken to throw the bags over it. Upon opening the door, towards the street, the members of the community found that two other bags had been left outside the gate, on HaNeviim Street.

June 1, Galilee. Large stones were thrown over the wall and into a Franciscan monastery.

June 17, Galilee. A cross was removed from the gate of a Franciscan monastery and large stones were thrown inside the property.

July 3, Galilee. From the 1st to the 3rd of July 2024, during his morning strolls in the garden, a monk living in a Franciscan monastery found several stones which he assumed had been thrown overnight or in the early mornings. Some of these stones had fallen into the courtyard area, while others were found on the protective wall surrounding the precinct.

July 6, Mount of Beatitudes. A small house used for silent retreats, located on the grounds of the Mount of Beatitudes Church, was broken into. All the items inside, including sacred objects, were either destroyed, thrown away, or stolen.

July 10, West Jerusalem. A piece of wood landed in the courtyard of the convent of the Salesian sisters in the neighborhood of Musrara. The object was quite

large, approximately one meter in length, and featured a wheel at one end, as if it was the leg of a piece of furniture. It is important to note that a street separates the Salesian House from the building from which the object was thrown, suggesting that the action was intentional. Without such intent, the object would likely have landed on the street beyond. This incident should be considered in light of previous occurrences, where objects have been thrown into the courtyard from the building across the street. These objects commonly include plastic toys, marbles, and occasionally rotten fruit or tomatoes. On one occasion, water was thrown over clothes that were line-drying, requiring a complete rewash. Stones have also been thrown into the yard on rare occasions.

June 12, Old City, Mount Zion. Bottles were thrown over the wall into the Church At-Coenaculum.

June 12, Old City, Armenian Quarter. An ultra-Orthodox young man spat in the direction of the Armenian Seminary.

June 12, Old City, Armenian Quarter. At a different time, another two other young men spat into the portal of the Armenian Patriarchate.

July 19, Old City, Mount Zion. In the morning, it was discovered that a glass bottle of Coca-Cola had been thrown into the courtyard of the Franciscan Monastery on Mt. Zion. Small pieces of glass were scattered throughout the yard.

August 13, Old City, Station II Via Dolorosa. A boy passing by the Second station of the Via Dolorosa spat on the wall of the Franciscan compound of the Flagellation.

August 13, Old City, Station II Via Dolorosa. A Jewish man spat at the Franciscan compound of

the Flagellation and when confronted about why he spat he replied: "Do you want to understand why? I'll explain it to you with blows." He claimed that it is a mitzvah to disgrace idolatry (referring to Christian symbols and sacred spaces) and stated that he does not recognize any rabbi except a particular rabbi. He implied that he might listen if that rabbi were to forbid such actions.

August 16 Migdal HaEmek. In the late evening of August 16, the Father in charge of the Franciscan monastery heard some youngsters outside of the convent. When he checked the courtyard, he found some stones which were thrown over the wall from the area of the main entrance to the complex.

In the middle of the night of Sunday **August 18th**, stones were thrown into the compound once again.

September 28, West Jerusalem. The nuns of the Polish Catholic monastery, situated on the border of the Mea Shearim neighborhood, witnessed an incident where some ultra-Orthodox children threw stones and glass shards at the monastery and into its yard. When one of the nuns went outside to photograph the children, they threw stones at her, forcing her to run away.

October 2, Old City, Station II Via Dolorosa. An Orthodox Jewish man passed by the entrance of the Flagellation Church at the Second Station of the Via Dolorosa. He cursed the guard of the Franciscan compound and spat at him. The soldiers on duty intervened, escorting the man away from the scene. However, he returned twice afterward.

