The Revolutionary Priest Manuel Musallam

Listen, Oh Palestine

Mohammed Mohammed Almasri

Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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Beirut - Lebanon

The Revolutionary Priest Manuel Musallam: Listen, Oh Palestine

الكاهن الثائر منويل مسلّم: اسمعي يا فلسطين

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"*…and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant*."

Surat al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread with Food): 82

Dedication

To my father, may Allah preserve him

To beloved Palestine

And to our righteous martyrs and brave prisoners

I humbly dedicate this modest work to you

Acknowledgment and Gratitude

Praise be to *Allah*, Lord of the Worlds, and the blessings and peace be upon His Messenger.

I extend my deepest appreciation to Dr. Nihad Muhammad al-Shaikh Khalil, Prof. Dr. Usamah Muhammad Abu Nahl and Prof. Dr. Zakariyya Ibrahim al-Sinwar for their gracious contribution in presenting the book "*The Revolutionary Priest Manuel Musallam: Listen, Oh Palestine*."

My sincere thanks go to His Eminence Monsignor Father Manuel Musallam, who generously answered many questions that enriched this study. I am also grateful to Dr. Ahmad Yusuf and the House of Wisdom Institute in Gaza Strip for providing numerous references that greatly supported the preparation of this study. Special thanks as well to my friend and companion, researcher Yahya Nabil al-Masri, for his assistance in translating several foreign-language sources.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to the completion of this study.

Foreword 1:

Dr. Nihad Muhammad al-Shaikh Khalil

Professor of Modern and Contemporary History

The Islamic University of Gaza

The relationship between Christians and Muslims in Palestine has long been characterized by brotherhood and coexistence. This bond transcended simple neighborly ties, evolving into a deep national partnership that spanned all spheres—ranging from the national struggle and religious tolerance to knowledge production and contributions to relief, development and economic activity.

The roots of this harmonious relationship lie in the fact that Palestine is the birthplace of Prophet Jesus (*'Isa*) (AS) and home to several of Christianity's holiest sites, including the Church of the Nativity, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Annunciation, as well as numerous bishoprics and monasteries. When Muslim armies entered Palestine in the 7th century CE, they were welcomed by the local Christian population, who viewed them as liberators from the oppressive Byzantine rule. Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab famously received the keys to Jerusalem from Patriarch Sophronius and entered the city peacefully. He granted its inhabitants what came to be known as the "Covenant of 'Umar," one of the most notable documents in the history of interfaith relations, establishing principles of tolerance and coexistence among people of different faiths. Under this covenant, Christians were granted a form of self-governance in managing their religious, cultural, economic and social affairs.

This relationship endured throughout Islamic history, with Christians actively contributing to the production of civilizational knowledge, most notably through the translation of Greek and Roman works into Arabic. Their role also extended to the defense of *Bilad al-Sham* (present-day Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon) against the Frankish (Crusader) invasions. During WWI, when the British occupied Palestine, Christians and Muslims stood united, forming Muslim-Christian

Associations (MCAs) and electing representatives to the First Palestinian Arab Congress and subsequent assemblies. Through the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Congress, they laid the foundation for Palestinian political leadership and worked together toward independence. This shared commitment to the Palestine issue persisted over time, with Christian figures emerging as prominent intellectuals, activists, political leaders, patriotic entrepreneurs, and pioneers in charitable, relief and development efforts.

Father Manuel Musallam has been a true and faithful embodiment of this rich civilizational heritage, deeply committed to preserving, advancing and enriching it. Our esteemed researcher, Mohammed Almasri, who undertook the task of writing this study on Father Musallam, is a dedicated scholar who took on a demanding assignment. Writing contemporary history is no easy task; it requires both courage, given its potential to invite criticism, and sharp intellect to skillfully gather, analyze and synthesize sources into a work of this caliber.

Mohammed Almasri brings together both courage and sharp intellect; qualities that were instrumental in completing this study. He was further supported by the powerful and respected presence of Father Manuel Musallam in the Palestinian national arena. Father Musallam is known for consistently voicing political and national positions, actively engaging in committees and public initiatives, and putting forward proposals to improve the Palestinian conditions. His efforts also extend to preserving social cohesion and fostering reconciliation; among Christians, among Muslims, and between both communities.

Mohammed Almasri skillfully collected and presented the material, offering Palestinian and Arab readers a compelling and authentic portrait of Father Manuel Musallam and his multifaceted roles. He clearly conveyed the deep influence of religious values on Father Musallam's national consciousness; values such as tolerance, generosity, solidarity, rejection of injustice, and the pursuit of justice. Almasri showed how these principles fueled and shaped Father Musallam's dedication to public service on behalf of Palestine and its people, both Muslim and Christian. He also highlighted the formative role of Musallam's social environment; growing up in conditions that mirrored the broader Palestinian experience, where children worked alongside their parents to make a living. Through this lived

reality, Father Musallam came to understand the profound connection between Palestinians and their land; a source of sustenance for all: tilled for food, molded into bricks for homes, or fashioned into ovens to bake bread. This deep rootedness in the land instilled in him, as in many Palestinians, a powerful sense of its worth and a steadfast resolve to fight for its liberation.

In every position he held, Father Manuel Musallam dedicated himself to serving the homeland, whether through the Church, in schools, in national committees, or in public initiatives. He also used various platforms to express his views and launch initiatives aimed at reforming the Palestinian conditions, strengthening their resilience against the Israeli occupation, and enhancing their ability to confront it.

8/4/2023

Foreword 2:

Prof. Dr. Usamah Muhammad Abu Nahl

Professor of Modern and Contemporary History

Azhar University – Gaza Strip

The book before us is, in essence, the result of an academic study submitted by the author to earn a master's degree in modern and contemporary history at The Islamic University of Gaza (Palestine). I had the honor of serving on the thesis defense committee at the time. And truth be told, the study stood out as exceptional, earning the admiration and approval of the examining panel. As the first serious academic work to examine the struggle and legacy of a prominent religious figure such as Father Manuel Musallam, this study fills a notable gap. I am equally honored to contribute this modest foreword to a book that documents the journey of a truly national figure—one who, in addressing the Palestine issue, made no distinction between the various components of the Palestinian people, whether Muslim or Christian. Such qualities reflect the charisma of a leader like Father Manuel Musallam.

Mohammed Almasri, our esteemed author, is widely recognized for his academic excellence and perseverance, qualities clearly reflected in the depth of connection, analysis, reasoning and insight throughout this work. His book explores the life of a prominent Palestinian national figure, Father Manuel Musallam, a man deeply respected across the diverse segments of the Palestinian community. Almasri skillfully organizes his ideas and interweaves a range of themes to arrive at a conclusion rich in meaning and substance, one that merits serious reflection. His thoughtful structure and effective use of these themes have resulted in a distinctive and commendable work, worthy of publication.

It is abundantly clear that the author's voice comes through in the pages of this book. He skillfully chose a modern and fitting title through which he explores the life of the national struggler, Father Manuel Musallam. To shed light on such a figure, it was necessary to delve into numerous details and offer reflections and perspectives. Through his writing, the author seeks to express his thoughts on this

charismatic personality, an endeavor that invites deeper consideration, especially given the limited information available about the subject of the biography.

The author not only presents a compelling analysis of Father Musallam's life as detailed throughout the book, but also skillfully applies the descriptive-analytical method, giving the work both scholarly depth and the political and educational weight of Father Musallam's legacy.

As the author notes in the introduction, the significance of the book lies in its exploration of Father Musallam's national role, demonstrated through his engagement with national frameworks and his political positions on key issues affecting the Palestinian people; such as Jerusalem and its holy sites, refugees, prisoners, settlement expansion and Palestinian resistance. The book also highlights his initiatives to reform the Palestinian political system, represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA), end the internal schism, advance the electoral process, and clarify his stance on Christian Zionism and Israeli practices against the Palestinian people. In addition, it addresses his views on Arab and international policies and initiatives related to the Palestine issue, his contributions to charitable and cultural work, building on the legacy of earlier Palestinian Christians, and his efforts to strengthen Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine.

Since the early 20th century, modern Palestinian history has consistently featured patriotic Palestinian Christian figures who played influential political and social roles. These individuals helped strengthen national unity and, in various ways, shaped the course of the Palestinian national movement. Among them is the subject of this biography, Father Manuel Musallam. The book at hand explores a range of highly significant themes centered on the life of a deeply committed national religious figure, a man whose kind has become exceedingly rare. These are serious, reality-based themes that reflect the essence of the Palestinian condition. In both concept and content, the book represents a contribution worthy of close and thoughtful reading.

Therefore, this distinguished and important book deserves to be published, so that the Palestinian people, particularly Palestinian and Arab intellectuals, can engage with it, explore the depth of this national figure, and reflect on his most significant achievements and patriotic positions.

4/4/2023

Foreword 3:

Prof. Dr. Zakariyya Ibrahim al-Sinwar

Professor of Modern and Contemporary History
The Islamic University of Gaza

When it comes to the homeland and its issues, differences dissolve and barriers fall. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, the educated and the illiterate, the seasoned and the simple, Muslims and Christians, the devout and the secular… all are united in a single cause: the defense of the homeland.

This is true in general, but even more so when the homeland in question is Palestine; held in special regard in Islam, the cradle of Christianity, and the wellspring from which faith and history spread across the earth!

I was pleased to see a researcher from the Department of History at The Islamic University of Gaza, with its Islamic philosophy, write about a prominent figure of the contemporary Palestinian national movement, Father Manuel Musallam, without distinguishing between religions. I had the honor of discussing this thesis, which I found warm in tone, deeply patriotic, clearly grounded in justice, and marked by undeniable objectivity. It was evident that the researcher left no stone unturned in exploring every aspect of Father Manuel Musallam's life; his writings, others' writings about him, his interviews and interviews given about him, all thoroughly compiled and used in preparing the thesis for a master's degree. The researcher combined historical methodology with oral history to paint a sincere and vivid portrait of this courageous father and steadfast struggler, whom I personally knew and whose honesty, patriotism, boldness, and bravery I witnessed during his many years in GS.

I thank the researcher for his effort, Father Manuel for his cooperation with the researcher, Dr. Nihad al-Shaikh Khalil for supervising the thesis, the History Department at The Islamic University of Gaza for approving this topic, and the Deanship of Scientific Research and Graduate Studies there.

I hope this study will contribute sincerely to our national unity and reflect our objective scientific approach in our theses and research.

Allah is the source of success.

10/4/2023

Introduction

“Revolutionaries Never Die”

(The Wise George Habash)

“Extend your hand and greet your brother. Raise your weapon, the weapon of struggle and dignity, to meet the weapon of resistance and pride in Gaza. Then aim it toward Jerusalem to liberate it”

(Father Manuel Musallam)

Palestinian Christians have played a vital role in the cultural, national, political and economic life of Palestine since the British occupation of the land in 1917. Through Muslim-Christian Associations (MCAs), they helped shape the national leadership of the Palestinian people and were instrumental in raising public awareness about the Zionist and British threats. After the establishment of Israel in 1948, several prominent Christian leaders emerged who embraced resistance and armed struggle against the Israeli occupation, including faction leaders such as George Habash and Wadi‘ Haddad. Arab Christians were deeply involved in the broader struggle against Israeli occupation.

The author thus selected Father Manuel Musallam to highlight his national role within Palestinian political and national frameworks. This study explores his political positions on key issues affecting the Palestinian people, including Jerusalem and its holy sites, refugees, prisoners, settlements and Palestinian resistance. It also examines Father Musallam’s initiatives to reform the Palestinian political system represented by the PLO and the PA, end the internal schism, and advance the Palestinian electoral process. The study further addresses his stance on Christian Zionism, Israeli practices against the Palestinian people, and his views on Arab and international initiatives and policies regarding the Palestine issue. Additionally, it outlines his contributions to charitable and cultural efforts as a continuation of the legacy of earlier Palestinian Christians, and emphasizes his role in fostering Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine.

This book, titled "*The Revolutionary Priest Manuel Musallam: Listen, Oh Palestine*," originated as a master's thesis submitted by the author to the Department of History at The Islamic University of Gaza. The original title was "*The Struggles of Father Manuel Musallam and His Political Stances on the Palestine Issue (1938–2022)*."

Mohammed Mohammed 'Abdul 'Aziz Almasri

Preface

The Struggle of Palestinian Christians
1905–2022

The Struggle of Palestinian Christians 1905–2022

First: The Struggle of Palestinian Christians Before 1948

Palestine is the cradle of Christianity. Jesus of Nazareth (*ʿIsa* bin Mariam (AS)) was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth. At the time, Palestine was under pagan Roman rule. When *ʿIsa* reached the age of thirty, he began preaching a message of love and peace, which his disciples and apostles carried forward. Despite opposition from the Jews and widespread Roman persecution of Christians, the new faith gradually spread throughout Palestinian villages and rural areas. Its expansion gained momentum after the Edict of Milan was issued in 313 CE, granting religious tolerance across the empire. The conversion of Byzantine Emperor Constantine (r. 306–337 CE)[1] to Christianity further advanced the religion's reach. He and his mother Helena commissioned the construction of many churches and monasteries in Palestine, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, and many other smaller churches and monasteries.[2] These three remain among the most important churches in the Christian world.

With the advent of Islam, the Islamic *futuh* (conquests)[3] advanced toward *Bilad al-Sham* (present-day Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon), including Palestine.

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[1] Bayan Nuwayhed al-Hout, *Filastin: al-Qadiyya, al-Shaʿb, al-Hadarah: Al-Tarikh al-Siyasi min ʿAhd al-Kanʿaniyin hatta al-Qarn al-ʿIshrin 1917* (Palestine: The Cause, the People, the Civilization: A Political History from the Canaanite Era to Twentieth Century 1917) (Beirut: Dar al-Istiqlal for Studies and Publishing, 1991), pp. 63–65.

[2] Nichola Ziadah, "Palestine: From Alexander the Macedonian to the Islamic Conquest," in *Al-Mawsuʿah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Dirasat al-Khassah* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: Special Studies) (Beirut: The Palestinian Encyclopedia Authority, 1991), vol. 2, p. 201.

[3] As Fred M. Donner has written, "The Arabic term *fath* (pl. *futuh*) is often translated as 'conquest,' but this meaning is not intrinsic to the root f-t-h either in Arabic or in other Semitic languages. Rather, the word was applied to episodes in the expansion of the early Islamic state by later Muslim writers who described these events following a particular use of the word *fath* in the Qur'an, where it referred to an act of God's grace that was favorable for the community. This might include instances of actual conquest, but could also be applied to other ways in which an area came into the state, such as by treaty agreement. The rigid translation as 'conquest' is therefore potentially misleading." Therefore, hereafter we will use the *fath* and *futuh* terms to express the Islamic expansion. For more see Fred Donner, "Arabic *Fath* as 'Conquest' and Its Origin in Islamic Tradition," *al-Usur al-Wusta* (The Journal of Middle East Medievalists), vol. 24, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1–14.

Several key battles took place, such as the Battle of Ajnadayn in Palestine in 13 AH / 634 CE, and the Battle of Yarmouk in 15 AH / 636 CE, which marked the end of Byzantine rule in the region. The Christians of Jerusalem then requested a peace agreement, on the condition that the keys to the city be handed directly to Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khattab (RA). Caliph ‘Umar agreed and issued what became known as the “Covenant of ‘Umar,”[4] one of the most distinguished international charters for its remarkable tolerance toward Christians and its respect for their beliefs. Commenting on this, Gustave Le Bon wrote, “Upon entering the city, he [‘Umar] showed the greatest tolerance toward its inhabitants, left them their religion, customs, and property, and imposed only a small tribute [*jizyah* tax[5]].”[6]

Christians played a significant role during the early Arab-Muslim state in the first century AH. Christian tribes, particularly the Syriac-speaking ones, contributed to the Arab *futuh* and helped consolidate Arab rule. In *Bilad al-Sham*, the Christian Taghlib tribe stood as a key ally of Caliph Mu‘awiyah bin Abi Sufyan and the Umayyads, supporting them militarily, including in the army and naval fleet construction. Christians continued to manage state bureaus (*Diwan*), and caliphs and governors permitted them to build new churches and openly practice their religious rituals, including raising banners and crosses.[7]

During the Crusades launched by the “Christian West” against the “Islamic East”, the Christians of *Bilad al-Sham* joined Muslims in popular resistance against the Crusader occupation. While there were isolated cases of them siding with the Crusaders, these were exceptions rather than the rule.[8]

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[4] Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *Filastin: Dirasat Manhajiyyah fi al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah* (Palestine: Methodological Studies of the Palestine Issue) (Kuala Lumpur: Fajr Ulung, 2003), pp. 21–22.

[5] *Jizyah*: Head tax on free non-Muslims living under Muslim rule.

[6] Gustave Le Bon, *Les Civilisation Des Arabes* (Paris: Librairie De Firmin-Didot, 1884), p. 134, https://archive.org/details/in.gov.ignca.10775/page/n169/mode/2up?q=d%27omar

[7] Samir ‘Abduh, *Dawr al-Masihiyyin fi al-Hadarah al-‘Arabiyyah al-Islamiyyah* (The Role of Christians in Arab-Islamic Civilization (Damascus: Hassan Malas Publishing House, 2005), pp. 29–30.

[8] ‘Abdul Hamid al-Farani, “The Popular Resistance to the Crusader Occupation in Bilad al-Sham (491 AH–1098 CE/ 690 AH–1291 CE)” (Master’s thesis, The Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine, 2005), pp. 203–204. (in Arabic)

In modern times, Christians of *Bilad al-Sham* participated in the struggle against both British and French colonialism. This study examines key aspects of the Palestinian Christian struggle against the Zionist movement, the British occupation, and the Israeli occupation.

1. The Role of Palestinian Christians in Raising Awareness of the Zionist Threat and Confronting It

Palestinian Christians have played an active role in raising awareness of the threat posed by the Zionist movement and its objectives, clearly stating that these efforts aim to establish a Jewish entity on the land of Palestine. Negib Azoury,[9] who served in the Ottoman administration in Jerusalem before seeking refuge in Paris and was among the earliest to sound the alarm about the Zionist danger, wrote in his 1905 book *The Awakening of the Arab Nation*:[10]

> Two major phenomena—similar in nature yet fundamentally opposed—are currently unfolding in Asian Türkiye, though they have so far drawn little attention: the awakening of the Arab nation and the latent effort by the Jews to reestablish the ancient monarchy of Israel on a grand scale. These two movements are bound to remain in conflict until one ultimately prevails over the other.[11]

Palestinian Christians played a prominent role in raising awareness among Palestinians and Arabs about the dangers of the Zionist movement. They did so through their leading roles in Palestinian journalism. Notable examples include *Al-Karmel* newspaper, founded in 1908 by its owner and editor-in-chief

[9] Negib Azoury was a Christian Arab nationalist thinker born in Azour, a small village in southern Lebanon. He attended the Frères School in Beirut and pursued higher studies in political science in Paris. Between 1898 and 1904, he served as assistant governor of Jerusalem. He died in 1916. See ʻAbdul Wahab Kayyali et al., *Mawsuʻat al-Siyasah* (The Encyclopedia of Politics) (Beirut: Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 1994), p. 649.

