



# PERSPECTIVES

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## The Persecution of Christians in the Palestinian Authority

by Dr. Edy Cohen

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The ongoing international neglect of the plight of the Christians under PA rule could lead to the disappearance of Christianity in the place where it emerged.

Three grave events occurred recently involving Christians in the territories ruled by the Palestinian Authority (PA). They left no mark on either the world or the Israeli media because they are not connected to Israel.

On April 25, the terrified residents of the Christian village of Jifna near Ramallah asked the PA to protect them after they were attacked by Muslim gunmen. The violence erupted after a woman from the village submitted a complaint to the police that the son of a prominent, Fatah-affiliated leader had attacked her family. In response, dozens of Fatah gunmen came to the village, fired hundreds of bullets in the air, threw petrol bombs while shouting curses, and caused severe damage to public property. It was a miracle that there were no dead or wounded.

Despite the residents' cries for help, the PA police did not intervene during the hours of mayhem. They have not arrested any suspects. Interestingly, the rioters called on the residents to pay *jizya*—a head tax that was levied throughout history on non-Muslim minorities under Islamic rule. The most recent victims of the *jizya* were the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria under ISIS rule.

The second incident occurred during the night of May 13. Vandals broke into a church of the Maronite community in the center of Bethlehem, desecrated it, and stole expensive equipment belonging to the church, including the security cameras.

Three days later it was the turn of the Anglican church in the village of Aboud, west of Ramallah. Vandals cut through the fence, broke the windows of the church, and

broke in. They desecrated it, looked for valuable items, and stole a great deal of equipment.

As in the two previous incidents, no suspects were arrested.

According to its Facebook page, this is the sixth time the Maronite church in Bethlehem has been subjected to acts of vandalism and theft, including an arson attack in 2015 that caused considerable damage and forced the church to close for a lengthy period. However, even though Mahmoud Abbas himself was present on December 24, 2018, at the party to mark the church's reopening after it was renovated, the arson, in addition to acts of rioting and vandalism over the years, have received no coverage in the Palestinian media. In fact, a full gag order was imposed in many cases.

It is unlikely that the latest wave of attacks will lead to the arrest, let alone prosecution, of any suspects. The only thing that interests the PA is that events of this kind not be leaked to the media. Fatah regularly exerts heavy pressure on Christians not to report the acts of violence and vandalism from which they frequently suffer, as such publicity could damage the PA's image as an actor capable of protecting the lives and property of the Christian minority under its rule. Even less does the PA want to be depicted as a radical entity that persecutes religious minorities. That image could have negative repercussions for the massive international, and particularly European, aid the PA receives.

Though the Christians in the PA avoid saying so publicly, many of them fear – with good reason – that Muslim aggression against them will only escalate. Such fears are all the stronger in light of the thunderous silence of the Western (and Israeli) media in the face of the Christian minority's ongoing disappearance from the PA and Islamic lands in general – in striking contrast to the growth, prosperity, and increasing integration of the Christian community in Israel proper. The Christians of the Western world must demand that the PA arrest the suspects in the latest attacks and begin guarding the Christian places of worship under its rule. The ongoing international neglect of the plight of the Christians under PA rule can only lead to the vanishing of Christianity from the place where it emerged.

*Dr. Edy Cohen is a researcher at the BESA Center and author of the book The Holocaust in the Eyes of Mahmoud Abbas (Hebrew).*