October 5, Old City, Mount Zion. At 09:00 am, the opening time of the Dormition Abbey, two young Jewish men were already waiting in front of the gates, expressing their interest in entering. After the workers at the abbey explained to them that the location is a Christian church and that they were welcome to visit if they felt comfortable

doing so, they agreed to proceed. One of the staff members followed them from a distance, and upon hearing spitting sounds, he quickly approached them and escorted them outside. He asked if they had spat, to which they denied it. He then instructed them to leave and informed them that he would contact the police, prompting them to leave at that moment. However, moments later, they returned and apologized, admitting to having spat (though the target of their actions was unclear), and asked that the police not be called. They expressed respect for the Christian place and conveyed their apologies for the incident.

October 11, Old City, Station II of the Via Dolorosa. A group of religious youth passed by the Monastery of the Flagellation and spat through the door.

October 15, Old City, Christian Quarter. A Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) father was walking with his three young children when they passed by Christ Church. He explained to his children that it is customary to spit when passing a place of idolatry, presenting it as a "halachic²⁷ obligation." His tone did not convey hatred or hostility.

Our colleague Hana Bendcowsky happened to witness the interaction and confronted him, expressing that he was teaching his children to spit on Christians. He appeared somewhat embarrassed and clarified that he was not instructing them to spit on people or on churches, but just on the ground. Hana explained that such behavior was offensive and emphasized that there is no halachic obligation to engage in such actions. He quickly hurried his children

along, who were watching the exchange with curiosity. It was clear that he was uncomfortable with the whole interaction.

October 18, Old City, Mount Zion. A car was parked in front of the entrance to the Ad Cenacle Monastery which belongs to the Franciscan Order. The car was completely blocking the passage and preventing entry or exit through the gate. The vehicle was reported at 7:30 AM. The police, unable to contact the driver due to the lack of a phone number, dispatched officers to the scene.

Around 8:15 AM, the driver returned and moved the car. A Franciscan friar living in the monastery attempted to speak with him, but the driver claimed not to know English and instead spoke with the police.

October 20, Old City, Armenian Quarter. A ultra-Orthodox nationalist (*Hardal*) man was seen spitting at the gate of the Armenian monastery.

October 21, Old City, Mt. Zion, Near the Ad-Caenaculum Monastery. At approximately 11:30 PM, a car was parked in front of the entrance to the Franciscan Ad Cenacle Monastery, completely blocking the passage and preventing entry or exit. The lawyer contacted the police, and the vehicle was subsequently removed.

October 22, Old City, Armenian Quarter. An Ultra-Orthodox man spat just before the gate of the Armenian Patriarchate.

October 22, Old City, Muslim Quarter. During

the holiday of Sukkot, a group of Jewish men passed by the Franciscan compound at the Second Station of the Via Dolorosa. In a video filmed from inside the garden, one man is seen spitting at the entrance of the compound.

October 22, Old City, Mount Zion. A Hardali man spat right after passing the gate of the Patriarchate.

October 22, Old City, Muslim Quarter. At the Austrian Hospice junction in the Old City, several boys spat at a church. The suspects were identified through police surveillance cameras, and a police force was dispatched to apprehend them. The assault was clearly captured by the police cameras.

November 20, West Jerusalem. As the Polish sisters living at the monastery bordering Mea Shearim were closing the gate of the compound, three Jewish boys began spitting and calling out the name of the Lord Jesus. One of them then threw the wheel chock, which had been placed under the wheels, against the wall and the gate. Additionally, an eight-year-old boy placed a stone to block the use of the compound gate. When the sisters finally managed to open it, the boy spat at them. They immediately called 100, and the police arrived at the scene. Security camera footage helped identify the boy.

December 20, Fassouta. A statue of the Virgin Mary, situated at the entrance of the village of Fassouta in the Galilee, was vandalized by a religious Jewish man. The perpetrator shattered the protective glass surrounding the statue, along with other decorative elements. A local resident apprehended the suspect, who was subsequently handed over to the Israeli police for further investigation.

December 24, Old City, Mount Zion. Overnight, the walls of the Dormition Abbey and the neighboring Franciscan monastery were vandalized with graffiti reading 'Death to Arabs.' Additionally, rotten

vegetables were thrown against the walls and one window leaving stains.