[10] Muhammad ʻAziz Shukri, "The International Dimension of the Palestine Issue," in *Al-Mawsuʻah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Dirasat al-Khassah (Encyclopaedia Palestina: Special Studies*) (Beirut: Encyclopaedia Palestina Corporation, 1990), vol. 6, p. 5.

[11] Negib Azoury, *Le Réveil de la Nation Arabe dans l'Asie Turque* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1905), p. 1, https://archive.org/details/39020008795513-lereveildelanat/page/n23/mode/2up?q=deux

Najib Nassar;[12] *Al-Asma'i* newspaper, launched the same year by Hanna 'Abdullah al-'Isa;[13] and *Falastin* newspaper, established in 1912[14] by 'Isa al-'Isa[15] and edited by Yusuf al-'Isa.[16]

Najib Nassar was the first to lead the opposition to Zionism in Palestine during the period leading up to WWI, and he did so consistently and without interruption. He played a key role in raising awareness about the Zionist threat to Palestine and the Palestinian people, launching an awareness campaign through

[12] Najib Nassar was a Christian Palestinian activist and journalist, born in 1865. Early in his career, he worked with a Jewish organization involved in land purchases in Palestine, which exposed him to Zionist plans. This experience turned him into one of Zionism's fiercest opponents. In 1908, he founded *Al-Karmel* newspaper in Haifa, which became a platform for the nationalist current opposing Zionism, making him a pioneer of a far-reaching nationalist journalism. He also published a book on Zionism and, between 1911 and 1914, actively engaged with journalistic and political circles across the Arab Mashriq to rally public opinion against it. His efforts received widespread support. He died in 1948. See 'Abdul Wahab Kayyali et al., *Mawsu'at al-Siyasah* (The Encyclopedia of Politics), vol. 7, p. 650.

[13] Hanna 'Abdullah al-'Isa, one of the earliest journalists and writers in Palestine, was born in 1858 and educated in the Arabic Orthodox schools of Jerusalem. A master of the Arabic language and literature, he was nicknamed "Abu al-Sa'id" by his friends in admiration of his passion for al-Asma'i. He strongly opposed Zionist settlement and the government's facilitation of land seizures by Zionists, calling on wealthy Arabs to invest in national trade and industry and urging banks to support Arab farmers with loans to cultivate their land. While recognizing the cultural role of foreign schools at the time, al-'Isa remained a staunch advocate of national Arab education and emphasized the importance of women's education and advancement. He died in 1909. See in *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-'Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section) (Damascus: The Palestinian Encyclopedia Authority, 1984), vol. 2, p. 281.

[14] Khairiya Qasimiya, "The National Movement in Two-Thirds of the Current Century (1900–1964)," in *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Dirasat al-Khassah* (Encyclopaedia Palestina: Special Studies) (Beirut: Encyclopaedia Palestina Corporation, 1990), pp. 46–47.

[15] 'Isa al-'Isa was born in Jaffa in 1878 and studied at the Orthodox Kfteen School in northern Lebanon. Prince Faysal appointed him as his secretary and later as head of the royal court. He was also a member of the National Defense Party in Palestine. Al-'Isa passed away in Beirut on 29/6/1950. See Shahin Ahmad 'Umar, *Mawsu'at Kuttab Filastin fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Writers in the Twentieth Century) (Gaza: The National Center for Studies and Documentation, 2000), vol. 2, pp. 531–532.

[16] Yusuf al-'Isa was born in the city of Jaffa in 1870 and received his education at the Orthodox School. He co-founded the newspaper *Al-Asma'i* with his cousin Hanna al-'Isa and later contributed to the publication of the newspaper *Falastin* alongside 'Isa al-'Isa. A vocal advocate for Arab freedom, he called for the rights of Arab Orthodox Christians in Palestine and Jordan, rights that had been usurped by Greek clergy. He passed away in 1948. See Ya'qub Al-'Awdat, *Min A'lam al-Fikr wa al-Adab fi Filastin* (Figures of Thought and Literature in Palestine), 3rd edition (Jerusalem: Al-Isra' Publishing and Distribution, 1993), p. 478.

his newspaper, most copies of which were distributed free of charge. Nassar succeeded in uniting public opinion, both within Palestine and across the Arab world, against Zionism and Jewish immigration. On 7/6/1911, he sent a letter to all editors-in-chief of Arab newspapers who shared his views, proposing that they coordinate their efforts and form a unified front against the Zionists. Within just a few days, Taha al-Midwar, editor of the Beirut-based newspaper *Al-Ra'y Al-'Amm* (Public Opinion), responded positively, suggesting that all Arab newspapers take a collective stance against Zionist settlement in Palestine. A review of Arab newspapers from the second half of 1911 reveals a surge of articles opposing Zionism.[17] The newspaper *Falastin* in particular intensified its campaign in the months leading up to WWI. In its 22/1/1913 edition, it issued a stark warning about the growing threat to Arab presence in Palestine: "As long as the Zionists continue taking over the land village by village... tomorrow, all of Jerusalem will be sold, and all of Palestine along with it."[18]

A number of prominent Palestinian Christian intellectuals played a key role in resisting the Zionist and British threats. Among them were Khalil Baidas,[19] who founded *Al-Nafa'is Al-'Asriyyah* magazine in 1908, Wadi' Bustani,[20] and

[17] 'Abdul Wahab Kayyali, *Tarikh Filastin al-Hadith* (Palestine's Modern History), 11th edition (Beirut: Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 1999), pp. 53–54.

[18] Khairiya Qasimiya, "The National Movement in Two-Thirds of the Current Century (1900–1964)," pp. 46–47.

[19] Khalil Baidas was born in Nazareth in 1874. Between 1886 and 1892, he directed several Russian elementary schools across parts of Syria and Palestine. In 1908, Arab Orthodox Christians elected him to represent them in the Ottoman Parliament (*Majlis al-Mab'uthan*), established by Sultan 'Abdulhamid II. He died in Beirut in 1949. See Ya'qub al-'Awdat, *Min A'lam al-Fikr wa al-Adab* (Figures of Thought and Literature in Palestine), pp. 67–69.

[20] Wadi' Bustani was a writer, poet, journalist and translator, born in Dbayeh, Lebanon, in 1888. He completed his higher education at the American University of Beirut (AUB). In 1917, he settled in Haifa, where he devoted himself to teaching and translation and became actively involved in national causes. He was a founding member of the Muslim-Christian Association (MCA) and helped establish several literary forums in Haifa. In 1930, Bustani earned a diploma from the Law Institute in Jerusalem and became a vocal advocate for farmers whose lands were under threat of confiscation. He played a key role in preventing the transfer of *al-Jiftlik* lands in the Baisan Valley to Zionist institutions. He passed away in 1954. See *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-'Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section), vol. 4, p. 569.

Khalil al-Sakakini.[21] Their writings addressed Jewish immigration, its dangers and the transfer of land to the Zionist movement.[22]

On 17/9/1919, *Mir'at al-Sharq* newspaper, founded by Boulos Shehadeh,[23] became the first Arabic-language newspaper published in Palestine following the British occupation. Shehadeh opposed the establishment of a Jewish entity in Palestine and played a key role in founding the National Defense Party.[24]

Khalil al-Sakakini played a leading role in the field of education, working to introduce modern teaching methods into Palestinian curricula as a means of resisting injustice. He drew a connection between liberation from colonialism and liberation from underdevelopment. After studying pedagogy and curriculum design in Britain, he was influenced by the European educational model and came to view education as a key tool for raising Palestinian awareness of the Zionist threat.[25] Al-Sakakini argued that Palestinian Arabs could confront Zionists only through strength, and in the modern era, that strength is knowledge. He urged his people to arm themselves with education. Committed to advancing modern schooling, he founded the Nahdah College in Jerusalem in 1936.[26]

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[21] Khalil al-Sakakini was born in Jerusalem on 23/1/1878. In 1893, he completed his education at the "College of Youth," later known as the English College of Jerusalem, and began teaching in his hometown. He became a member of the Zahret al-Adab Society. In 1909, he founded a national school in Jerusalem called the Dusturiyya School. He passed away in Egypt in 1953. See Ya'qub Al-'Awdat, *Min A'lam al-Fikr wa al-Adab fi Filastin* (Figures of Thought and Literature in Palestine), pp. 273–275.

[22] 'Aida al-Najjar, "The Role of the Press in Rejecting Zionism," in Nawwaf al-Zur (ed.), *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah al-Shamilah: Masirat al-Kifah al-Sha'bi al-'Arabi al-Filastini* (The Comprehensive Palestinian Encyclopedia: The Journey of Arab Palestinian Popular Struggle) (Amman: Dar Majdalawi for Publishing and Distribution, 2016), vol. 2, pp. 42–43.

[23] Boulos Shehadeh was a Palestinian poet and journalist, born in Ramallah in 1882. In 1907, he was appointed director of the Orthodox School in Haifa. He later joined the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), becoming one of its prominent members. Shehadeh passed away in 1942. See Muhammad 'Umar Hamadah, *Mawsu'at A'lam Filastin* (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Figures) (Beirut: Dar Kotaiba for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 1985), vol. 2, p. 30.

[24] Ibid., pp. 30–31

[25] Muhannad 'Abdul Majid, The Presence and Absence of Khalil al-Sakakini in the Educational Landscape, site of Institute for Palestine Studies, 21/12/2020, https://www.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/1650852 (in Arabic)

[26] Maher al-Sharif, How Did Khalil al-Sakakini Envision the Modern Education System, Institute for Palestine Studies, 21/12/2020, https://www.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/1650853 (in Arabic)

From what has been said, Palestinian Christians were the first to recognize the threat posed by the Zionist movement and its colonial ambitions. Through the newspapers they led, they warned both Palestinians and Arabs about the movement's true objectives.

2. The Struggle of Palestinian Christians Against the British Occupation and Their Role in the Palestinian National Movement until 1948

Palestinian Christians stood alongside Muslims in opposing Zionist and British colonial plans by forming Muslim-Christian Associations (MCAs). These were the first political organizations established by Palestinians after WWI, in 1918, and they took on the crucial role of organizing the Palestinian national movement.[27] These associations actively resisted the Zionist presence. For example, when the Jewish community tried to celebrate the first anniversary of the Balfour Declaration in 1918, six MCAs submitted a formal protest to the military governor in Jerusalem. General Ronald Storrs[28] submitted this protest, which carried over 100 signatures addressed to the English High Command.[29] The number of associations increased to 15, most notably the Yafa and Jerusalem associations being the two most prominent. Membership was open to all, any Muslim or Christian citizen had the right to join.[30]

The significance of the Christian-Islamic associations in Palestine lies in their efforts to promote political cooperation between Muslims and Christians, aiming to form a unified front against both the British and Israeli occupations. These associations demonstrated strong national and pan-Arab solidarity, effectively thwarting British attempts to incite sectarian conflict between the two communities.[31]

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[27] Zuhair al-Masri, *Itijahat al-Fikr al-Siyasi al-Filastini* (Trends in Palestinian Political Thought) (Gaza: Al-Yaziji Library, 2008), p. 11.

[28] Sir Ronald Henry Amherst Storrs: He was born on 19/11/1881 in London and died on 1/11/1955. Storrs was an official in the British Foreign and Colonial Office. He served as Oriental Secretary in Cairo, Military Governor of Jerusalem, Governor of Cyprus and Governor of Northern Rhodesia, Ronald Storrs, site of Fandom, https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Ronald_Storrs

[29] Taysir Jabarah, *Tarikh Filastin* (The History of Palestine) (Amman: Dar al-Shuruq, 1998), p. 102.

[30] Bayan Nuwayhed al-Hout, *Al-Qiyadat wa al-Mu'assasat al-Siyasiyyah fi Filastin 1917–1948* (Political Leadership and Institutions in Palestine: 1917–1948), 3rd edition (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1986), p. 81.

[31] Ahmad Mahmud al-Hroub, "The Role of Muslim-Christian Associations in the National Movement (1918–1931)" (Master's thesis, Department of History, An-Najah University, Palestine, 2001), pp. 13–14, https://repository.najah.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/1a1d1b17-70c2-42fd-9e58-ba19a25186f2/content (in Arabic)

Following the emergence of the Palestinian national movement in 1919 and the successful convening of its first conference, the British occupation employed its familiar divide-and-rule strategy to sow discord between Muslims and Christians. However, these efforts ultimately failed to fracture the Palestinian front.[32]

When the King-Crane Commission[33] arrived in Palestine, Arab leaders, including prominent Christian figures such as Ya'qub Nicola Farraj[34] and Khalil al-Sakakini, convened to establish a set of non-negotiable principles. Chief among them were the demand for Palestine's independence within a broader Arab union, and the categorical rejection of the Zionist project and the Balfour Declaration.[35]

In 1920, during the Nabi Musa festival in Jerusalem, Khalil Baidas led a mass demonstration against British colonial policy and the Zionist movement. Baidas is widely regarded as the first to lead a Palestinian uprising against British rule and the notorious Balfour Declaration. He warned of the grave threats facing Palestine, its people and its land. As a result of his outspoken opposition to British rule and Zionist ambitions, Baidas was arrested by British forces, sentenced to death and

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[32] Emil Ghouri, *Filastin 'Abr Siteen 'Am* (Palestine Across Sixty Years) (Beirut: Dar Al-Nahar Publishing, 1972), p. 112.

[33] Among the resolutions adopted at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference held by the Allied Powers was the division of territories captured during WWI. A three-member commission was dispatched to Syria and Palestine to assess local perspectives in preparation for determining the region's future. This decision stemmed from a proposal submitted by US President Woodrow Wilson on 20/3/1919, which was approved by the conference's Supreme Council. However, British and French concerns about US encroachment in the region prompted France to refuse to appoint a representative and led Britain to withdraw its own. As a result, the commission was limited to its two US members: Henry Churchill King and Charles Crane. See *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-'Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section), vol. 3, p. 688.

[34] Ya'qub Nicola Farraj was a political activist born in Jerusalem in 1874, where he also received his education. He was a member of the MCA, founded in 1918 and chaired by 'Arif al-Dajani. Farraj represented Jerusalem at the First Palestinian Arab Congress, convened in Jerusalem under al-Dajani's leadership. The congress adopted a national charter for Palestine, which rejected the Balfour Declaration, Zionist immigration and the British Mandate. Farraj was elected to the Executive Committee of the Orthodox Congress as a representative of Jerusalem, and later served as its president. When the opposition formed the National Defense Party under the leadership of Raghib al-Nashashibi, Farraj joined and became an active member. In 1936, he was appointed to the Arab Higher Committee as the party's representative, but he resigned on 3/7/1937, alongside al-Nashashibi. See *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-'Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section), vol. 4, p. 635.

[35] Jihad al-Batsh, "The Development of the Political Thought of the Christian Leaders in Palestine 1914–1922," *Journal of Al-Quds Open University for Educational & Psychological Research & Studies*, vol. 2, no. 38, June 2016, p. 13, https://journals.qou.edu/index.php/jrresstudy/article/view/506 (in Arabic)

imprisoned in Acre. His sentence was later commuted to 15 years. Following widespread protests and demonstrations calling for his release, he was freed after four months.[36]

Palestinian Christians, like their Muslim compatriots, were subjected to numerous assaults under British rule. The British occupation worked to transfer ownership of Palestinian church endowments to Jews by appointing two committees between 1921 and 1926, ostensibly to inventory church properties and settle the debts of the Orthodox Patriarchate.[37] In reality, however, the British authorities were facilitating the transfer of these assets to the Zionist movement. These committees transferred 22 thousand dunams of church land to Jews by offering them to the Zionist "Palestine Land Development Company (PLDC)."[38] In total, approximately 120 thousand dunams of land belonging to the church and Christian-owned companies were seized and transferred to Jews. It is worth noting that the committee established in 1921 was appointed by the British government without consulting the Orthodox community.[39]

Palestinian Christians quickly recognized Britain's bias in favor of the Zionist movement and its concerted efforts to implement Zionist plans in Palestine. This culminated in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which aimed to establish a settler entity for Jews in the land. In response, Christian leaders issued an appeal to the global Christian community in 1936, describing the Declaration as a profound injustice against the Palestinian people. They emphasized that the Zionist movement had

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[36] 'Isa Qaraqi', Khalil Baidas… The First to Call for Revolution, site of Ma'an News Agency, 18/1/1918, https://www.maannews.net/articles/973311.html

[37] Orthodoxy is the oldest and largest Christian denomination in Palestine. The majority of its followers, particularly in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Acre, are of Arab origin, descending from groups such as the Ghassanids, the Taghlib, and other Arab Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and the Syrian Desert. See Emil Ghouri, *Filastin 'Abr Siteen 'Am* (Palestine Across Sixty Years), p. 13.

[38] Palestine Land Development Company (PLDC): Founded in 1908 by Otto Heinrich Warburg and Arthur Rubin, both members of the World Zionist Organization. This company aimed to acquire land in Palestine and prepare it for settlement. By the time Israel was established in 1948, the company alone had purchased approximately half of all the land acquired by Jews up to that point. See Johnny Mansour, *Mu'jam al-A'lam wa al-Mustalahat al-Suhyuniyyah wa al-Isra'iliyyah* (Dictionary of Zionist and Israeli Names and Terms) (Ramallah: The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (MADAR), 2009), pp. 208–209.

[39] Hind Amin al-Budairi, *Aradi Filastin Bayn al-Sahuyniyyah wa Haqa'iq al-Tarikh* (The Lands of Palestine between Zionism and the Facts of History) (Cairo: General Secretariat, League of Arab States, 1998), pp. 182–183.

desecrated all the holy sites in Palestine and urged the Christian world to uphold justice for the Palestinian people and shield them from the combined Zionist-British scheme.[40]

In the 1930s, one of the most prominent Arab Christian figures was Tawfiq Canaan,[41] a pioneering Palestinian scholar of history and folklore. Well known to the British occupation authorities for his political activism, Canaan strongly opposed both British and Zionist policies, especially the facilitation of Jewish immigration. He was arrested by the occupation on 3/9/1939, the day Britain and France declared war on Germany, and held in Acre Prison for nine weeks. Nevertheless, his detention did not deter him from continuing to challenge these policies and confront the Zionist movement through his lectures and writings.[42]

In 1939, 'Isa al-Bandak[43] submitted a memorandum on behalf of Arab Palestinians to Britain and the Arab delegations, rejecting British proposals to designate the Christian community as a minority with distinct rights. He affirmed that Palestinian Christians are an integral part of the Palestinian people and the broader Arab family, stressing that the concept of minority status was a reactionary

[40] Akram Zuaiter, *al-Harakah al-Wataniyyah al-Filastiniyyah 1935–1939: Yawmiyyat Akram Zuaiter* (The Palestinian National Movement 1935–1939: The Diaries of Akram Zuaiter), 2nd edition (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), pp. 153–154.

