

**OFFICE OF JUSTICE, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT**  
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To  
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Honourable Shri Salman Khurshid,

The Justice, Peace and Development Office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, which is a member of Pax Christi International, is happy that the government of India is maintaining healthy diplomatic ties and trade relationship with Israel. However, we are greatly concerned over Israel's plans to build a wall on the land of 58 Christian families in the Cremisan Valley, near Bethlehem. We have heard the pain and anguish of the families in Beit Jala faced with the threatened loss of their land and livelihood. We are deeply pained to learn that the planned wall will destroy vineyards, groves and orchards and separate people from their land. The most deplorable consequence of the proposed wall construction will be the difficulties that children will encounter trying to access their school in one of the convents in the valley.

We are also appalled to know that the planned route of the wall deviates sharply from the Green Line, the internationally-recognised demarcation line separating Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories captured in the six-day war of June 1967. More than three quarters of the wall's planned route is illegal, according to a landmark advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in 2004. It is also a flagrant breach of the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Our deep concern is that this planned wall will consolidate the Israeli settlement areas and permanently cut off Bethlehem from Jerusalem, and create a situation which incites resentment and mistrust, making the possibility of a much-needed solution less likely.

In this context, even as the Israeli Supreme Court Hearing on the construction of a separation wall in the Cremisan Valley starts today (29 January 2014), we urge your ministry to put its weight behind the international community's efforts to restrain Israel from building the illegal wall, to protect the livelihoods of these 58 families and ensure justice for them, and to protect the people of the parish of Beit Jala from further expropriation of their land and homes.

Seeking your ministry's intervention in favour of a just peace in the Holy Land, I remain

Yours truly,

*Fr. S. Charles*

Rev Dr Charles Irudayam

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