Harassment

Examples include verbal harassment, attacks and protests during Christian gathering, anti-Christian propaganda.

March 28, Old City, Mount Zion. On Maundy Thursday, during Holy Week before Latin Catholic Easter, a Jewish man entered the Cenacle prior to the beginning of the traditional foot-washing ceremony. He attempted to disrupt the service, but a policeman was called, and the man was escorted out before the ceremony began.

April 9, Old City, Jewish Quarter. An unauthorized sign has been installed, seemingly by activists who have placed similar signs in other parts of the Quarter. This sign makes problematic comparisons between Crusader violence and the actions of Nazis and Hamas, even referencing the October 7 violence with an emphasis on religious identity. The incident likely occurred as a response to the ongoing renovation in the Cardo area of the Jewish Quarter, focusing on the section from the Crusader period under the theme "1,500 Years of Commercial History." While previous unauthorized signs were successfully removed with the municipality's cooperation, this particular sign's depiction of Crusader violence—without proper historical context—is offensive to Christians and misrepresents the historical narrative.

April 27, Old City, Armenian Quarter. On Saturday afternoon during Passover, a procession of Armenians was on his way returning to the Patriarchate. At the corner of St. James Street and Armenian Patriarchate Street, a Jewish man wearing a kippah shouted offensive remarks, including 'Jesus is gay' and 'Jesus is a whore.' The policeman present at the scene intervened and moved him away.

27 The term “halachic” relates to “halacha” (sometimes spelled “halakha” or “halakhah”), which is the collective body of Jewish religious laws derived from the written and oral Torah. It encompasses a wide range of commandments, customs, and traditions governing various aspects of Jewish life, including religious practices, ethical behavior, and civil matters. Halachic principles guide how observant Jews live their daily lives, including prayer, dietary laws (kashrut), Sabbath observance, festivals, family purity, and more. Halachic rulings are interpreted and applied by rabbis and legal scholars through an extensive body of rabbinic literature.



An Eastern Orthodox worshipper lights candles at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | Photo: Adi Marer

June 9, Old City, Mount Zion. During the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, a group of 11 pilgrims and priests attempted to visit the site of King David's Tomb. They were advised to arrive without robes and crosses, but despite this, they were met by a group of about 50 religious Jewish students on a school trip, accompanied by their teachers, who cursed at them and shouted obscenities. The pilgrims then tried to approach the site via a different route, but once again encountered Jewish individuals who shouted at them and used abusive language. Ultimately, the group decided to abandon their visit to King David's Tomb.

June 22, Old City, Mount Zion area. A group of Greek Orthodox pilgrims stood outside of the compound of King David's Tomb on Mount Zion, when a crowd of young Jews shouted at them "Go away" till the pilgrims left.

Sometime in July, West Jerusalem. A Christian resident of East Jerusalem who was due to receive an ultrasound examination experienced refusal of medical service at a clinic in West Jerusalem.

July 13, Old City, Mount Zion. A Franciscan friar living at the monastery on Mount Zion was harassed by an Orthodox Jewish teenager, approximately 14 years old. The friar was standing outside the main door of the monastery with two suitcases when the boy grabbed the smaller one. Upon noticing this, the friar rushed to chase the boy, who dropped the suitcase and ran toward the Cenacle, only to return moments later. The teenager then started making violent gestures and cursing at the friar. When the friar took out his mobile phone to record the incident, the teenager fled and did not return. The entire event was captured on camera, and the video was submitted to the community police responsible for the Mount Zion area.

The following day the lawyer from the Custodia approached the police station at Jaffa Gate to file a complaint. The officer there said he would not open the complaint as they prefer the matter to be first handled at the community level, and only if there is no resolution after a few days should we return to file a complaint. The attempts to explain the importance of opening a complaint, given that this was an attempted robbery and considering the sensitivity of the matter and the importance of documenting such incidents of violence against Christians, fell on deaf ears. Ultimately, the complaint was filed. On August 30, a letter was received from the police stating that since no suspects were found, the case was closed. The attorney representing the Franciscan Custodia was updated.