[41] Tawfiq Canaan was born in Beit Jala in 1882. He attended the Syrian Protestant College now AUB, graduating as a physician in 1905. He later became president of the Palestine Oriental Society and served as editor-in-chief of its journal in 1927. He also chaired the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) for an extended period and cofounded the Arab Medical Association in Palestine. Canaan published dozens of articles in English, German and French newspapers, in which he clarified the reality of the Palestine issue. He passed away in the city of Jerusalem in 1964. See Shahin Ahmad 'Umar, *Mawsu'at Kuttab Filastin fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Writers in the Twentieth Century), vol. 1, pp. 164–165.

[42] Biography of Tawfiq Canaan, site of Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, https://www.palquest.org

[43] 'Isa al-Bandak was born in the city of Bethlehem in 1896. He received his primary education at the Orthodox School and at the Collège des Frères in Bethlehem. In 1913, he completed his secondary education at the Collège des Frères in Jerusalem. In 1920, 'Isa founded the Literary Club within the MCA, which was chaired at the time by the late 'Arif Pasha al-Dajani. In 1921, the Arab Executive Committee was established in Palestine under the leadership of Musa Kazim al-Husaini, and al-Bandak was elected as the representative of the Bethlehem district from its inception until it was dissolved in 1935. In 1934, he was elected mayor of Bethlehem and continued to be re-elected until 1957. Al-Bandak passed away in Santiago, the capital of Chile, on 7/5/1984. He was mourned by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). See 'Isa al-Bandak, site of Al-Quds Institution for Culture and Heritage, https://web.archive.org/web/20191210185655/http://alqudslana.com/index.php?action=individual_details&id=1794

colonial ploy aimed at fragmenting Palestinian unity. Al-Bandak also cautioned Christians against embracing this colonial narrative.[44]

Summary

- Arab Christians in Palestine were among the earliest to recognize the Zionist threat and took the lead in exposing the aims of the Zionist movement, particularly through the newspapers and journals they established and edited.
- Palestinian Christians played an active role in political life, especially through their involvement in MCAs. They also contributed significantly to the advancement of education and the fight against ignorance in Palestine.
- British occupation policies did not differentiate between Christians and Muslims in their colonial approach; the Palestinian people, their land, and their Islamic and Christian holy sites were all subject to exploitation and seizure by the British occupation.

Second: The Struggle of Palestinian Christians 1948–2022

This section explores the political, diplomatic and resistance contributions of Palestinian Christians, and how their efforts have helped advance the Palestinian narrative on the global stage. It also examines Israeli aggression targeting prominent Christian figures engaged in defending the Palestine issue, and highlights their role in resisting Israeli attacks on both Islamic and Christian holy sites.

1. The Struggle of Palestinian Christians 1948–1986

In 1948, Israeli forces carried out one of the most horrific displacement campaigns of the modern era, known as the Palestinian *Nakbah* (Catastrophe), during which over 700 thousand Palestinians, including 47 thousand Christians, were forcibly uprooted from their homeland. Israel seized 77.8% of Palestine's territory, and Palestinian Christians endured the trauma of forced displacement alongside their Muslim compatriots. Amid this crisis, Palestinian Christians actively participated

[44] Memorandum from 'Isa al-Bandak, on behalf of Palestinian Arab Christians, to the British authorities, the heads of Arab delegations, and the Round Table Conference, 20/1/1939, Institute for Palestine Studies, https://oldwebsite.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/%20%20%20

in relief efforts. The Pontifical Mission for Palestine was established on 18/6/1949. Similarly, the Lutheran World Federation converted Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem into a relief center and launched a large-scale humanitarian campaign.[45]

During that period, Christians were not limited to relief work; several prominent Christian leaders emerged, playing major roles in both political and resistance activities. Following the 1948 *Nakbah*, the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM)[46] was founded in Palestine by Dr. George Habash[47] and Wadi‘ Haddad.[48] The movement advocated for the unification of all Arab countries and the liberation of Palestine.[49]

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[45] Mitri Raheb, Faith, Steadfastness and Creative Resistance in Contemporary Palestinian Christian Thought, site of Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, https://www.mitriraheb.org/ar/article/1486385199

[46] Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM): A group of young Arabs who supported the ideology of nationalist parties and opposed the prevailing Arab regimes. They began meeting in Damascus, Beirut and Amman to lay the foundations of a secret organization. Convinced that the 1948 defeat stemmed from the absence of Arab unity, these groups made unity their central objective, viewing it as the necessary path to liberation. Among the movement’s early figures were George Habash and Hani al-Hindi, who embraced a symbolic triad: “Unity, Liberation, Revenge.” *Al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqa* Society (The Firmest Bond Society) at AUB served as the nucleus from which the movement later emerged. See Abu Ali Mustafa, “The Political Experience of the Arab Nationalist Movement and the Popular Front during the Past Century,” in Nahid Zaqout (ed.), *Al-Nadwah al-Fikriyyah al-Siyasiyyah: Khuburat al-Harakah al-Siyasiyyah al-Filastiniyyah fi al-Qarn al-‘Ishrin* (The Political Intellectual Symposium: The Experience of the Palestinian Political Movement in the Twentieth Century) (Gaza: The National Center for Studies and Documentation, 2000), p. 116.

[47] George Habash was born in 1925 into a Greek Orthodox Christian family in the city of Lydda. He earned a medical degree from the American University of Beirut in 1951. In 1952, he co-founded ANM with a group of his peers, including Wadi‘ Haddad and Mustafa al-Zibri (Abu Ali Mustafa). From the outset, he played a pivotal role in advancing the idea of establishing the PLO, with the ANM contributing many of its members to the organization’s founding phase, which began in 1964. In 1967, he and a group of close associates founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), where he served as Secretary-General until 1999. George Habash passed away on 26/1/2008, in the Jordanian capital, Amman, where he was laid to rest. See site of Yasser Arafat Foundation, https://yaf.ps/page-830-ar.html

[48] Wadi‘ Haddad: An Arab militant and one of the ANM and PFLP leaders. He was born in the city of Safad and received his primary and secondary education in its schools, before enrolling at AUB, from which he graduated as a physician in 1952. Haddad began his political activism among the Palestinian masses in both the eastern and western parts of the West Bank (WB) through the ANM. The idea of establishing an armed struggle movement remained a constant preoccupation of his, as he firmly believed that popular armed struggle was the only path to the liberation of Palestine. He passed away in 1978. See *Al-Mawsu‘ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-‘Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section), vol. 4, p. 570.

[49] The Emergence of the Arab Nationalist Movement, site of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), 1/12/2011, https://pflp.ps

Christians played a role in the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), including Nicola al-Durr,[50] who was elected Deputy Chair of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) during its inaugural session in Jerusalem on 28/5/1964. That same year, he was appointed to the PLO Executive Committee and headed the Department of Information and National Guidance. During his tenure, the Voice of Palestine radio station was launched in Cairo, and the Palestine Research Center was established in Beirut.[51]

Following the defeat of June 1967, Christian leadership figures emerged as key actors in forming resistance fronts aimed at confronting Israel. On 11/12/1967, George Habash, Wadi' Haddad, and their comrades founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), adopting armed struggle as the principal path to liberation.[52] Subsequently, Nayef Hawatmeh broke away[53] and established the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) on 21/2/1969.[54]

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[50] Nicola al-Durr was a Palestinian politician and writer, born in Shafa 'Amr in the Haifa district. He completed his primary education there and graduated from the Terra Sancta College in Jerusalem in 1926. Among his most notable works is *Hakaza Da'at Filastin.. wa Hakaza Ta'ud: Dawr al-Naft wa al-Madfa' fi Tahrir Filastin* (This Is How It Was Lost, and This Is How It Will Return: The Role of Artillery and Oil in the Liberation of Palestine), first published in 1963. He passed away in Beirut in 1967. See *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-'Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section), vol. 4, pp. 502–503.

[51] *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-'Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section), vol. 4, pp. 502–503.

[52] Zuhoor Mahmud Abu Mayialah (Duyyat), George Habash: His Life and Struggle (Master's thesis, Department of History, Hebron University, Palestine, 2015), p. 18, https://dspace.hebron.edu/jspui/bitstream/123456789/760/1/الرسالة%20كاملة.pdf (in Arabic)

[53] Nayef Hawatmeh was born on 17/11/1935, in the city of al-Salt, Jordan, to a Bedouin Orthodox Christian family. He is associated with the Marxist leftist current in Palestinian politics. From an early age, he joined the ANM before becoming part of the leftist faction within the PFLP. In 1969, he broke away to found the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), a Marxist-Leninist organization which he continues to lead. Hawatmeh is widely regarded as the first Palestinian politician to endorse the establishment of a Palestinian state on territories liberated from Israeli occupation, alongside the Israeli state. See Nayef Hawatmeh, site of Aljazeera.net, 5/12/2010, https://www.aljazeera.net (in Arabic)

[54] Fahema Dalloul, The Development of the Political Thought of Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (1991–2006) (Master's thesis, Department of History and Archeology, The Islamic University of Gaza, 2014), p. 10, https://ebook.univeyes.com/156587 (in Arabic)

The Palestinian poet Kamal Butrus Nasser[55] played a prominent role in drawing attention to the Palestine issue through his poetry. Following the June 1967 War, Israel expelled him from Palestine due to his national and militant positions. In 1969, he was elected to the PLO Executive Committee. Among his most notable prose contributions were the editorials of *Falastin al-Thawra*, the official magazine of the PLO, which he edited from its inception in June 1972. He was assassinated by Israeli intelligence in Beirut on 10/4/1973.[56] The list of those assassinated of the National Prisoner Movement also included Christian figures, among them Khadr Hilaneh, who was killed in Nablus Prison on 14/7/1976.[57]

After Israel occupied the eastern part of Jerusalem in 1967, Bishop Hilarion Capucci[58] emerged as a prominent defender of the city. He actively supported the resistance, assisting in gathering intelligence on the Israeli occupation and transporting weapons to the resistance using his vehicle.[59] On 8/8/1974, while carrying out a weapons delivery mission, his activities were uncovered, leading to a 12-year prison sentence.[60] In 1977, he was exiled to Rome, where he remained until his death on 1/1/2017.[61]

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[55] Kamal Butrus Nasser was a Palestinian activist, politician and poet. Born in Birzeit in 1924, he earned a bachelor's degree in political science from AUB in 1945. In 1947, he was appointed teacher of Arabic literature at Al-Ahliyya College in Ramallah. Following the 1948 *Nakbah*, he and several colleagues in Ramallah launched the newspaper *al-Ba'th*. In 1949, he founded the magazine *al-Jil al-Jadid* (The New Generation) in Jerusalem, aiming to raise national and political awareness among Arab youth. He was killed in 1973 during an Israeli airstrike on Palestinian resistance centers in Beirut. See *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah: Al-Qusm al-'Aam* (The Palestinian Encyclopedia: General Section), vol. 3, p. 662.

[56] The Martyred Poet Kamal Nasser.. "The Conscience of the Palestinian Revolution," site of Birzeit University, 30/3/2021, https://www.birzeit.edu/ar/news/Kamal-Nasser

[57] Hanna 'Isa, "Palestinian Christians: Partners in Founding the Palestinian National Movement," site of Abouna.org, 2/2/2018, https://abouna.org/content/المسيحيون-الفلسطينيون-شركاء-في-تأسيس-الحركة-الوطنية-الفلسطينية

[58] Bishop Hilarion Capucci: Born in 1922 in the Syrian city of Aleppo, he was appointed bishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Jerusalem in 1965. He was known for his national stances opposing Israel's occupation in Palestine. He passed away in 2017. See Bishop Hilaryon Capucci, Palestinian National Information Center – Palestinian News and Information Agency (WAFA), https://info.wafa.ps/Home/PersonDetails/305

[59] Milad Suhail Fu'ad 'Ayyad, Bishop Hilarion Capucci and His Role in Supporting the Palestinian National Struggle (1922–2017) (Master's thesis, Department of History, Al-Aqsa University, Gaza, 2022), pp. 41–42.

[60] Ibid., p. 45.

[61] Nesrin Barghothi, Hilarion Capucci… The Revolutionary Archbishop, Aljazeera.net, Blogs, 29/4/2020, https://aja.me/7c2dv (in Arabic)

Israel sought to eliminate Palestinian leaders based outside of Palestine, figures who played a pivotal role in exposing the realities faced by Palestinians, including killings, home demolitions and land seizures. Among them was Na'im Khader Daibes,[62] who was instrumental in advancing Arab-European dialogue through his work and activism in Belgium. His strong Christian religious background enabled him to engage deeply with Belgian and broader European society, adapt to it and exert significant influence. While these societies are governed by secular political systems that formally separate religion from the state, religion continues to hold spiritual and cultural significance, and the Church retains influence within both society and political circles. Na'im secured important achievements for the PLO, including official recognition of the organization as an independent member within the Asian Group of the UN, the Group of 77 (G-77), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The recognition of the Palestinian people and the PLO by the nine European countries that convened at the Venice Conference in June 1980 is primarily attributable to the sustained efforts of Na'im Khader. He was assassinated on the morning of Monday, 1/6/1981, on Scarabée Avenue in Brussels, while on his way from home to the PLO office. Israel claimed responsibility for his assassination.[63]

[62] Na'im Khader Daibes was born in the village of Zababdeh, in the Jenin District, on 30/12/1939. He attended the local Latin School, where the parish priest encouraged him to continue his education. He later enrolled in the seminary in Beit Jala but left before ordination, feeling no calling to the priesthood, and because a different mission awaited him. Daibes joined the Fatah movement in 1967 and quickly became active in student circles. He was elected president of the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) in Belgium and, in 1969, was appointed as Fatah's representative there. In 1975, he was officially designated as the PLO's representative to Belgium. He also served as its liaison to the European Economic Community, the European Parliament, and the Arab-European Dialogue Council. See 'Urabi Klob, Martyr Dr. Na'im Salim Khader Daibes, Memory of a Nation, site of w6an.com, https://www.w6an.com/naim-salim-khader-daibes/

[63] See Ibid.; and Hasan Bal'awi, When Naim Khader Chose Poetry and Law as His Weapon for Palestine in Belgium, *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 1/6/2022, https://www.alhaya.ps/ar/Article/134912

Among these leaders was Hanna Muqbil,[64] a staunch critic of the false Zionist narrative concerning Palestine. A prominent figure within the culture of resistance, Muqbil's foremost concern was Palestinian national unity. He famously asserted, "Whoever struggles for Palestine is Palestinian, even if born in Honolulu; and whoever does not struggle is not Palestinian and has no connection to Palestine, even if born in Jerusalem."[65] In 1978, he founded an institution called *Quds Press*, explaining at the time: "I will endeavor to use it to convey to the people whatever can contribute to revealing the truth." This commitment made him a target for Israel, which ultimately orchestrated his assassination through the Mossad[66] in Cyprus on the morning of Thursday, 3/5/1984.[67]

The role of the activist Iskandar 'Odeh[68] became particularly prominent; he chaired the "American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee" and also taught political science and Arabic at Coastline Community College in Southern California. Through his position and exceptional abilities, he was able to address the American

[64] Hanna 'Eid Muqbil was born in the village of Taybeh, Jerusalem district, in 1939, where he grew up and completed his education. After graduating from university in Jerusalem, he worked for *Falastin* newspaper in Jerusalem and *Addustour* newspaper in Jordan. Following the defeat of June 1967, he joined the Fatah movement and played an active role in founding *Fatah* newspaper, which became the official voice of the movement. He later served as editor-in-chief of *Filastin Al-Thawra* magazine in Beirut, following the assassination of its first editor-in-chief, Kamal Nasser. In 1979, Hanna Muqbil was elected Secretary-General of the Federation of Arab Journalists as the Palestinian representative and was re-elected in 1983 for an additional four years. See 'Urabi Klob, The Martyr Hanna Eid Muqbil, Memory of a Nation, w6an.com, 15/9/2019, https://www.w6an.com/hanna-eid-muqbel

[65] Nabil al-Sahli, Hanna Muqbil, a journalist who confronted the Israeli narrative and was martyred, site of Arabi21, 25/5/2021, https://arabi21.com/story/1360729/

[66] Mossad**:** Israel's intelligence and clandestine operations agency operates primarily beyond the borders of Israel. Its activities are structured around three principal domains: first, the collection of information on political, military and security issues deemed critical by Israel; second, the execution of covert operations; and third, the systematic research and assessment of all gathered data to derive conclusions and formulate recommendations for Israel's political and security authorities. See Johnny Mansour, *Mu'jam al-A'lam wa al-Mustalahat al-Suhyuniyyah wa al-Isra'iliyyah* (Dictionary of Zionist and Israeli Names and Terms), p. 485.

[67] Nabil al-Sahli, Hanna Muqbil, a journalist who confronted the Israeli narrative and was martyred, Arabi21, 25/5/2021.

[68] Iskandar 'Odeh was born in the village of Jifna. He completed his primary and secondary education in Birzeit, Ramallah, and Nablus, before enrolling at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University. After immigrating to the US in 1972, he attended California State University at Fullerton (CSUF), where he got a master's degree in political science in 1978. See Jay Mathews, Alex Odeh: Arab-American Victim of Hate, site of The Washington Post newspaper, 12/10/1985, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/10/13/alex-odeh-arab-american-victim-of-hate/f159c30d-1e6d-4f9b-85cf-184ec7a0805e/

public directly, raising awareness among segments of the US population about the Palestine issue. His efforts posed an unprecedented and unexpected challenge to the activities of Zionist organizations in the US. As a result of his activism, 'Odeh was assassinated on October 11/10/1985, when a bomb was planted at the entrance of his office. It is noteworthy that the perpetrators of the assassination were known to US security agencies; they were Zionist individuals holding US citizenship. Despite the US authorities being aware of their involvement, they were later allowed to escape to Israel.[69]

Based on the above, it can be argued that Palestinian Christians have played a significant role in promoting the Palestine issue abroad, whether in Europe or elsewhere, through the positions they have held. This influence likely stems from their deep understanding of Western societies and their ability to engage effectively with all segments of these communities. Consequently, Israel has monitored their movements and targeted them for assassination.

