

## Consequences of Uncertainty

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There's always uncertainty in the Middle East -- it's almost the definition of the place. But the combination of "Arab Spring," the connection to Hamas and a possible UN vote on Palestinian statehood has increased the tension and the stakes. One sad result is a financial crisis in the West Bank. Arab nations which give financial support have pulled back, the US has followed suit, and the Israeli government has also reduced the funds they return to the West Bank from the taxes that residents pay.

Salaries for government employees have been cut substantially according to the *New York Times* and publicly funded construction has been halted. Let's be clear -- salaries in the public arena weren't great to begin with. Now families are trying to make do with less of very little. As school fees become due in September, this will place an added strain on families.

At the recent International Conference on Christians in the Holy Land, hosted in London in July by Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury and Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, a fund was established in the UK to provide humanitarian aid to the region. The Rt. Rev. Suheil Dawani, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem spoke passionately at the conference about the need: "Unless the situation changes, Christians of the Holy Land who trace their roots back to the time of Christ, will be no more



than a memory. There will no longer be a vital, living, witnessing Church. Instead, these churches will become museums. The time for change is long overdue; the time for change has come." A world-wide effort is needed and needed now.

Jerusalem is the root of our faith tradition, the only place on earth that is physically connected to the origins of our religious heritage. If we fail to water that root, it will wither. There's an urgent need, articulated by the Archbishop and leaders of all the Christian denominations, for help to sustain indigenous Christians. Scholarship aid, supplies for health clinics, grants for physical therapy, books, job training all need international support, your support. AFEDJ provides more ongoing funding to the people of the Diocese of Jerusalem than any other source. This is thanks to your generosity and your commitment to sustaining the Christian message of reconciliation in a volatile place. Your gifts provide for important daily needs, but they also convey the care and love we have for them as brothers and sisters.

The Christian residents of the Holy Land are under pressure from every side. If they all leave, a real possibility, there are many who believe that the place which gave birth to the three Abrahamic

faiths will no longer function as a pluralistic society. Issues of land use, water, personal freedom and sovereignty will be viewed as religious conflicts unless there are many denominations represented. Christians can represent neutrality, a buffer.

George's family lives in Ramallah. His father is permanently disabled from a job accident and can no longer work. His mother finds occasional work as a house cleaner. The four children are bright and would like to finish school and attend university. An AFEDJ donor was eager to provide George with a full scholarship to the hotel management course at the Vocational Technical School when they heard his story. He'll be able to get a good job in just two years. That gift will change not just George's future, but that of his entire family. We need to support these struggling people in their everyday lives so they can maintain their communities. Otherwise, how do we educate the future leaders who will find a way toward peace through this tangle web? Who will offer compassionate care to those with traumatic injury or chronic illness? It's us. We can make that difference. And we need to do it now.