July 18, West Jerusalem. A group of evangelicals, believed to be from Korea or a nearby area, were singing evangelical songs. As part of a solidarity delegation, Otzma Yehudit politician Bentzi Gofstein and his assistants approached the group, dispersing them through shouting and aggressive behavior.

September 10, West Jerusalem. While waiting at the bus stop, an Orthodox Jewish man, appearing to be from the Chabad community, approached me and asked, "Do you speak English? God wants you to get married and have children. You need to stop doing what you're doing; it doesn't go anywhere." After leaving and then returning, he repeated, "God wants you to get married and have children," pointing at my priestly collar and saying, "It's a waste of time what you're doing." He turned around again, came back one last time, and handed me a card with the 7 Laws of Noah.

October 30, West Jerusalem. A woman who regularly collects money in the market has repeatedly verbally harassed some Russian nuns while they run their errands at the market.

November 26, Old City, Armenian Quarter. An Armenian deacon was approached by a religious Jew who was singing a verse from Psalms. Upon seeing the deacon in his clerical attire, harsh words were directed towards Jesus and Christianity. While attempts were made to quiet him, the man continued to speak louder and more provocatively. The situation escalated into mutual pushing, and the police intervened.

December 2, Checkpoints: Allenby, Al-Jib and Hezma. A group of 10 nuns and priests from the Coptic Church were held for an extended period at various checkpoints. The soldiers, unfamiliar with the new visas that the clergy members receive and unaware that clergy can drive diplomatic vehicles even if they are not diplomats, addressed them and behaved disrespectfully. The soldiers subjected the group to invasive questioning and demanded that the nuns remove their glasses for facial recognition, which the nuns perceived as humiliating.

December 23, Kiryat Motzkin. An inspector from the municipality of Kiryat Motzkin decided that a ribbon decoration on a cosmetics studio in a local shop was, in fact, a swastika—a symbol prohibited by law. The shop owner, who appears to be of Russian origin based on her name, claimed it was a bow tie. However, in a video, a man is seen trying to explain to the inspector that it is simply a cross, a symbol and expression of Christian faith, which is not illegal. Despite this, the inspector insisted and issued them a fine. Journalist Yoseph Haddad posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, the response from the Kiryat Motzkin municipality, but there is no evidence of this response—no quotes or images—anywhere else:

"Yesterday, a report was received about a store displaying a swastika at its entrance. A municipal inspection vehicle immediately arrived at the location to verify the information. During the inspector's stay at the scene, it became clear that the information was incorrect. A conversation took place between the inspector and the store



Franciscan monks walk in the Palm Sunday procession. Clergy is the primary target of verbal attacks and spitting | Photo: Adi Marer

owner, which was not conducted in a manner we find acceptable. This incident will be reviewed and analyzed to ensure such occurrences do not happen again. It should be noted that the inspector left the location without issuing a ticket or warning to the store owner. This morning, the mayor of Kiryat Motzkin, Tsiki Avishar, along with the municipal CEO, Yaniv Ashur, the head of the security department, the inspection manager, and the inspector himself, visited the store. They apologized to the owner for the unfortunate incident and parted on friendly and positive terms. The Kiryat Motzkin municipality, as a representative of a city with a rich and diverse population, operates according to the values of pluralism and freedom of religion. This is evident in the Hai Park complex, the city's tourism gem, which is adorned in honor of Christmas with all the holiday's characteristic symbols, as part of the Lights Exhibition combining Hanukkah and Christmas celebrations."

Public signs defaced:

January 1, Abu Gosh. The signs in Abu Ghosh directing visitors to the churches were vandalized, with the crosses spray-painted black.

January 25, Old City, Mount Zion. The sign at the entrance of the Last Supper was defaced.

February 2, Ein Karem. The sign providing information about the site of Mary's Spring was defaced, with the words "Miryam" and "Yeshu" specifically erased.