2. The Struggle of Palestinian Christians from the First *Intifadah* 1987 to 2022

Palestinian Christians have presented numerous honorable models of resistance, playing diverse roles throughout the two *Intifadah*s. Like their fellow Palestinians, they endured martyrdom, imprisonment and injury, and actively participated alongside Muslim Palestinians in guarding and defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

a. The Struggle of Palestinian Christians 1987–2008

Christians joined their fellow Palestinians in confronting Israel during the First Palestinian *Intifadah*. On 31/1/1988, the first confrontation between Christians and Israeli forces occurred since the outbreak of the *Intifadah*: Christians held a prayer at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in protest against Israeli measures, and a women's demonstration emerged from the church, throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. In response, Israeli forces fired tear gas at the demonstrators. During Easter in 1988, Christians raised black flags on building rooftops to mourn the *Intifadah*'s martyrs, signaling that the threat did not endanger Muslims alone or

[69] Ibid., and The forgotten Palestinian Martyr, Activist And Writer Iskandar 'Odeh, site of Elqiama, 12/10/2021, https://www.elqiama.com/الشهيد-الفلسطيني-المنسي-المناضل-والكاتب-إسكندر-عودة

their places of worship in the city. As Father Yohanna of the Church of the Nativity declared, "Jerusalem will remain sorrowful and continue to shed tears until the yoke of racial occupation is lifted from her."[70]

Among the Christian martyrs of the First Palestinian *Intifadah* was Khadr Elias Tarzi[71] from GS. He confronted the Israeli army by throwing stones at its forces, but was captured and subjected to torture. As a result of prolonged abuse in Israeli prisons, Tarzi was killed on 9/2/1988 at the age of 20, becoming one of the earliest martyrs of the prisoner movement during the First *Intifadah*.[72] Later, on 19/7/1988, Israeli forces launched an assault on Jerusalem. Palestinian youth defended the city, and three Palestinians were killed during the clashes, including Nidal Sulaiman Fu'ad Al-Rubdi, a Christian, who was not yet 18.[73]

In the same year, Geryes Yusuf Geryes Qanqar,[74] a member of the Popular Committee of the Palestinian Communist Party (People's Party), was martyred during a large demonstration against Israel's forces. He was initially shot in the leg, and when Israeli forces advanced toward him as he lay on the ground, they executed him.[75]

Christians also participated in the Second *Intifadah*. Notably, the activist Chris Bandak fought within the ranks of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, resisting Israel. He was among those besieged in the Church of the Nativity in 2002, yet managed to escape. Following a subsequent pursuit by Israel, he was arrested on 6/2/2003 and sentenced to four life terms, accused of firing on the Gilo settlement south of

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[70] Ibrahim al-Za'im, The First Intifadah: A Shared Struggle between Muslims and Christians, Aljazeera.net, Blogs, 12/12/2017. (in Arabic)

[71] Khadr Elias Fu'ad Tarzi was born in al-Zaytoun neighborhood of Gaza City into a Christian family. He completed his secondary education at Al-Karmel School in Gaza. See 'Abdul Jabbar 'Adwan, *Al-Intifadah 'ala Tariq al-Istiqlal al-Filastini* (The Intifadah on the Road to Palestinian Independence) (Palestine: n.p., 1989), vol. 2, p. 168.

[72] "Martyr Prisoner Khadr Tarzi," site of Handala Center, 1/5/2016, https://handala.ps/p/745

[73] "Three Martyrs in Jenin and General Strike in Jerusalem," *Al-Taleea* newspaper, Kuwait, 21/7/1988.

[74] Geryes Yusuf Geryes Qanqar was born in Beit Jala on 4/2/1948. His first arrest occurred at the age of 19, when he was imprisoned in Al-Moskobiya Prison in Jerusalem, See'Abdul Jabbar 'Adwan, *Al-Intifadah 'ala Tariq al-Istiqlal al-Filastini* (The Intifadah on the Road to Palestinian Independence), vol. 2, pp. 97–98.

[75] Martyr Comrade Geryes Qanqar, From the Register of the Immortals Program, Media Office of the Palestinian People's Party channel (@newmedia83), site of YouTube, 1/4/2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh9uGr9ftAQ

Jerusalem, which resulted in the deaths of three Israelis, in addition to carrying out several other operations. Palestinian resistance ultimately secured his release in the 2011 prisoner exchange, known as Devotion of the Free Deal.[76] This episode illustrates that Hamas made no distinction among the prisoners included in the exchange, encompassing members from multiple factions, both Muslims and Christians.

In 2004, Israel's forces raided Beitunia, near Ramallah, targeting three young men affiliated with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. Among them was the martyr Salam Ya'qub Hilaneh, who had been listed as wanted by Israel.[77]

b. The Struggle of Palestinian Christians 2009–2022

During Israel's 2008/2009 aggression against GS, Christians stood alongside their fellow Palestinians and made sacrifices, including martyrs such as the 15-year-old Kristen Turk, Geryes al-'Amash (50), and the resistance fighter Hanna Saba, who was targeted by a missile while confronting Israeli forces.[78]

In 2009, Palestinian Christians issued the document "A Moment of Truth," representing the stance of Christians across all denominations in Palestine. Through it, they called on the international community to uphold justice for the Palestinian people, emphasizing that Palestinians have faced "oppression, displacement, suffering and clear apartheid for more than six decades." They urged the international community to abandon its pro-Israel bias, begin condemning Israel's crimes, and recognized nonviolent resistance as a legitimate right for Palestinians to defend themselves.[79] In the same year, Archbishop

[76] Chris Bandak's affiliation and religion did not exempt him from the prisoner exchange, site of Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, 20/10/2011, https://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/news/details/3719

[77] Ayham Abu Ghosh, "The Three Martyrs of the Beitunia Massacre: Stories and Heroism, Not Mere Numbers," *Al-Bayader al-Siyasi* Magazine, year 37, no. 1080, 15/7/2017.

[78] Gazan Christians stood alongside the resistance against Israel, *Emarat Al Youm* newspaper, 9/2/2009, https://www.emaratalyoum.com/politics/reports-and-translation/2009-02-09-1.123530?ot=ot.AMPPageLayout

[79] Kairos Palestine, A Moment of Truth, site of Kairos Palestine, 2009, https://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/files/English.pdf

'Atallah Hanna[80] called on all Christians to support *al-Aqsa* Mosque in the face of Israeli incursions. He also urged churches and major Christian authorities worldwide to condemn Israel's attacks on Islamic holy sites, foremost among them the *al-Aqsa* Mosque.[81] This demonstrates that Archbishop 'Atallah Hanna acted without sectarian or denominational bias, focusing instead on Palestine and its issue, and calling on the entire world to protect Islamic holy sites, particularly *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Palestinian Christians joined Muslim defenders (*al-Murabitun*) at *al-Aqsa* Mosque in acts of seclusion and vigilant defense, protecting it from attacks by Israel. Among them was John William Kakish, who defended *al-Aqsa* with unwavering determination. He confronted Israeli forces when they began assaulting the women stationed in the mosque's courtyards and carried out a stabbing attack in May 2015, which resulted in several injuries among Israeli soldiers. He was initially sentenced to nine years in prison, a term later extended to eleven years. When questioned by a Shin Bet investigator about his motives, he replied, "Do you expect me to watch settlers desecrate *al-Aqsa*, attack the stationed women, and remain silent?" The investigator, surprised, responded, "But you are Christian." John answered, "I am Christian by faith, Muslim in spirit, Palestinian in identity and a Jerusalemite revolutionary."[82]

On 14/7/2017, Israel closed Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque to worshippers, prompting both Muslims and Christians to mobilize in solidarity, rejecting Israel's

[80] Archbishop 'Atallah Hanna was born in the village of Rameh in the Galilee in 1965. He completed his primary, middle, and secondary education in Galilee schools before joining the Patriarchal Seminary in Jerusalem. He holds both a master's and a doctoral degree in Theology. In 1992, he was ordained a priest at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. On 22/8/2002, the Israeli authorities arrested him and imprisoned him in Al-Moskobiya Prison in Jerusalem, later imposing a three-year travel and movement ban. In 2005, he was consecrated bishop at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and appointed Archbishop of Sebastia, becoming the only Arab bishop in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In 2010, he issued a document addressed primarily to the West, and especially Western churches, calling for the defense of Jerusalem and the Palestine issue. See Archbishop 'Atallah Hanna, Yasser Arafat Foundation, https://yaf.ps/page-342-ar.html

[81] 'Atallah Hanna Calls on World Churches to Support al-Aqsa, site of Palestine Today Agency, 27/10/2009, https://paltoday.ps/ar/p/61556

[82] John Kakish, The Revolutionary Christian, site of The Palestinian Information Center, 25/9/2016, https://palinfo.com/news/2016/09/25/214430/

restrictive measures. Among them was Nidal ‘Aboud,[83] a young Christian from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, who joined thousands of Palestinian Muslims in prayer at the mosque’s gates. On the “Friday of Rage,” he carried his Gospel, displayed his cross, and stood alongside Muslims in unified prayer. Nidal’s commitment is part of a broader pattern of Christian solidarity with Muslims at *al-Aqsa*. William, John Kakish’s father, then 65, began a vigil at the mosque’s gates on the very first night of its closure, raising his hands in supplication behind the imams as they invoked *Allah* for the liberation of *al-Aqsa* and the release of prisoners. His daughter, Doline Kakish, 21, documents Israel’s violations around the mosque and has maintained a constant presence at Bab al-Asbat, undeterred by the occupation’s repressive measures. Like many Muslims present, she sustained an injury to her abdomen while participating in the protests.[84]

Raed Nasrallah[85] engaged in spiritual seclusion and vigilance at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, affirming that the mosque belongs to him as a Palestinian and forms an integral part of his Palestinian heritage.[86]

On 11/5/2022, when Israeli forces attacked the Jenin RC, journalist Shireen Abu ‘Akleh, a Christian,[87] was carrying out her journalistic duty by reporting from

[83] Nidal ‘Aboud was born in Jerusalem in 1993 into a Christian family. He was educated in Jerusalem’s schools and experienced multiple assaults by Israeli forces. He later ran in the Palestinian elections on the Al-Mustaqbal (Future) list. See Nidal ‘Aboud: The Story of a Christian Defending Islamic Holy Sites in Jerusalem, site of Alghad TV, 25/4/2021, https://www.alghad.tv/نضال-عبود-قصة-مسيحي-يدافع-عن-المقدسات-الإسلامية-بالقدس/news/أخبار-الغد

[84] Jerusalem’s Christians Stand in Solidarity with Its Muslims Against the al-Aqsa Siege, Aljazeera.net, 17/7/2017.

[85] Raed Nasrallah was born in the city of Nazareth to a Christian family. He is considered one of the prominent cultural figures among Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories and served as the director of al-Karmah Theater in Haifa. See Tweeters Circulated a Photo of a Christian who was in Seclusion at al-Aqsa, Arabi21, 16/4/2022, https://arabi21.com/story/1431854/

[86] Raed Nasrallah..The story of a Christian who joined the Worshippers in Their Defense at al-Aqsa Mosque During its Raid, site of National Press Agency, 16/4/2022, https://npa.ps/p/15742

[87] Shireen Nasri Abu ‘Akleh was born in 1971 and grew up in Jerusalem in a Christian family originally from Bethlehem in the southern WB. She first pursued studies in architecture at the Jordan University of Science and Technology, before shifting to journalism at Yarmouk University in Jordan, from which she earned her undergraduate degree. After graduation, Abu ‘Akleh returned to Palestine, where she worked in various media roles with several institutions. In 1997, she joined the newly established Palestine bureau of Aljazeera satellite channel. See ‘Atef Daghlas, Shireen Abu ‘Akleh: Daughter of Every Palestinian Household, Aljazeera.net, 11/5/2022. (in Arabic)

the RC on the brutal assaults it was enduring. Israeli forces shot her in the head with live ammunition, killing her and placing her among the ranks of Palestinian Christian martyrs.[88]

Summary

- Palestinian Christians experienced various forms of forced displacement by Zionist militias in 1948, alongside Palestinian Muslims.
- A number of Palestinian Christian leaders emerged, actively participating in the national struggle.
- Israeli forces pursued many of these Christian leaders abroad, assassinating a significant number of them.
- During both the First and Second *Intifadah*s, Palestinian Christians were actively involved in resisting Israeli occupation.
- Many Palestinian Christians stood in solidarity with Muslims in defending the *al-Aqsa* Mosque, sometimes through sustained presence and devotion, and at other times by taking up force in its defense.

[88] The Martyrdom of Shireen Abu 'Akleh, Aljazeera correspondent, by Israeli army gunfire while covering the raid on Jenin Camp, Aljazeera.net, 11/5/2022. (in Arabic)

Chapter One

Father Manuel Musallam and His Positions on Fundamental National Issues

Father Manuel Musallam and His Positions on Fundamental National Issues

First: The Life of Father Manuel Musallam and His Public Engagements

1. The Life and Writings of Father Manuel Musallam

a. Birth, Upbringing and Education

Manuel Hanna Shehadeh Musallam was born in the village of Birzeit in Palestine on 16/4/1938, during the height of the Palestinian Revolt (1936–1939). This period was marked by a strong sense of national consciousness among both Muslims and Christians in Palestine, especially in response to British bias toward the Zionist movement and encouragement of Jewish immigration to Palestinian lands.[1] Musallam was raised in a family distinguished by both religious devotion and national commitment. He was the eldest of six children; three sons and three daughters.[2]

From an early age, he was exposed to the harshness of life and the challenges of growing up in modest circumstances. His mother, in particular, was self-reliant and adept at navigating the difficulties of a demanding environment.[3]

Father Manuel Musallam's family lived in poverty. Even though they owned land planted with olive trees, the harsh realities of cultivation meant that the harvest was meager. Father Manuel recalled, "During the war, I experienced poverty and hunger alongside my family, and many times I waited for a hen to lay an egg just

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[1] Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study) (Gaza: House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, 2021), p. 61.

[2] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan: Tajalliyat al-Din wa al-Wataniyyah wa al-Huwiyyah al-Filastiniyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation: Manifestations of Religion, Nationalism, and Palestinian Identity) (Gaza: House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, 2019), pp. 59–60.

[3] Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Qiyam al-Musalahah al-Wataniyyah fi Fikr al-Abb Mauel Mussalam* (The Values of National Reconciliation in the Thought of Father Manuel Musallam) (Gaza: n.p., 2019), p. 25.

so I could buy a notebook." It was common for his father to require a dinar or two, often necessitating borrowing from neighbors. Father Manuel contributed to his family's labor in numerous agricultural activities, from tending and harvesting olives to cultivating wheat, and he even assisted his father in digging wells through solid rock.[4]

When Zionist militias began attacking Palestinian towns and villages in 1947, Father Manuel Musallam was only ten years old, bearing witness to the Palestinian *Nakbah* and its devastating consequences. He recalled, "During those days of mass displacement, many refugees arrived in Birzeit and settled in our school… The number of refugees was so great that women could not reach the water springs due to the crowds and the weak flow from the springs. Many purchased donkeys to carry water from distant springs to sell."[5] These experiences left a lasting impression on young Manuel, shaping his awareness and concern for the struggles of his people.

Father Manuel Musallam received his primary education in Birzeit before enrolling at the Clerical Institute in Beit Jala in 1951, where he studied theology and philosophy, graduating in 1963.[6] According to Ahmad Yusuf,[7] Manuel was intelligent, though his academic performance had been average or below average in his early years, a reflection of the difficult economic conditions he faced.[8]

b. The Works of Father Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel Musallam authored a diverse collection of books, which can be categorized into stories and plays, political and historical works, as well as numerous other writings. He wrote a total of 14 plays, drawing inspiration from the Gospels, imbued with rich lessons and moral reflections.

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[4] Ibid., p. 26.

[5] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 73.

[6] Father Manuel Musallam.. A Palestinian Resisting Israel, Aljazeera.net, 19/3/2017. (in Arabic)

[7] Ahmad Yusuf: Born on 27/12/1950 in Rafah. Leader in Hamas, political advisor to former Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah, former Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chairman of the Board of the House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, President of the Palestinian Accord Authority, member of the Palestinian Engineers' Syndicate, and former Director of the United Foundation for Studies and Research – Washington. Author of 50 books in Arabic and English. See Ahmad Yusuf, interview via WhatsApp, Gaza, 26/10/2022.

[8] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 62.

Plays and Stories

Among the plays and stories written by Father Manuel Musallam are: The Living Nativity, The Apostles' Meeting with the Church, The Apostles and the Gospel, The Prodigal Son, The Healing of the Blind Man, The Sinful Woman in the House of Simon the Leper, Christ: Light of the World, The Adulterous Woman, The Three Trees, The Passion of Christ as Told by the Church, He Rose from the Dead, Jesus in the Realm of the Dead, Ascended to Heaven, and The Raising of Lazarus from the Dead. He also composed music for simple sketches, including the sketch "The King Who Lost His Way."[9]

Political and Historical Books

Father Manuel Musallam authored *Hadith Umm Qush'am: Stories and Reflections on the Stolen Homeland as Seen by an Arab Priest from Palestine*, in Arabic, published in 2021. This work is widely regarded as one of his most important, offering a thoughtful articulation of his political positions on pivotal national issues, including Israeli occupation and its resistance, normalization, refugees, the right of return, settlements, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip (GS) siege. He also addresses the roles of the PLO, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the Oslo Accord. Father Manuel often employed allegory to convey his views, giving voice to animals as a means of political expression.[10]

His second work, *The Roaring Pen*, in Arabic, published in December 2022, compiles Father Manuel's statements and positions regarding the issues facing the Palestinian people.[11]

Father Manuel Musallam has several other unpublished works, in Arabic, currently in the process of being released. Among these is *The Palestinian Christian Arabs: The Case of Gaza*, a historical study that explores the Christian communities of GS, their denominations and origins. Another unpublished work, *The Roar of Truth*, is a collection of courageous sayings and advice that Father Manuel Musallam addressed to his people. His book *I Spoke with Wisdom and*

[9] Ibid., p. 125.

[10] Father Manuel Musallam, *Hadith Umm Qush'am: Qusas wa Ta'ammulat Tahki Qadiyyat al-Watan al-Salib kama Ra'aha wa 'Ashaha Kahin 'Arabi min Filastin* (Hadith Umm Qush'am: Stories and Reflections on the Stolen Homeland as Seen by an Arab Priest from Palestine) (Ramallah: New Print, 2021), p. 7.

[11] Father Manuel Musallam, *Al-Qalam al-Hadir* (The Roaring Pen) (Ramallah: New Print, 2022), p. 6.

Good Counsel gathers his positions, perspectives and proposals in service of the Palestine issue and the national struggle. Father Manuel also authored a religious work titled *Symbols of Numbers in the Torah and Some Civilizations*.

