

October 31, 2018

The Honorable Michael Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

After months of uncertainty and anxiety, it is to the deepest distress of Christians in the Holy Land and around the world that the Israeli Knesset is once again debating legislation that would allow state expropriation of Church lands. The Tenant Rights law is expected to be up again for a vote in early November. [In a letter](#) sent to Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem denounced this decision as in “flagrant disregard” of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s earlier “reassurance given to the Heads of Churches.”

The extent to which the Jerusalem Patriarchs and Heads of Churches consider this legislation to be an existential threat cannot be overstated. When the bill was first introduced this past February (concurrently with a proposed municipal tax on church property) the Heads of Churches protested by [closing the Church of the Holy Sepulchre](#) in a historic act of solidarity. In response, eighteen religious leaders in the U.S., representing a diverse spectrum of Christianity, wrote to [President Trump](#) expressing the need to protect the vulnerable Christian community in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Mr. Secretary, all efforts must be made so that a similar crisis may be avoided.

On Sunday October 22, when the legislation was originally scheduled for a vote, Representatives Gus Bilirakis and Ted Deutch wrote to Prime Minister Netanyahu expressing their concerns on behalf of the International Religious Freedom Caucus. The Prime Minister intervened, and the vote has subsequently been postponed until November 4. Mr. Secretary, as faith-leaders in the United States, we ask as this critical date approaches that you work with the appropriate representatives of the Israeli government to ensure that this bill is halted permanently.

Mr. Secretary, our concern is for the situation of the Christian community in the Holy Land. We fear that this act could radically diminish the strength of the Christian presence in Jerusalem by imposing severe financial constraints upon churches. The maintenance of international religious freedom should be of utmost importance for the United States. And as the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem noted, “the disastrous impact of the crisis on the fabric of relations between the State [of Israel] and the Church” is neither in the interests of Christians, Israel, nor the United States.

Respectfully,

Alliance of Baptists

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

Armenian Orthodox Church

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Churches for Middle East Peace

Church of the Brethren

The Episcopal Church

Evangelical Covenant Church, Serve Globally

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

National Council of Churches

Presbyterian Church (USA)

United Church of Christ

The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society