March 10, Ein Karem. The sign at the Well of Mary in Ein Karem was vandalized with black spray paint.

March 28, Old City, Mount Zion. The sign indicating the Last Supper Room was defaced.

March 29, Beit Shean Valley. A sign pointing to the remains of the Kiri Mary Monastery (along the bridge path in Nahal Harod) was vandalized, with words potentially related to Christianity, such as "monastery," deliberately erased.

May 5, Latroun. Graffiti of a Star of David was drawn on the monument of the Latroun Benedictine Monastery. Additionally, every word referring to Christian or Muslim content was erased with spray paint.

May 27, Galilee. The road signpost directing to the church of Tabgha the Tabgha junction was vandalized.

May 27, Galilee. A road signpost indicating the Mount of Beatitudes was vandalized on both sides.

June 2, Road to Beit Shemesh and Beit Jamal. The road sign to Deir Rafat was vandalized, with the church symbol covered in spray paint. Additionally, tourist signs (brown road signs) were also targeted: the cross symbol was erased from the signs directing to both the Deir Rafat Monastery and the Beit Jamal Monastery.

August 20, West Jerusalem. The text in Hebrew on the sign providing historical information

about the Salesian Monastery was erased, though it is unclear who was responsible or when exactly the vandalism occurred.

October 26, Road to Deir Rafat, near the Beit Shemesh. The sign displaying the symbol of the monastery was vandalized for the second time.

November 21, Latroun Benedictine Monastery. A monument of the Latroun Benedictine Monastery, honoring clerics of all three monotheistic religions, was vandalized with paint. According to the Council for the Preservation of Sites, who had cleaned the monument after the previous vandalism incident, the paint and the type of damage were similar to the prior occurrence which took place in May 2024.

November 29, Old City, Christian Quarter. A picture of Mary on Santa Helena Street was torn down from where it had been hanging for the past few years.

Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FOrB) and Church-State relations: examples include requests to remove religious symbols, limitations of access to religious sites, limitations in freedom of movement to attend religious services etc.

May 4, Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Old City. As in previous years, restrictions were imposed on the number of people allowed to attend the Holy Fire Ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on the occasion of Eastern Easter. Similar to the events of 2023, in May 2024, police erected barriers restricting access to the Christian Quarter of the Old City. Only approximately 4,200 pilgrims were permitted in the area surrounding the Holy Sepulcher, with fewer than 2,000 granted entry into the church itself to witness the ceremony. Pilgrims and church leaders expressed frustration over the heavy-handed

behavior of the police and the conspicuous presence of armed officers inside the church.

August 16, Mount Tabor, Galilee. Refusal to let Greek Orthodox Christians celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. In preparation for the Feast of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, the police informed the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate that it does not permit any procession to the mountain during the holiday, and assembly on the mountain in the churches and the open spaces around it, due to lack of approval from the fire department and the absence of an event manager as required by the police since the Meron disaster for any mass event. The church did not appoint an event manager but expressed protest against preventing the gathering of pilgrims, viewing it as a violation of religious freedom. The police, on their part, are concerned about the potential risk and security danger that could arise in the place. On August 16, the Patriarchate published a statement and the police order. In practice, about 170-200 people attended the event. The event again reflects the complexity of the situation on Mount Tabor. There are no infrastructures, and the tradition that was previously accepted, of having barbecues on the mountain around the monastery, adds to the concerns of the fire department.

October 7, Haifa. On October 7, the mother of fallen Staff Sgt. David Bogdanovsky visited his tomb during the official ceremony to remember fallen soldiers at the Haifa cemetery, only to find that it had been covered with a black cloth to conceal the cross. According to reports, the Ministry of Defense permits the placement of a personal gravestone next to the military gravestone, and there is no distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish graves. However, the military rabbi ruled that the gravestone should be removed. Jewish families requested the relocation of their son's grave from the area, claiming that the cross was offensive to them. Media reports indicate that the Ministry of Defense asked the family to remove the tomb.

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