2. National Frameworks Through Which Father Manuel Musallam Worked to Defend the Palestine Issue

a. Positions Held by Priest Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel Musallam was ordained on 29/6/1963 in a ceremony at the Cathedral Church in Jerusalem officiated by Patriarch Alberto Gori.[12] He initially served as an assistant priest to Father Boutros Aranky in Jordan, at the South Zarqa parish, during the period 1963–1968, teaching in two church schools; one for boys and another for girls. His distinguished performance during this time led to his appointment in charge of the Rusaifeh Church in Zarqa, Jordan. Subsequently, the Patriarch Gori appointed him parish priest in the town of ‘Anjara, near ‘Ajloun, from 1968 to 1970, where he established strong ties with Palestinian guerrillas (*fedai’yyun*) in the area. From 1970 to 1975, he served as the priest of Jenin, overseeing Christian communities in Ya‘bad, Burqin, Kafr Qud, Deir Ghazaleh, Al-Jalama, and al-Muqeibleh, each of which had a small Christian population. In 1975, he took up a teaching position in Christian education at the Terra Santa School in Nazareth. He then assumed the role of parish priest for the Catholic community in Zababdeh (Palestine) and later served as parish priest in GS from 1995 to 2009. In January 2006,[13] Pope Benedict XVI conferred upon him the title of Monsignor.[14] He retired and returned to his hometown of Birzeit on 4/5/2009.[15]

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[12] Alberto Gori was born on 9/2/1889 in San Piero Agliana, Italy. On 26/9/1907, he joined the Franciscan Order, and on 19/7/1914, he was ordained a priest in Florence. On 11/11/1949, he was appointed Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. He later became a member of the Central Commission of the Second Vatican Council. On 25/11/1970, he passed away in Jerusalem, where he was buried in the Latin Patriarchal co-Cathedral (the Chapel of St. Joseph). Patriarch Alberto Gori, site of Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, https://lpj.org/en/the-patriarchate/diocese/patriarchs-1/patriarch-alberto-gori-1949-1970

[13] Father Manuel Musallam.. A Palestinian Resisting Israel, Aljazeera.net, 19/3/2017. (in Arabic)

[14] The title Monsignor is an honorary designation conferred by the Pope in Rome upon a priest in recognition of distinguished service in his ecclesiastical duties, whether in teaching or administration, within Catholic institutions affiliated with the Vatican. See Scott Thompson, How Does a Catholic Priest Become a Monsignor?, site of Chron, 28/6/2018, https://work.chron.com/catholic-priest-become-monsignor-5419.html

[15] Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Qiyam al-Musalahah al-Wataniyyah fi Fikr al-Abb Mauel Mussalam* (The Values of National Reconciliation in the Thought of Father Manuel Musallam), pp. 37–38.

b. Institutions and Committees in which Father Manuel Musallam was Active

Father Manuel Musallam played an active role in numerous institutions and committees that confronted the practices of Israel, defended Jerusalem and its holy sites, and called on Palestinian factions to achieve national unity. This section reviews the institutions and committees in which Father Manuel held permanent membership or assumed leadership positions.

Institutions

Father Manuel Musallam is a member of the Christian–Islamic Commission in Support of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites,[16] and President of The World Popular Organization for Jerusalem Justice and Peace.[17] He co-founded the Islamic–Christian Forum in Gaza in partnership with the National Guidance Committee, and established Palestinian folklore groups that won the gold medal at the Arab Youth Forum in Egypt. He also founded musical ensembles and the Arab Scout Group in Zababdeh, Jenin and GS. Musallam is a founding member of both House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution in Gaza and the National Reconciliation Committees. He serves as President of the Independent Palestinian Committee for the Prosecution of Israeli War Criminals (HUKM) and Head of the Christian World Department in Fatah. In addition, he has directed the Latin Patriarchate schools in GS and the Islamic–Christian Committee in Birzeit.[18]

Committees Father Manuel Musallam Served On

Father Manuel Musallam has served on the Jerusalem as the Capital of Arab Culture 2009 Committee, the Christian–Islamic Commission in Support of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites, and the Arab Writers Union in GS. He has also edited several works on religious education and pedagogy for elementary schools and kindergartens.[19]

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[16] Bila Hudud [Without Boundaries]: The Position of Jerusalemites on Trump's Decision to Recognize Jerusalem as Israel's Capital, with Father Manuel Musallam, Al Jazeera Arabic channel, YouTube, 21/12/2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOn2LWuX3QE

[17] The Establishment of The World Popular Organization for Jerusalem Justice and Peace, Abouna.org, 15/12/2017, https://abouna.org/content/تأسيس-'الهيئة-الشعبية-العالمية-لعدالة-وسلام-القدس'

[18] Manoel Musallam, Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, https://lpj.org/en/the-patriarchate/diocese/priests/manoel-musallam

[19] Ibid.

3. The Social and Educational Role of Father Manuel Musallam

a. Social Role

Father Manuel Musallam has frequently emphasized, through television appearances and on his Facebook page, the Covenant of ‘Umar, granted by Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 15 AH/ 636 CE. He regards this covenant as a foundational moment that fostered fraternity and established a framework of love and coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Palestine. It bound the two communities in a shared destiny of suffering and celebration,[20] cultivating compassion and mutual defense. In Father Manuel’s view, the Covenant of ‘Umar laid the groundwork for a way of life rooted in partnership.[21]

Father Manuel Musallam conceptualized the relationship between Palestinian Christians and Muslims along three interrelated dimensions:

- **The National Dimension**

Father Manuel emphasized that Palestinians perceive a profound national dimension to their existence, and that Jerusalem and its holy sites carry significant national meaning. Accordingly, Palestinian Christians align with the aspirations of their people rather than with the directives of a religious authority that may be foreign and connected to Palestinians only through purely religious ties. This national consciousness compels Palestinian Christians to stand in solidarity with their Arab compatriots. *Al-Aqsa* Mosque is not exclusively a Muslim site; it also belongs to Christians. Similarly, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre represents not only the Christian resurrection but the collective resurrection of the Palestinian people.[22]

- **The Palestinian Identity Dimension**

This dimension carries a spiritual aspect, wherein Jerusalem, *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre constitute a central element of Palestinian

[20] Good Morning Program: Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, AlFalstiniah TV channel, YouTube, 27/11/2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9neXvTPBTA

[21] “Our relationships as Palestinian Muslims and Christians remain steady and unwavering in our spheres of interaction, and this is due to the stability of the spheres,” Abouna Manuel Musallam page, site of Facebook, 24/6/2021, https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1B3VtRS1uj/?mibextid=wwXIfr

[22] Exclusive Interview, member of the Islamic-Christian Commission in Support of the Holy Sites: Father Manuel Musallam, AlarabyTv_News channel, YouTube, 31/7/2017, https://youtu.be/pc5xNvX-nkI?si=-wQY4BAyE1jqoe8m

identity. Jerusalem and the Palestinian people cannot be understood apart from *al-Aqsa* and the Holy Sepulchre. This shared identity unites Christians and Muslims, with Christians participating at *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Muslims joining at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[23]

- **The Shared Destiny Dimension**

What befalls Muslims also befalls Christians; the fate of one is intimately bound to the fate of the other. Christians and Muslims are joint partners in defending Palestine and in contributing to its reconstruction.[24]

In this context, Father Manuel Musallam undertook several social roles within his predominantly Muslim community, through which he was able to build strong social bonds with the members of his people, including:

Condemnation of Attacks on Islamic religious Symbols

Father Manuel condemned all assaults on the religious symbols of his Palestinian Muslim community. This includes, for example, the crime of offensive depictions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), which he strongly denounced. He did so in the context of France, represented by President Emmanuel Macron, refusing to apologize for this offense. Father Manuel criticized their hostile policies toward Islam, pointing out the double standards prevalent in Europe: when Jewish symbols are disrespected, it is considered a crime of anti-Semitism, yet insulting Islamic religious symbols—such as the Prophet of Islam or the Quran—is framed as freedom of expression and supported by secular law.[25] Father Manuel emphasized that attacks on Islamic religious symbols are not matters of personal freedom but constitute harm, and that France should offer an apology to Muslims.

Father Manuel argued that Western countries pursue a harmful policy aimed at distorting Islam. They present the Quran and depictions of the Prophet as sources of terrorism, demean Muslims, act condescendingly toward them, and

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] "Regarding the crisis over the offensive depictions of the Prophet, my message to the Arab nation is very brief," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 1/11/2020, https://www.facebook.com/abounamanuel.musallam

promote Islamophobia.[26] At the same time, they express concern over the supposed "Islamization" of France and its perceived negative impact on democracy and secularism. By fostering groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), they have tarnished the image of Muslims and Islam, while extremist actors have further deepened this darkened and distorted perception.[27]

The researcher concurs with this view, particularly following the confirmed involvement of the French company Lafarge, a global manufacturer of building materials and cement (Damascus branch), in providing material support and resources to the terrorist organizations ISIS and Al-Nusra Front (ANF), in exchange for safeguarding its interests in Syria during 2013–2014. The company was investigated by the New York Joint Terrorism Task Force of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Immediately following the defendants' guilty pleas this morning, US District Judge sentenced the defendants to terms of probation and to pay financial penalties, including criminal fines and forfeiture, totaling $777.78 million.[28]

Contributing to the Resolution of Tribal and Familial Disputes

Father Manuel Musallam was instrumental in social reform and the resolution of tribal and familial disputes. His efforts began during his time in Jordan, where he successfully mediated between two Christian families in the late 1960s, and he consistently sought to foster reconciliation wherever he lived.[29] In Zababdeh, he facilitated the resolution of a serious conflict within the Muslim Kamil family in the town of Qabatiya, a dispute that had resulted in the death of a man and the

[26] "Islamophobia is a new ideological formation that has taken full expression since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Islamophobia does not originate in one particular administration, thinker, philosopher, activist, media outlet, special interest group, think tank, or even economic sector or industry though indeed, these actors are collectively responsible for the virulent dissemination of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab stereotypes and beliefs, circulated in order to naturalize and justify US global, economic and political hegemony." See Stephen Sheehi, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2011), p. 31.

[27] "In the crisis over the offensive caricatures of the Prophet, my message to the Arab nation is very brief," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 1/11/2020.

[28] Lafarge Pleads Guilty to Conspiring to Provide Material Support to Foreign Terrorist Organization, site of U.S. Department of Justice, 18/10/2022, https://www.justice.gov/opa/video/lafarge-pleads-guilty-conspiring-provide-material-support-foreign-terrorist-organizations

[29] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 118.

destruction of property.[30] Father Manuel demonstrated particular skill in mediating among the Muslim population, fostering reconciliation and social cohesion, even though certain disputes among Christians were left to the judgment of respected Muslim elders. He also played a decisive role in ending the longstanding feud between the Al-'Aweiwi (Abu 'Aisha) family and the Ja'abari family in Hebron, dedicating substantial and commendable effort to achieving reconciliation.[31]

Social Solidarity

Father Manuel Musallam played a prominent role in fostering social solidarity among his people, particularly during periods of upheaval, revolutions and wars. His contributions were especially notable during the First *Intifadah* in 1987, when he supported youth initiatives and assisted besieged families.[32] Likewise, during Israel's war on GS (2008/2009), he played a crucial role in protecting his people and providing essential aid—food, water, and shelter—opening the church's doors to shield them from the brutality of Israel's machinery.[33]

b. Educational Role

Father Manuel distinguished himself through an active educational role, which rested on two main pillars:

First Pillar: Promoting National Culture

Through his leadership of various Christian educational institutions in both the West Bank (WB) and GS, Father Manuel sought to nurture Palestinian students on national foundations, transcending religious and sectarian differences. He began this work early in his career, while serving as director of the Latin Patriarchate School in Zababdeh. There, he established a fund to support Palestinian prisoners, with students contributing donations that were then sent to prisoners held in Israeli prisons.[34]

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[30] Ibid., p. 144.

[31] "Your fellow Palestinian Christians, together with Father Manuel Musallam, stand today among you while you are in conflict, seeking to reconcile your hearts," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 1/8/2021.

[32] Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Al-Kahin wa al-Muthaqqaf wa al-Mu'allim: Ida'at Hawl al-Tajruba al-Wataniyyah wa al-Tarbawiyyah al-Abb Manuel Musallam* (The Priest, Intellectual and Educator: Insights on the National and Educational Experience Father Manuel Musallam) (Gaza: House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, 2022), p. 66.

[33] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 275.

[34] Ibid., p. 124.

Father Manuel Musallam deliberately connected the school curricula to the Palestine issue and its national dimensions, ensuring that students' education was deeply informed by the realities and historical data of the struggle. In doing so, he played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural and intellectual foundations of Palestinian liberation, complementing political and military efforts. The motto of the Holy Family School in GS was prominently displayed on a large image of the Dome of the Rock: "The goal of education is the liberation of Jerusalem."[35]

For Father Manuel, education was itself a strategic tool for liberation from Israeli occupation, designed to foster a deep sense of belonging to the homeland. He renamed classrooms after Palestinian villages destroyed by Israel during the 1948 war and its aftermath and created a family tree for each student, tracing their origins to ancestral towns and villages. Many of the slogans he inscribed still adorn the school's walls, instilling in students the conviction that they are citizens entrusted with a just cause, soldiers in the struggle for liberation, and not merely members of the Palestinian people but its future leaders.[36]

Milad 'Ayyad, a former student of Father Manuel at the Holy Family School, recalled, "Father Manuel sought to instill a strong national consciousness among students by emphasizing aspects of Palestinian heritage, such as the *dabkeh*. He dressed the girls in traditional Palestinian thobes and the boys in the Palestinian keffiyeh, and wrote on the school walls: 'Here, the independent Palestinian decision is made.'"[37] Through these practices, Father Manuel cultivated a profound sense of leadership among his students.

Second Pillar: Advancing Educational Methods

Father Manuel Musallam contributed significantly to curriculum development at the Latin Patriarchate School in GS. He authored textbooks for the school in Arabic, followed by English, mathematics and general science. He then further developed these books, which were eventually printed in color. At the time, the Palestinian Ministry of Education approved these textbooks as the official curriculum for his school. During this period, a ministry official remarked to

[35] Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Al-Kahin wa al-Muthaqqaf wa al-Mu'allim* (The Priest, Intellectual and Educator), p. 131.

[36] Ibid., p. 133.

[37] Milad 'Ayyad, Oral interview, Gaza, 23/5/2022.

Father Manuel: "It would be wonderful if this curriculum were adopted across all private schools."[38]

Father Manuel embraced a distinctive educational approach, stating:

> I relied on two guiding principles in my relationship with children: courage and joy. My method was simple: give the child joy, and you receive learning in return. When you give a child joy, they respond with study, happiness, love for their country, their community, their school and their teachers, forming strong bonds with all of them. A happy child becomes a good citizen.[39]

Father Manuel Musallam firmly opposed the prevailing educational model that treated children as passive recipients of knowledge, effectively turning them into human machines consumed by study. In response, he developed curricula that emphasized active learning and play, deliberately minimizing parental involvement, as he believed that learning through play did not require adult assistance. He encouraged students to explore the arts, including singing, chanting and poetry—both in writing and performance. He composed poems for children, setting some to music, and wrote additional works for youth. Moreover, he promoted the learning of the Palestinian *dabkeh*.[40]

Father Manuel also introduced modern educational tools to the school. Reflecting on this, he remarked, "I was the first to bring educational computers to the Zababdeh School and to Gaza, and I decided that science should be taught exclusively via computer in the lower grades." He awarded certificates of recognition not only to high achievers but also to those who demonstrated significant effort, ensuring that a student who struggled academically might receive a certificate before a top performer if their effort was exceptional.[41]

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[38] Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Al-Kahin wa al-Muthaqqaf wa al-Mu'allim* (The Priest, Intellectual and Educator), p. 144.

[39] Ibid., p. 147.

[40] Ibid., p. 145.

[41] Ibid., pp. 146–147.

Summary

- Father Manuel Musallam witnessed the forced displacement of the Palestinian people in 1948, known as the "Palestinian *Nakbah*," an event that profoundly shaped his commitment to activism and political engagement.
- He consistently resisted Israel through his participation in various organizations and committees dedicated to opposing the occupation on Palestinian land.
- Musallam also played a pivotal role in fostering Islamic–Christian coexistence, a commitment reflected in his work as a priest and particularly evident in the schools he administered in both the WB and GS.
- He actively nurtured national consciousness among his students, inscribing the names of cities and villages destroyed by Israel in 1948 on classroom walls and displaying patriotic slogans throughout the school, including the emblematic: "Here, the independent Palestinian decision is made."

Second: Father Manuel's Position on Core National Issues

1. Father Manuel's Stance on Jerusalem and the Holy Sites

Jerusalem holds profound significance for Father Manuel Musallam. For him, the city embodies the homeland and identity of Palestine. He argued that Palestine derives its central importance from the sanctity of Jerusalem; without Jerusalem, Palestine loses its meaning. Accordingly, he considered the core of the conflict to be centered first on Jerusalem and its holy sites, and only afterward on the rest of Palestinian territory.[42]

a. Father Manuel's Position on Israel's Policies and Practices Regarding Jerusalem

Father Manuel Musallam expressed deep concern over the actions and policies that Israel has imposed on Jerusalem. He used every available media platform—television channels that host him, as well as his personal pages on Facebook and YouTube—to explain and highlight the dangers posed by Israel's policies toward the city and its holy sites. He articulated this concern through two main points:

[42] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 25/6/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3119808334792911

Settlement and Judaization in Jerusalem

Father Manuel Musallam warned against Israel's ambitions and its policies aimed at altering the demographic and historical status of Jerusalem. He highlighted Israel's attempts to disrupt the city's demographic balance through:

- The continued forced displacement of Palestinians, the city's original and legitimate inhabitants.
- Ongoing settlement expansion at the expense of Palestinian land, the demolition of homes, and the seizure of Palestinian property in Jerusalem.
- Israel's policy of Judaization imposed on the residents of Jerusalem and its holy sites, including: compelling churches to pay taxes, taking control of Islamic sacred areas, manipulating religious tourism through Jewish tour guides whose task is to distort the historical truth for foreign visitors, and appropriating religious-tourism industries while attributing them to Israel.[43]

On the Danger of Selling Land to Jews

Father Manuel cautioned against the increasing practice of selling land and property in Jerusalem, urging Palestinians not to succumb to Israeli pressures. He opposed the sale of any property in Jerusalem for investment in the WB or abroad, arguing that selling land in Jerusalem constitutes selling a part of the homeland itself. He called on Palestinians in Jerusalem to maintain their ownership and invest locally, thereby reinforcing the Palestinian presence in the city.[44]

b. Father Manuel's Position on Israeli Attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Holy Sepulchre Church

Father Manuel Musallam has consistently taken principled positions in defense of both Islamic and Christian holy sites. He is widely remembered for his statement: "If they destroy your mosques, raise the call to prayer from our churches."

The Significance of *al-Aqsa* Mosque According to Father Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel Musallam has repeatedly emphasized, in numerous television interviews and on his Facebook and YouTube pages, the profound significance of

[43] Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study), pp. 152–153.

[44] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 13/8/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3259924334114643

al-Aqsa Mosque in his thought and his stance against the ongoing attacks on it. He articulated this importance by stating, "Every stone that is shaken at *al-Aqsa* is a stone shaken at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and any Muslim man who is killed is a Christian man who is killed,"[45] underscoring that *al-Aqsa* Mosque is no less important than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Father Manuel argued that *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Quran are integral components of Christian civilization, just as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Gospel are integral to Islamic civilization. Over time, these two civilizations have interwoven, producing a singular, shared heritage for one people: the Palestinian Arab people.[46] From this perspective, Father Manuel has consistently continued his defense of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Assaults Against *al-Aqsa* Mosque

Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that *al-Aqsa* Mosque embodies three dimensions: the first is the Palestinian people; the second is the land and place that Palestinians possess; and the third is the Islamic faith. Together, these dimensions constitute the civilizational and national identity of Muslim Palestinians. Global and Zionist powers have recognized the importance of these dimensions and have systematically sought to undermine and dismantle them, thereby eroding the cultural and national foundations of the Palestinians. He explained that the first target has been the Palestinian people themselves. Israel has perpetrated numerous massacres, including those of 1990, 1996 and 2000. Father Musallam viewed these massacres as deliberate attempts to eradicate the Muslim Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Alongside these physical atrocities, he noted the parallel existence of "political massacres," manifested in forced expulsions, displacement, exile and policies aimed at excluding Muslims from *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Turning to the second dimension, the land and place, Father Musallam distinguished between two methods used to erase it. The first is outright destruction and burning, exemplified by the 1969 arson attack carried out by settlers against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the pulpit of Salahuddin al-Ayyubi, and copies of the Quran. The second is the ongoing excavations beneath the mosque, which, if allowed to continue, will ultimately lead to its collapse.

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[45] "Interview with Father Manuel: Murabit from the Holy Land," TRT Arabi Channel, YouTube, 4/2/2021, https://youtu.be/28Sn9L_3jO0?si=99ldmCtn1HhCjVSH

[46] "We, the Sons of Jerusalem, Were Nurtured on Faith, Integrity, Truth and Peace from Its Bosom, Al-Aqsa and the Holy Sepulchre," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 18/4/2022.

As for the third dimension, the religious, he pointed to Israel's efforts to restrict the call to prayer at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, while simultaneously imposing Talmudic rituals and practices within its courtyards. These actions, he argued, represent an attempt to replace Islam with their own religious presence in the sacred space.[47]

Within this context, Father Manuel Musallam noted that Israel does not refrain from insulting the religious sentiments of Muslims by allowing its soldiers to storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Qibli Mosque with their boots, thereby violating the sanctity of these holy sites. He stressed that Israeli soldiers routinely employ unjustified violence, brutally beating the steadfast men and women present at *al-Aqsa*, spilling their blood within its courtyards. They fire tear gas, stun grenades and lethal explosives at the worshippers, in addition to opening live fire against them.[48]

In this context, Father Manuel Musallam warned of the excavations being carried out by Israel beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque. He added that "Israel has refused any reconstruction of the mosque or restoration of the damaged areas within *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The purpose of this persistent refusal is to let *al-Aqsa* collapse on its own by preventing necessary repairs, all while the ongoing excavations continue to threaten its foundations."[49] He also cautioned Palestinians against a potential large-scale massacre within the mosque and its courtyards, as well as its demolition, noting that Israel could exploit the weakness of the Arab states, the normalization of some Arab regimes with it, and the Palestinian schism.[50]

Father Manuel attributed this repressive and sadistic policy, which Israel imposes on Muslims within *al-Aqsa*, along with its continual attempts to end the

[47] Father Manuel Musallam: Al-Aqsa Global Week in Britain, The World Popular Organization for Jerusalem Justice and Peace page, Facebook, 8/3/2021, https://www.facebook.com/100071862834425/posts/1217170788678677/

[48] "Father Manuel Musallam: al-Aqsa Stands Supreme," YouTube, 21/4/2022.

[49] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," *Al-Mishkat Journal*, Morocco, no. 55, 2018, p. 110.

[50] Ali Hafez, "Father Manuel Musallam: The Attack on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as a Prelude to Something Greater," site of al-Ain News, 5/11/2016, https://al-ain.com/article/church-resurrection-jerusalem-palestine-manuel

Islamic presence in Jerusalem, to the ideology of Zionist Christianity.[51] This belief holds that Israel cannot be fully realized as a "state" without the existence of the alleged Temple on *al-Aqsa* hill, which they call the "Temple Mount."[52]

Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Israeli Attacks on Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem

Father Manuel interprets Israel's attacks on Christian churches in Jerusalem as a deliberate prelude to preparing European and global opinion for an assault on the *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the primary target, with Palestinian Muslims as the main focus.[53] He notes: "The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is under threat from Israel, as evidenced by its actions, including raising the Israeli flag at the church entrance." According to Father Manuel, Israel's aim in targeting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is not immediate seizure but to pave the way for taking control of other Christian sites, such as the Church of Jacob's Well in Nablus, the Tabgha Churches in Tiberias, the Upper Room (Cenacle) on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and most Christian churches across Palestine. The ultimate goal, he argues, is to erase the history of Palestinian Christianity, supplant it with Judaism, and ultimately monopolize both the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and *al-Aqsa* Mosque by appropriating them.[54]

c. Father Manuel Musallam's Efforts in Defending Jerusalem and Its Holy Sites

Father Manuel's Defense of Jerusalem

Father Manuel called upon Palestinians and Arabs to resist and defend Jerusalem, not as a pursuit of peace, but to protect Palestinian-Arab civilization within the city and safeguard Palestinian identity. For him, Jerusalem embodies

[51] Zionist Christianity advocates the idea of "relocating the Jewish people to Eretz Israel" (Palestine) and establishing a state for them under Jewish sovereignty. These are biblically prescribed preconditions for the second arrival of the Messiah (Prophet 'Isa (Jesus)). See Rafael Medoff and Chaim Waxman, *Historical Dictionary of Zionism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008).

[52] Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study), pp. 167–168.

[53] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 201.

[54] Father Musallam: Israel's Raising of its Flag Over the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Sought to Replace One Religion with Another, site of Al-Quds City, 2/11/2016, https://qii.media/index.php

the Palestinian identity and homeland; without it, Palestinians have no homeland. Father Manuel further asserted, "The Zionist project cannot be completed without controlling Jerusalem. Israel understands that their entity cannot exist without dominating Jerusalem and rebuilding the Temple. If Palestinians and Arabs succeed in reclaiming Jerusalem, it would signify the collapse of the Zionist project in Palestine."[55]

In this context, Father Manuel Musallam has been actively engaged in defending the city of Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites through organizations dedicated to the city's protection. Father Manuel is a member of the Christian–Islamic Commission in Support of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites. In 2017, he founded The World Popular Organization for Jerusalem Justice and Peace, whose mission and operational plan are outlined below:

Objectives of the Commission

- To support the free and independent decision of the Palestinian national leadership within the framework of the "Justice and Peace" plan. The Commission is non-partisan and non-factional; it exposes Israel's actions and highlights the suffering of the Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation, with the aim of enforcing international law and holding war criminals accountable in international forums.
- To emphasize that the conflict in Jerusalem is not religious but a civilizational and historical struggle.
- To preserve Jerusalem's religious character, remove all restrictions on access to the city, and safeguard its heritage, monuments and civilization.
- To strengthen the Arab presence in Jerusalem.[56]

Aspirations of the Commission

- The Palestinian people call for the PLO to formally terminate the Oslo Accords and nullify it, while refraining from recognizing Israel.
- They urge the PLO to rejuvenate its leadership and adopt a comprehensive resistance strategy aimed at liberating all of Palestine.

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[55] "Father Manuel Musallam: The Gradual Nakba," YouTube, 7/6/2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skYR1mwMJh8&t=3s

[56] Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study), p. 275.

- The Palestinian people appeal to Arab nations to take concerted action toward the liberation of Jerusalem—its territory, its population and its holy sites.
- They call upon the Palestinian factions to complete national reconciliation without delay.
- All Palestinians recognize their state extending from Ras al-Naqoura to Umm al-Rashrash, and they call upon the PA to declare the establishment of a Palestinian municipality in Jerusalem, as well as to reactivate institutions relocated from Jerusalem to Ramallah following the Oslo Accords. These measures, they assert, constitute the beginning of civil disobedience and the pursuit of justice and peace for Jerusalem.[57]

Father Manuel Musallam's Defense of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem

Father Manuel criticized Islamic movements abroad, attributing their shortcomings to what he perceived as their failure to fulfill their religious duty toward the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its restoration. He urged Islamic movements and organizations overseas to pressure Israel to cease all hostile practices against Islamic and Christian holy sites. He also called on Jordan and its King, 'Abdullah II, as well as Morocco and its King, Mohammed VI bin al-Hasan—given their custodial responsibility over the holy sites—to assume a leading and liberating role regarding Jerusalem's holy sites and to free them from Israeli occupation.[58] Furthermore, he demanded that the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, in coordination with King 'Abdullah II, ensure that all police stationed at *al-Aqsa* compound and its gates be Arab, regulate the number of Jewish and foreign visitors to the mosque, and verify that such visits are strictly for tourism rather than religious purposes.[59]

Father Manuel Musallam affirmed that Islamic and Christian holy sites are the property of the Palestinians and Arabs, regardless of whether the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) formally acknowledges this. He emphasized that asserting ownership of *al-Aqsa* Mosque requires no international decision, as it is a historical and inherent right of Muslims.

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[57] Ibid., p. 276.

[58] Ibid., pp. 110–111.

[59] "Father Manuel Musallam: The Aqaba Conference/ Jordan," YouTube, 16/11/2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrYUq-1v4dw

At the same time, Father Musallam called on UNESCO and other international bodies to expose the falsity of the Israeli narrative, demonstrate its illegitimacy, and take concrete steps to rectify Israel's violations in Jerusalem. This includes addressing all damages inflicted upon *al-Aqsa* Mosque, both above and below ground, restoring Islamic and Christian holy sites seized by Israel to their rightful Palestinian owners, securing an official apology from Israel for its violations and crimes against *al-Aqsa*, and reinstating the status quo that existed prior to its occupation.[60]

Father Musallam also urged Israel to return the keys to the Mughrabi Gate, which it seized in 1967, noting: "The Mughrabi Gate and *al-Aqsa* Mosque are Islamic endowments and must fall under Palestinian control." He added, "It is a disgrace for Muslims and Palestinians that these keys remain under Israeli control."[61]

Father Manuel Musallam called on all Christian denominations in Palestine, as well as religious leaders, including patriarchs, bishops, and priests, to support *al-Aqsa* Mosque and to confront the attacks carried out by settlers. He emphasized that by defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Christians affirm their identity and underscore that Palestinians, both Muslims and Christians, share a single civilization and a united people. In this sense, the Christian defense of *al-Aqsa* Mosque constitutes a symbolic Christian covenant to Muslims.[62]

Amid the ongoing assaults by Israeli forces on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Father Musallam urged both Christians and Muslims to declare comprehensive civil disobedience to protect Islamic and Christian holy sites, foremost among them *al-Aqsa* Mosque.[63]

The researcher observed that Father Musallam did not differentiate between Islamic and Christian holy sites in his call to defend them, nor did he limit the

[60] Father Manuel Musallam, During his Meeting with the MPs, Affirms the Absolute Historical Right of Arabs and Palestinians in Jerusalem, site of Al-Watan Voice, 18/10/2016, https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2016/10/18/980483.html

[61] Exclusive Interview, member of the Islamic-Christian Commission in Support of the Holy Sites: Father Manuel Musallam, AlarabyTv_News channel, YouTube, 31/7/2017.

[62] Palestine.. Father Manuel Musallam Calls for a Christian Uprising in Support of al-Aqsa Mosque, site of Anadolu Agency, 11/5/2021, http://v.aa.com.tr/2235663

[63] "Father Manuel Musallam, I Call for Civil Disobedience at al-Aqsa," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 27/9/2022.

defense of *al-Aqsa* Mosque to Muslims alone. He explicitly encouraged Christians, including religious leaders, priests and patriarchs, to participate in its protection. The researcher attributes this inclusive approach to Father Musallam's profound national consciousness, which transcends all sectarian and religious considerations.

2. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Refugee[64] and Prisoner Issues

a. Father Manuel's Position on the Refugee Issue

Father Manuel Musallam articulated his position on the plight of Palestinian refugees through television channels as well as on his Facebook and YouTube platforms. He traced the origins of the refugee question to the actions of Zionist occupation and its armed groups, which in 1948 expelled some 800 thousand Palestinians out of a population of 1.4 million into exile. During this period, Israel seized 774 Palestinian villages and towns, completely destroyed 531 of them, and subjected the remainder to its rule and legal framework. In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of historic Palestine, leading to a second wave of Palestinian displacement.[65]

Father Manuel further noted that the total Palestinian population had more than doubled by 2018/2019, reaching 12.48 million. Of these, approximately 2 million reside in GS, 2.5 million in WB, and 1.5 million within the 1948 occupied territories, while around 6.48 million live in the diaspora. These displaced communities are spread across 58 official refugee camps (RCs) administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA): 10 RCs in Jordan, 9 in Syria, 12 in Lebanon, 19 in WB and Jerusalem, and 8 in GS.[66]

Father Manuel Musallam explained that Palestinians living within Israel since 1948, whom Israel claims as its citizens, are subjected to systematic displacement, dispossession of rights, and entrenched discrimination. For example, a Palestinian who moved from Bisan to Nazareth is prohibited under Israeli law from returning to his original home, just as one who moved from West Jerusalem to its eastern

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[64] Refugees: Palestinians who were expelled from their homes as a result of the campaigns of terror and mass expulsion carried out by armed Zionist militias during the 1948 war, which followed the declaration of the establishment of the "state of Israel." See 'Abdul Wahab Kayyali et al., *Mawsu'at al-Siyasah* (The Encyclopedia of Politics), vol. 5, p. 374.

[65] "What does the Right of Return mean for the Palestinian people?," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 20/6/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3105874926186252

[66] Ibid.

side is denied the right to return. By contrast, Israelis enjoy unrestricted freedom of movement throughout Israel. Moreover, Israel designates all properties abandoned by displaced Palestinians within its borders as "absentee property" and places them under state control. If this is the condition of those whom Israel itself classifies as citizens and who even carry Israeli passports, then what implications does this hold for any prospective negotiations with Israel concerning the right of return for refugees in GS or WB, as well as those in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan?[67]

Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Right of Return and Compensation for Palestinian Refugees

Father Manuel frames the right of return as the complete removal of the Israeli occupation from all of Palestine and the restitution of lands and properties seized by Zionist militias in 1948 and 1967. He emphasizes that the refugee issue cannot be considered resolved as long as even a single refugee continues to claim the right to return. He stresses, "With refugees still dispersed across the diaspora, all resources and efforts must be dedicated to securing their return."[68]

He argues that the continued existence of Israel fundamentally obstructs the return of Palestinian refugees. While Israel may permit the return of a limited number of individuals, it will never allow the seven million Palestinian refugees to reclaim their homeland. Consequently, Father Manuel calls for the refugee issue to occupy the highest priority within the Palestine issue and insists that every available means must be employed to enable refugees to return to their villages, towns and fields.[69]

Father Manuel Musallam underscored that compensating the refugees for the losses they have suffered constitutes an inalienable right. He clarified that compensation must not be construed as a substitute for the right of return; rather, Palestinians must be enabled to return to their land while also receiving redress for the cumulative losses endured over the past 75 years. Such redress entails the reconstruction of towns, villages, mosques and churches destroyed by Zionist militias, from which Palestinians were forcibly displaced, as well as compensation for the massacres committed by Israel against them.[70]

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[67] Father Manuel Musallam: Jerusalem Is Our Appointment, YouTube, 2/4/2022.

[68] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 20/6/2020.

[69] "Whoever has ever negotiated over a speck of dust or a stone from a refugee's home destroyed by Israel… deserves nothing but our justice," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 24/6/2022.

[70] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 20/6/2020.

Father Manuel Musallam rejected framing the return of refugees within the Oslo framework and the two-state solution, namely, the return of Palestinians solely to the WB, as the fulfillment of the right of return. He stressed that the true essence of this right lies in the return of Palestinian refugees to the entirety of Palestinian land from which they were forcibly displaced. This means returning to Haifa, Jaffa, Safad, Bisan and other occupied cities. He emphasized that those who came back with the establishment of the PA constitute only a small fraction of the refugee population, while the overwhelming majority remain in the diaspora.[71]

Father Manuel Musallam expressed profound concern over efforts to settle refugees in Arab countries through integration and the granting of passports. He urged Arab states to correct the course of the conflict with Israel, insisting that the right of return remain the central issue. He called on host countries to prepare refugees for their eventual return to their homes, emphasizing that the RCs in which they live are merely temporary transit points, not permanent residences.[72]

Father Manuel Musallam on Solving the Refugee Issue

Father Manuel pointed out the complicity of global institutions, including the United Nations (UN), the Security Council, and others, against the Palestinian people. This is evident in their disregard for the crimes committed by Israel against Palestinians, their failure to compel Israel to end its occupation, and their inaction in enforcing UN Resolution 194 of 1948.[73] It is clear that Israel cannot accept any negotiations that include the right of return for refugees, nor can it return the 531 Palestinian towns and villages to their rightful owners. Therefore, any negotiations with Israel regarding the right of return are ultimately futile.[74] Given the impossibility of resolving the refugee issue through peaceful or diplomatic

[71] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview via Messenger, 26/5/2022.

[72] "How many men in GS stand as one thousand, and how many among these thousands are content with mere demonstrations, passing by uncounted!," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 26/5/2021.

[73] "The United Nations General Assembly adopts resolution 194 (III), resolving that 'refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.'" See Resolution 194, site of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), https://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194

[74] Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 4/10/2016.

means, Father Manuel argued that the only viable solution is resistance, in order to achieve the return of refugees and the liberation of their homeland. Consequently, the use of arms to secure this return constitutes a legitimate form of struggle.[75]

b. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Prisoners' Issue

Father Manuel characterized Israel's treatment of Palestinian prisoners as both sadistic and brutal, stating, "Prisoners are subjected to all forms of torture and oppression within the prisons, encompassing excessive force, severe beatings, and the systematic denial of medical care to sick prisoners."[76]

The researcher confirms Father Manuel's observations regarding the Israeli Prison Service (IPS)'s use of extreme violence against prisoners, citing the testimony of Ahmad 'Adel Sa'adeh,[77] who recalled that the Israeli suppression forces pulled Palestinian prisoners out individually and beat them across their entire bodies, concentrating on the head and joints, resulting in him being struck on the head and subsequently suffering a cerebral stroke.[78]

Father Manuel Musallam explained that Israel invokes "administrative detention" to arrest Palestinians,[79] and when the detention period ends, it is simply renewed without releasing the prisoner. This strategy, he argued, is designed to provoke Palestinians into actions that cast them negatively before the world, thereby providing Israel with a pretext for further punitive measures. Father

[75] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 26/5/2022.

[76] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah: Mawaqif wa Ara' bi Lughat al-Siyasah wa al-Adab* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity: Positions and Opinions in the Language of Politics and Literature) (Gaza: House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, 2022), p. 67.

[77] Ahmad 'Adel Sa'adeh: A Palestinian, born in Jerusalem in 1982. He joined the Al-Qassam Brigades and was arrested by Israel in April 2004, subsequently receiving a sentence of 13 life terms. See *Al-Asra Yatahaddathun 'an Mu'anatihim* (Prisoners Speak of Their Suffering) (Gaza: Hadarat For Political and Strategic Studies, Center for Oral History and Palestinian Heritage and The Islamic University of Gaza, 2022), p. 13.

[78] Ibid., p. 14.

[79] Administrative Detention: It is when a person is held without trial without having committed an offense, on the grounds that he or she plans to break the law in the future. As this measure is supposed to be preventive, it has no time limit. The person is detained without legal proceedings, by order of the regional military commander, based on classified evidence that is not revealed to them. This leaves the detainees helpless – facing unknown allegations with no way to disprove them, not knowing when they will be released, and without being charged, tried or convicted. See Administrative Detention, site of The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories—B'Tselem, https://www.btselem.org/administrative_detention

Manuel further noted that Israel's detention of children, women and men aims to impose calm and control through repression and administrative detention.[80] He emphasized that this practice violates the law and is entirely unacceptable.[81]

Father Manuel Musallam revealed that the objective Israel seeks to achieve through its practices and punitive measures against Palestinian prisoners is to break them morally, psychologically and intellectually. These sanctions are not limited to Palestinian prisoners within Israel's jails; Israel also deliberately inflicts harm and punishment on the families of the prisoners, detaining their siblings and children, subjecting them to abuse, destroying their property and demolishing their homes—part of a policy of collective punishment aimed at shattering the will of Palestinian prisoners.[82]

Father Manuel emphasizes that Palestinian women and men imprisoned in Israel's jails are prisoners of war and should be treated accordingly, receiving all rights granted to them under international law, including access to clean food, proper clothing and daily exposure to sunlight. However, Israel refuses to recognize Palestinian prisoners as prisoners of war and insists on treating them as "terrorists," employing all criminal means and instruments against them.[83]

3. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Settlements and House Demolitions

This section examines Father Manuel Musallam's stance on Israeli settlement activity, its legitimacy and his proposals for ending settlements and reclaiming Palestinian land.

a. Father Manuel's Position on Israeli Settlements and Their Objectives

Father Manuel consistently emphasized that the Zionists were outsiders who infiltrated Palestine clandestinely. Despite all their efforts and the assistance provided by Britain, they were unable, up until the eve of the UN Partition Resolution of 29/11/1947, to control more than 7% of Palestine. Nevertheless, the UN granted them 54% of Palestine under the Partition Plan. The Zionists were not

[80] "The level of civilization in a society can be judged by examining the conditions of its prison," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 19/3/2022.

[81] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview via Messenger, 17/5/2022.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

satisfied with this allocation; through armed force, they went on to occupy 77.8% of Palestinian land by early 1949.[84]

Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that "state" of Israel has consistently violated international law. Immediately after its occupation of the WB and GS in 1967, it initiated a large-scale settlement project, an unmistakable indication of its strategy to assert control over all Palestinian territory, grounded in biblical conceptions that identify the WB as "Judea and Samaria."[85]

He further observed that the Oslo Accords of 1993 did not curb settlement expansion; rather, they facilitated its acceleration. This outcome stemmed from the Palestinian leadership's commitment not only to renounce resistance but also to pursue and suppress those engaged in it, thereby preventing them from confronting settler aggression. These measures created a strategically conducive environment for the entrenchment and growth of settlements across WB.[86]

Father Manuel Musallam outlined several objectives that Israel seeks to achieve through its settlement construction in the WB and Jerusalem. These objectives can be summarized as follows:

First Objective: To separate Palestinian cities and villages from one another, thereby preventing any communication or coordination in the event of an uprising or revolution. For this reason, settlements are strategically built between them. Moreover, Israel's settlement policy deliberately concentrates on hilltops and elevated areas, ensuring greater control over the entrances and exits of Palestinian towns and villages.

Second Objective: To seize control over resources, wealth and water. This includes taking over springs and rivers suitable for drinking, surrounding these water sources with settlements, depriving Palestinians of access to them, prohibiting the digging of wells, and dominating agricultural areas such as the Jordan Valley.

Third Objective: To fulfill a military-security purpose. Israel lacks strategic depth, particularly in the north around the cities of Qalqilya and Tulkarm, where its territory narrows to just 14–15 kilometers in width.[87]

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[84] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview via Messenger, 20/5/2022.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview via Messenger, 21/5/2022.

[87] Ibid.

b. Father Manuel's Position on the Demolition of Palestinian Homes

Father Manuel considered the home to be, for Palestinians, the foundation of stability, security and peace. He viewed the demolition campaigns in occupied Jerusalem as tantamount to demolishing the peace process itself, and as an end to calm, stability and security in the region. Father Manuel explained that the policy of demolishing houses, displacing residents and uprooting trees pursued by Israel in Jerusalem and other Palestinian cities forms part of a Israeli scheme aimed at expelling Arab Palestinians from the city. Such measures, he argued, seek to cast Palestinians, with their children, heritage, civilization, and national, human, and religious identity, into exile and dispersal, much as occurred in 1948 during what is known as the "Palestinian *Nakbah*." The ultimate objective, he contended, is to advance the Zionist project of destroying *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Christian churches in order to construct the Temple upon their ruins.[88]

In this regard, Father Manuel Musallam affirmed that the lands and homes seized by Israel are Arab and Islamic properties inherited by the Palestinian people through successive generations. He stressed that the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, which faces the threat of forced displacement, is an Arab and Islamic neighborhood, and that Israel has no right to expel its residents.[89] Father Manuel added, "The occupation has no legitimate authority to interfere in the issuance of building permits for the people of Jerusalem. Such interference is nothing more than a pretext to seize these homes and displace their residents into exile, replacing them with immigrant Jews rather than the indigenous inhabitants." He further noted, "The Israeli occupation forces families to demolish their own homes with their own hands, subjecting them to humiliation and degradation." He urged the people not to comply with Israel's demands.[90]

Father Musallam also called upon Arab and Muslim countries, as well as the international community, to support Palestinians whose homes are threatened with demolition by Israel. He appealed for assistance through every available means,

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[88] Father Musallam highlights the gravity of home demolitions in Jerusalem, their underlying objectives, and the means of protecting the city's Palestinian residents, site of Al-Quds News Agency, 23/7/2019, https://alqudsnews.net/p/142730

[89] "From Sheikh Jarrah to our people in the prisons, to those whose homes face the threat of eviction, and to all Palestinian families," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 12/4/2021.

[90] Father Manuel Musallam: The Demolition of Homes in Jerusalem, YouTube, 1/2/2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hehcDg7Umu4&t=3s

including the reconstruction of demolished houses and the provision of funds for building new ones. Such efforts, he argued, are essential to strengthen Palestinian steadfastness in the face of Israel's repeated assaults, to preserve their presence, and to sustain their struggle against Israel and its settlement policies.[91]

c. Ending the Settlements and Recovering Palestinian Lands, According to Father Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel Musallam argued that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and its air superiority over Arab states makes it extremely difficult—if not impossible—for Arab armies to defeat it, particularly given that some Arab regimes have normalized relations with Israel and therefore would not engage in war against it. According to Father Musallam, the solution lies with Palestinians dispersed across all of Palestine. He emphasized the necessity of establishing a resistance independent of the factions and the PA, organized into secret, coordinated groups capable of striking settlements from within. Such a strategy would neutralize Israel's nuclear and aerial advantage against Palestinians, ensuring that the fall of each settlement would be swift and inevitable. Gradually, settlements would collapse one after another, leading ultimately to the defeat of Israeli occupation.[92]

4. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Palestinian Resistance

Father Manuel has repeatedly expressed through numerous websites and television channels his support for Palestinian resistance in all its forms, considering it a legitimate right of the Palestinian people living under Israeli occupation.

a. Father Manuel's Position on Resistance Against Israeli Occupation

Father Manuel has consistently emphasized that Palestinian resistance is not an act of terrorism but a legitimate right of the Palestinian people to liberate themselves from the injustices of Israeli occupation.[93] He argued that failing to resist Israeli occupation constitutes a crime, as remaining silent in the face of the occupation's oppression, accepting it as an inevitable reality, or assuming that we are incapable of confronting it is a grievous offense against Palestine. He further

[91] Father Musallam highlights the gravity of home demolitions in Jerusalem, their underlying objectives, and the means of protecting the city's Palestinian residents, Al-Quds News Agency, 23/7/2019.

[92] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 20/5/2022.

[93] Father Manuel Musallam, *Al-Qalam al-Hadir* (The Roaring Pen), p. 23.

stated that remaining silent about those who prevent Palestinians from resisting is also a crime.[94] As Father Manuel affirmed, "If you are seeking a homeland, take up your rifle... and since our land is occupied, it is our right to liberate it by all available means."[95]

For Father Manuel Musallam, terrorism entails the manipulation of international law, UN resolutions, and Security Council mandates, portraying the massacres committed by Israel and the use of internationally prohibited weapons against the Palestinian people as acts of self-defense, while simultaneously labeling Palestinian defensive actions, whether peaceful or rudimentary, as "terrorism." Father Manuel extends this critique to US policy, arguing that one of the clearest manifestations of terrorism is the United States positioning itself as a substitute for international legitimacy, effectively legitimizing the occupation of Palestine.[96] As he asserted, "It is the right of my people to defend their cause, which has become existential in a world devoid of legitimacy and respect for international law, the UN, or the Security Council."[97]

b. Forms of Palestinian Resistance According to Father Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel outlined several legitimate forms of resistance against Israel, emphasizing that Palestinians have the right to defend themselves and their land. He identified four main avenues: armed struggle, civil disobedience, education, and literature and the arts. The following provides a detailed overview:

1. Armed Struggle

Father Manuel considered armed struggle a legitimate right for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, stressing its central role in the liberation movement.[98] He also proposed a strategy for how armed resistance should be conducted in Palestine.

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[94] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 155.

[95] "If we remain entrenched in this bitter present, we will continue, in vain, to try to reunite with our people in the diaspora—crying all the while," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 13/6/2022.

[96] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," pp. 88–89.

[97] "Let the child hold a stone in his right hand and a book in his left," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 8/6/2022.

[98] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 19/5/2022.

Strategy for Resistance, According to Father Manuel

Father Manuel argued that the time had come to shift the resistance's strategy from defense to liberation, and that this transformation must engage every aspect of Palestinian life. He stated, for example, that:

> The mindset of the resistance fighter must become that of the liberator, and the weapons of the resistance, rifles and rockets, must become instruments of liberation. Jerusalem and Gaza, currently symbols of resistance, must become symbols of liberation. Schools, curricula, teachers, students, merchants, farmers and civil servants, all must orient their efforts toward liberation.[99]

To achieve liberation, Father Manuel Musallam devised a strategic plan aimed at enabling the Palestinians to end the occupation imposed upon them:

- Father Manuel urged the Palestinian leadership to separate political work from military operations. He called on Palestinian factions to focus on political engagement, enhancing their effectiveness in this domain, while integrating military wings into unified, carefully structured formations dedicated to liberation rather than mere resistance.
- He emphasized the need to create space for the leadership of the resistance to cultivate revolutionary alliances with like-minded actors worldwide. Central to this approach was the establishment of a single resistance command responsible for planning and overseeing program implementation, thereby consolidating efforts and preventing the fragmentation of energy and dispersal of arms.
- Father Manuel argued that guerrilla warfare, organized in small cells akin to those employed by modern liberation movements, represents the most effective method for building revolutionary forces capable of accomplishing the mission of liberation. He stressed the critical importance of maintaining secrecy regarding personnel, leadership, resources and operational capabilities.[100]
- Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that the allocation of roles within the Palestinian political system, between the PA, PLO and the resistance, requires a thorough reorganization. The PLO, once it has fully restored its structure and charter, should assume leadership of the armed struggle. The PA, in turn, should

[99] Muhammad Abu Rukbah, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Kalimah ila al-Ummah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Message to the Ummah) (Gaza: House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, 2022), p. 49.

[100] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 19/5/2022.

be limited to managing the day-to-day affairs of citizens and operate under the supervision and strategic guidance of the reconstituted PLO leadership. The current situation, in which the PA monopolizes multiple roles, must be rectified, particularly in light of evidence demonstrating the PA's repeated failures in fulfilling these functions.

- Father Manuel further contended that his proposals represent a faithful implementation of the original National Charter. Initiatives grounded in the Charter's principles constitute a restoration of the PLO's structures, integrity and authentic role.[101]

The Weapon of Resistance

Father Manuel Musallam repeatedly emphasized the critical importance of the weapon, viewing it as the protector of the Palestine issue and the path to liberation. He articulated this conviction clearly, "Through fierce resistance, with the rifle in the hands of the Palestinian, Jerusalem is promised liberation."[102] Father Manuel rejected any attempt to subject the weapon of resistance to discussion or negotiation within any reconciliation process. He stressed the necessity of achieving national reconciliation but insisted that it must never come at the expense of resistance or its weaponry.[103] He added, "The weapon of resistance is the sole guarantor for recovering the rights of the Palestinian people and their land; neither the UN, the Security Council, nor the Arab League can grant Palestinians their political rights. The rifle alone can accomplish that."[104] He further explained, "The weapon of resistance does not belong to factions; it is the property of the Palestinian people and their hope for liberating their homeland from Israeli occupation. Any concession, even of a single bullet, or any attack on the weapon of resistance, constitutes betrayal." Father Manuel called for strengthening the weapon of resistance, developing it, and supporting it financially.[105]

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[101] Muhammad Abu Rukbah, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Kalimah ila al-Ummah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Message to the Ummah), pp. 50–51.

[102] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 113.

[103] Do not approach the weapon of resistance, and it must not be subjected to debate, site of Alresalah.ps, 10/10/2017, https://alresalah.ps/post/169052

[104] Father Manuel Musallam: What we lost through arms can only be regained through arms, Al Jazeera Arabic channel, YouTube, 9/5/2021, https://youtu.be/f5DsgVn4BEc?si=GaGn-gnGRmnDWklr

[105] Manuel Musallam to Shehab: The resistance's weapon is the protector of reconciliation; without it, we have no dignity, site of Shehab News Agency, 12/10/2017, https://shehabnews.com/p/21724

Father Manuel Musallam's call for Palestinians to take up arms and resist Israel, despite his position as a clergyman who preaches peace and rejects violence, reveals his conviction that the Israeli incursion is illegitimate and that Israel neither desires nor seeks peace. This is evident in its ongoing killings of Palestinians, expropriation of their lands, demolition of their homes, and violations of the sanctity of their holy sites. Furthermore, Israel ignores all international resolutions condemning it, recognizing none, foremost among them Resolution 194. Father Manuel also believes that Israel responds only to the language of force, which underpins his advocacy of armed struggle against the occupation.

2. Civil Disobedience[106]

Father Manuel Musallam proposed civil disobedience as a means of resisting Israel. This initiative was proposed in response to the pervasive influence of Israeli media, which constructs a distorted narrative portraying Palestinians as "terrorists." This narrative has gained support from numerous countries worldwide. In response, Father Manuel advocated for peaceful civil disobedience, aiming to correct these misperceptions and to provoke a global moral reckoning regarding the catastrophe that has befallen the Palestinian people; a people dispossessed of their land and forcibly displaced. He emphasized that his call was individual and not coordinated with any organization.[107]

Father Manuel distinguished between a strike and civil disobedience: a strike represents absence and serves Israel's interests, whereas civil disobedience entails active presence. He recommended temporary civil disobedience lasting one or two days per month, during which citizens would withhold taxes and refrain from attending courts and municipal offices, but without closing commercial establishments. He proposed turning these days into productive civic activities, such as planting trees or delivering lectures. He further envisioned civil disobedience evolving into a nationwide political movement engaging the entire

[106] Civil Disobedience: Civil disobedience is a form of nonviolent resistance, characterized by the refusal to comply with the demands or orders of a government or occupying authority, without resorting to violence or active measures of opposition. Its usual purpose is to compel the government or occupying power to make concessions. Civil disobedience has historically served as both a tactic and a guiding philosophy for nationalist movements in Africa and India, for the civil rights movements of Black Americans in the US, and for labor and anti-war movements in numerous countries. See Andreas Sofroniou, *Moral Philosophy, from Socrates to the 21st Aeon* (UK: PsySys Limited, 2010), p. 188.

[107] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 93.

populace. Father Manuel argued that civil disobedience should begin in the city of Jerusalem.[108]

Father Manuel Musallam noted that the call did not resonate as strongly as anticipated, for several reasons:

- Israel's repression of civil disobedience directed against it, and the PA's suppression of any civil disobedience targeting its authority.
- A lack of popular organization; the leadership is preoccupied with structuring itself, neglecting to guide and organize the people, who require direction and coordination.
- Fear among the populace of the PA's potential collapse, even if it is ineffective, due to the absence of a visible alternative and limited experience with civil disobedience and its implementation.
- The harsh economic conditions and widespread concern over personal livelihoods pose a significant obstacle to the implementation of civil disobedience.[109]

3. Education, Literature and the Arts

Father Manuel Musallam believes that the ultimate goal of education is the liberation of Jerusalem and Palestine, viewing education as a weapon no less vital than other forms of resistance. He championed this vision at the Holy Family School in GS during his tenure as director, transforming folk songs such as "*Dal'ona*, *Zarif al-Toul*, *Mijana*, *'Ataba* and *Jafra*" into revolutionary, nationalist lyrics that schoolchildren danced to, while carefully explaining their meanings and vocabulary to cultivate a revolutionary, liberation-oriented identity in students. Father Manuel also innovated the school environment itself, writing the names of Palestinian villages and cities on classroom doors instead of assigning numbers. He emphasized the importance of educational and dramatic plays in schools that depict Palestinian displacement, refugee camps, and exile to raise national consciousness among children. He further underscored the vital role of cinema in portraying the struggle against the occupier, wars, resistance, as well as Palestinian history and geography. In addition, he advocated using visual arts, music, songs, and sculpture to expose the occupation and its crimes.[110]

[108] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 19/5/2022.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 115.

Father Manuel Musallam emphasized the importance of employing literature, art, theater, folklore, and the traditional *dabkeh* dance in the struggle against Israel, as these cultural expressions are capable of conveying the suffering, aspirations, civilization, and heritage of the Palestinian people to the world. In this regard, Father Musallam stated, "For the Palestine issue to resonate, it must be inscribed in books and in the hearts of children and the people... A nation without resistance literature has no place in the memory of other nations." For this reason, he called for a reform of school curricula to include resistance literature, and for Palestinian universities to introduce compulsory courses on resistance literature and the Palestine issue. He further urged Palestinian media outlets to highlight this literature and its authors, stressing the need to organize training programs to enhance their capacities, encourage literary production, and support the emerging generation of writers, poets and artists. Father Musallam argued that Palestinian resistance literature is of international caliber, for it embodies profound substance. Themes such as the *Nakbah*, diaspora, suffering, struggle and resistance all possess the potential to be elevated to world-class texts, provided they are supported by specialized linguistic and literary studies.[111]

Father Manuel Musallam pointed to several challenges confronting the dissemination of Palestinian resistance literature, including:

- The campaigns of distortion launched against it by Israeli media.
- The limited translation of this literature into other languages.
- The role of the PA and its approach of coexistence with Israel, which has further restricted the circulation of resistance literature, particularly through the use of the Cybercrime Law.
- The constraints imposed by poverty and the limited resources available for publishing, which have hindered the spread of literature in general, and resistance literature in particular.[112]

[111] Ibid., p. 116.

[112] Ibid., pp. 116–117.

Summary

- Father Manuel Musallam underscored the centrality of Jerusalem as the embodiment of the identity of the Arab Palestinian people.
- He unequivocally rejected any bargaining or negotiations over the city's division, affirming Jerusalem as the unified capital of the State of Palestine. He further warned against Israel's policies aimed at reshaping the city's historic Islamic-Christian character into a Jewish one.
- Father Musallam has been an active defender of Islamic and Christian holy sites, foremost among them *al-Aqsa* Mosque. He highlighted Israel's objectives in continuing excavations beneath the mosque and urged Muslim countries to act urgently to protect these holy sites.
- He stressed the necessity of the return of all Palestinian refugees to the entirety of Palestinian land, with compensation in accordance with UN Resolution 194, asserting that resistance is the only viable path to realizing return and ending Israeli occupation.
- Father Musallam also called for Palestinian prisoners to be recognized and treated as prisoners of war rather than labeled as "terrorists," and to be accorded their full rights under that status.
- Father Manuel Musallam affirmed that all Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are illegitimate. He called for confronting these settlements from within, as a means of neutralizing Israel's air superiority and deterring any potential use of nuclear weapons.
- He stressed the importance of supporting families whose homes face demolition by Israel, advocating for comprehensive assistance, the reconstruction of destroyed dwellings, and the provision of financial resources for new housing. Measures essential for reinforcing their steadfastness in the face of repeated Israeli attacks.
- Father Musallam asserted that resistance in all its forms, particularly armed struggle, is a legitimate and inherent right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves and their land against Israeli aggression. He called upon all parties to actively support and further develop the resistance.
- He highlighted the imperative of unifying all military wings, maintaining their independence from political factions, and ensuring strict secrecy in their resistance operations.
- Father Musallam categorically rejected any attempts to undermine Palestinian resistance weapons, emphasizing that such arms belong to the Palestinian people and constitute the sole guarantee for the restoration of their rights.

Chapter Two

Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Palestinian Political System

Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Palestinian Political System

First: Father Manuel's Position on the PLO and the PA

1. Father Manuel's Position on the State of the PLO

Father Manuel emphasized that the PLO is currently experiencing a severe period of weakness, a situation that has persisted since its acceptance of the Oslo Accords and security coordination, and its reliance on US and European promises, as well as Arab initiatives. The PLO ultimately abandoned armed struggle altogether.[1] Nevertheless, Father Manuel affirmed that the PLO remains the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, both in the homeland and in the diaspora. He added that the Palestinian people granted the PLO an extended opportunity to negotiate with Israel, lasting more than 25 years, yet during this time, the organization received nothing from the promises made by Israel, Europe or the US. Instead, it became bound by these agreements, foremost among them the Oslo Accords of 1993. For this reason, Father Manuel called for the PLO to free itself from the constraints of these agreements, to select new members, and to implement comprehensive internal reforms, both politically and economically.[2]

Father Manuel Musallam's position toward the PLO became evident early on, particularly during a critical moment when the US requested that the late Palestinian President Yasir 'Arafat (Abu 'Ammar) annul the clauses of the Palestinian National Charter that called for the liberation of Palestine from Israel. 'Arafat sought to submit the matter to a vote among the Palestinian leadership and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). On 14/12/1998, a session was convened in Rashad Al-Shawa Hall in GS, attended by former US President Bill Clinton. Although the majority of participants approved the annulment, Father Manuel firmly opposed canceling the National Charter clauses.[3]

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[1] "The PLO was once a young organization that represented us; it has now grown old, and we continue to honor it," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 3/12/2020.

[2] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 140.

[3] Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Al-Kahin wa al-Muthaqqaf wa al-Mu'allim* (The Priest, Intellectual and Educator), pp. 64–65.

Father Manuel Musallam has repeatedly called on the Palestinian leadership, through television appearances and social media, to return to the original 1964 PLO charter, which affirms that Israel is an occupying force and must be resisted until all Palestinian territory is liberated.[4]

He also warned against US policies aimed at undermining the PLO, such as labeling it a "terrorist" organization and prohibiting the opening of PLO facilities on US soil.[5] In contrast, the US has maintained its ties with the PA and its leadership, suggesting an attempt to supplant the PLO with the PA as part of a broader strategy to neutralize the PLO and treat its members solely as PA officials.[6]

a. Father Manuel's Position on the PLO's Signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993

Father Manuel's Understanding of the Oslo Accords

Father Manuel defined the Oslo Accords as "Some Palestinians publicly acknowledging before the world that Israel is not a colonial invasion, but rather the rightful owner of the land and the home, while simultaneously denying before the world that the Israeli occupation is the thief that has seized Palestinian land and homes."[7]

Father Manuel believed that the true objective pursued by the US and Israel through the Oslo Accords was to transform the PLO from a revolutionary liberation organization, one striving to expel the Israeli occupation from Palestine, into a state or authority easily controlled under international law and UN oversight. This transformation aimed to make it accept a new division along the 1967 borders. When the PLO agreed to the terms of the Oslo Accords and fulfilled what was asked of it, Israel refused to recognize the agreement's provisions and violated all its commitments to the Palestinians, including to former PA President Yasir 'Arafat (Abu 'Ammar), who had signed the accords.[8]

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[4] "The proclamation of a Palestinian state encompassing all Palestinian territory," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 10/6/2020.

[5] David Pollock and Sander Gerber, Biden's 'Open Door' to the Palestinian Authority, site of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 26/4/2021, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bidens-open-door-palestinian-authority

[6] Father Manuel Musallam: The False Political Image, YouTube, 20/7/2022.

[7] "In Oslo, some of us acknowledged before the world that Israel is not a settler-colonial invasion," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 21/11/2020.

[8] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 9/5/2022.

Father Manuel Musallam described the Oslo Accords as a second *Nakbah* to befall the Palestine issue, following the *Nakbah* of 1948. He warned that this agreement could steer the Palestine issue toward a third *Nakbah*, namely, the establishment of a state in the WB and GS without Jerusalem and without the right of return.[9] He further characterized the initiatives introduced under Oslo as falsehoods, all of which failed due to Israel's rejection.[10] Father Manuel added, "Israel set a trap for the PLO and its leadership, luring them with the illusion of false peace and then ensnaring them in the Oslo Accords, leaving the PLO captive to its terms."[11]

Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that the Palestinians were victims of this shameful agreement and had no role in its formulation. At the time, the Palestinian leadership did not conduct any popular referendum on the Oslo Accords; instead, the decision was made unilaterally, without consulting the people. Moreover, the procedures of the agreement were carried out in secrecy.[12] Following the signing of Oslo, the Palestinians were compelled to adhere to its course, including its negotiation framework and the ensuing security coordination with Israel.[13]

In line with his opposition to the Oslo Accords, Father Manuel Musallam declined a Christmas greeting in 2018 from Palestinian President 'Abbas, reflecting his broader rejection of the Oslo Accords. On his Facebook page, he articulated his position, "I am not a Christian of the Oslo state, that is, of the WB and GS. I am a Christian of historic Palestine, from Ras al-Naqoura to Umm al-Rashrash, from the sea to the river. I am a Palestinian Christian who inhabits every particle of this land; it all belongs to me, and every particle of its soil dwells within me."[14]

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[9] "How many men in GS stand as one thousand, and how many among these thousands are content with mere demonstrations, passing by uncounted!," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 26/5/2021.

[10] Father Manuel Musallam states: "Oslo is a grave falsehood," site of Rawafid Post, 21/1/2021, https://www.rawafidpost.com

[11] Father Manuel Musallam, *Hadith Umm Qush'am* (Hadith Umm Qush'am), p. 37.

[12] "Peoples are often dominated by rulers who impose policies and positions upon them, obliging them to implement these measures… When the people reject them, convinced of their harm, they are destined to pay a heavy price," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 15/4/2021.

[13] "How many men in GS stand as one thousand, and how many among these thousands are content with mere demonstrations, passing by uncounted!," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 26/5/2021.

[14] "I am not a Christian of the Oslo state, that is, of the WB and GS. I am a Christian of historic Palestine," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 22/12/2018.

The Drawbacks of the Oslo Accords on the Palestine Issue According to Father Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel Musallam, through television appearances as well as on his Facebook and YouTube pages, expressed his rejection of and opposition to the Oslo Accords and their outcomes. He argued that continuing to uphold this agreement would lead to the loss of the Palestinian people and their issue for several reasons:

- The Oslo Accords introduced a new policy for Palestinians, whereby those who embrace its provisions avoid persecution and exclusion and can enjoy economic and political stability. Conversely, those who resist the agreement face isolation, imprisonment, and suffering. Father Manuel cited, as evidence, the siege imposed on GS and the situation of the resistors in the WB, who are punished for opposing Oslo.
- The Oslo Accords effectively neutralized the WB, preventing its population from joining their fellow Palestinians in GS during the wars launched by Israel against the Strip.[15]
- The Oslo Accord increased Israel's control and seizure of additional Palestinian cities, plains, mountains, deserts and villages.[16]
- Father Manuel Musallam viewed the Oslo Accords as an explicit concession of Haifa, Jaffa, Ramla, Lydda, Safed and other occupied cities to Israel.
- The Oslo Accord also nullifies the right of return for refugees to the cities from which they were forcibly displaced, including Haifa, Jaffa, Lydda, Ramla, Safed and others.[17]

Father Manuel expressed strong opposition to any plan that proposes establishing a Palestinian state in phases, as outlined in the Oslo Accords. He regarded such an approach as a political disaster, one that Israel exploits to advance its designs for further control and settlement of Palestinian lands. Moreover, he warned that such agreements, in the end, would lead to the erasure of Palestinian presence on their own land.[18]

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[15] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 149.

[16] The two most important days in the life of Oslo are: the day it was born, and the day we—and Oslo itself—understand why it was born," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 16/11/2020.

[17] Father Manuel Musallam, *Hadith Umm Qush'am* (Hadith Umm Qush'am), p. 27.

[18] "The leadership is distant from the people," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 6/1/2021.

Building on Father Manuel Musallam's warning about the dangers the Oslo Accords pose to the Palestine issue, he urged the Palestinian people and their leadership to terminate the Oslo Accords and to withhold recognition of Israel as a state. He stressed the importance of acknowledging the reality that Israel constitutes a settler-colonial enterprise. He further called for a formal declaration that historic Palestine and its people remain under Israeli occupation, and pressed the Palestinian leadership to launch resistance in all its forms against the occupation.[19]

Father Musallam emphasized that liberation from the Oslo Accords and their consequences can only be realized through a radical course; specifically, by holding comprehensive elections and establishing a new Palestinian parliament capable of producing new leadership.[20]

b. Father Manuel Musallam's Vision for Rebuilding the PLO

Father Manuel's role did not stop at calling for reforms within the PLO. He went further by launching a comprehensive initiative aimed at putting the Palestinian political house in order through restructuring and rebuilding the PLO (considering it the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, both in the homeland and in the diaspora) while also seeking to end internal schism. This initiative was articulated at the Popular Conference for Justice and Peace in Jerusalem, held on 26/5/2019, under the title "The National Initiative to Rebuild the PLO: A Return to the Roots." The conference was attended by several political forces, factions of the PLO, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ).[21]

The initiative's core ideas can be summarized as follows:

- Holding PNC elections both in the homeland and in the diaspora.
- From the PNC, the Executive Committee is elected, which in turn elects its own chair.
- The Palestinian Central Council (PCC), which stems from the PNC, has no authority to make binding decisions on behalf of the Palestinian people; it is only an advisory body.
- The PNC elects the Chair of the Palestine National Fund (PNF).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 9/5/2022.

[21] Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Al-Kahin wa al-Muthaqqaf wa al-Mu'allim* (The Priest, Intellectual and Educator), p. 73.

- The PNC holds the PNF Chair accountable.
- The Chair of the Executive Committee may not disburse from the PNF without the countersignature of the PNF Chair.
- The PNC serves as both legislator and overseer of Palestinian affairs. Should the PLO decide to hold additional elections, these would be implemented thereafter.
- The reconstituted PLO adopts a new constitution.
- Elections inside the homeland are conducted under local supervision with Arab and international observers. As for the diaspora, where elections may be difficult or unfeasible, consensus-building or alternative arrangements can be pursued.[22]

Mechanism for Implementing the Initiative Proposed by Father Manuel Musallam

- A High Committee shall be established to oversee the planning and implementation of general elections for the PNC, both in the homeland and among the diaspora.
- The Committee will comprise Palestinian figures renowned for their integrity and commitment to national interests.
- It will immediately undertake the compilation of lists of individuals eligible to vote, both domestically and abroad.
- The election date will be determined once the conditions for candidacy and the qualifications for PNC membership have been announced.[23]

Father Manuel Musallam's initiative received support from several Palestinian factions and political forces. Hamas endorsed Father Manuel Musallam's initiative, describing it as a serious effort to rebuild the PLO and strengthen its institutions. Hamas added, "Father Manuel's initiative reinforces the concept of national partnership and implicitly outlines a path toward achieving national unity and ending the Palestinian schism."[24]

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[22] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 180.

[23] Ibid., pp. 180–181.

[24] Hamas Values Father Manuel Musallam's Initiative to End the Schism, site of Quds Press, 2/5/2019, https://qudspress.com/?page=show&id=52466

Taysir Fattuh, Secretary-General of the Palestinian Justice Party (PJP), also expressed support for Father Manuel Musallam's initiative. Fattuh called on the initiative's coordinators to define mechanisms for its implementation and further recommended the formation of a committee to oversee the execution of its recommendations.[25]

Khaled 'Abdul Majid, Chair of the Follow-Up Committee of the Palestinian National Congress and the Palestinian Forces Alliance, and Secretary-General of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF), sent a message to Father Manuel Musallam, expressing his full support and endorsement of the initiative. He described Father Manuel's positions as courageous, emphasizing the necessity of holding free and democratic elections for the PNC, as called for by Father Manuel, as well as the importance of rebuilding the PLO institutions and mobilizing all national forces to confront the "Deal of the Century."[26]

'Isam Helmi Hammad,[27] together with Fattuh and 'Abdul Majid, agreed on the significance of Father Manuel's initiative, considering it a declaration of national will. They urged all Palestinian political forces to support Father Manuel's initiative, noting that it would guide everyone to participate in the PLO through elections both inside the homeland and in the diaspora. Hammad also called for actions on the ground inspired by Father Manuel Musallam's call, including sit-ins in GS, Jerusalem, the 1948 occupied territories, the WB, and the diaspora, as well as gathering signatures from the Palestinian people to achieve elections for the PNC, aiming to craft a new national project.[28]

'Imran al-Khatib, a member of the PNC, diverged from the views of the previously mentioned figures. While he described Father Manuel's initiative as

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[25] Fattuh Supports Father Manuel Musallam's Initiative on Reconciliation and Elections, Al-Watan Voice, 29/6/2019, https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2019/06/29/1254993.html

[26] 'Abdul Majid to Father Manuel Musallam: We support your initiatives and commend your courageous role and stances, site of *Nedal al-Sha'b* Magazine, Damascus, 18/6/2019.

[27] 'Isam Hilmi Hammad: Born in the city of Gaza in 1965 to parents displaced from Sarafand al-'Amar. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Electronic Engineering from Waterford University, Ireland, in 1987, and in 2015, a Master's in Management and Economics from The Islamic University of Gaza. He served as Secretary of the Hope Institute for Orphans for the 2010 term, and as Secretary of the "Toward Hope and Peace" Charity Association, a position he resigned from to run in the elections. He was also head of the "Loyalty and Construction" list in the postponed 2021 elections. See 'Isam Hilmi Hammad, site of Marefa, https://www.marefa.org/

[28] 'Isam Hilmi Hammad, Address at the "Erhal" Movement, site of Media Amad, https://www.amad.ps/ar/post/283445

positive, he considered it incomplete. He argued that it would have been more appropriate for Father Manuel to direct his initiative toward pressuring Hamas, which controls GS, through addressing the "coup" attempts by the movement that seek to separate the territory and establish an emirate under its rule. He added, "Before calling for PNC elections, the priority should be to end the political schism and Hamas's control over Gaza Strip."[29]

Although several national and political forces supported Father Manuel's initiative as a potential solution for putting the Palestinian political house in order and ending the schism, the initiative ultimately failed to achieve its objectives. Father Manuel attributed this failure to the incompatibility between the initiative's political line and that of the Oslo Accords.[30]

The researcher observed Fatah's disregard for Father Manuel Musallam's initiative. The movement issued no official statement or press comment regarding the initiative, either in support or opposition. This silence likely reflects the initiative's significant divergence from Fatah's political positions, which the movement is keen to uphold and enforce, while refusing to open them to public debate.

In contrast, Hamas's interest in the initiative appears to stem from the similarity of its provisions to the political proposals that Hamas has consistently advanced as a means to end the schism. Moreover, the ongoing siege imposed on GS, along with the sanctions affecting the Palestinian population there, encourages Hamas to adopt a consistently positive stance toward any initiative or political proposal that offers even a theoretical possibility of alleviating the siege and sanctions.

The researcher considers Father Manuel Musallam's initiative a strategic solution to resolving all outstanding political disputes, foremost among them the Palestinian schism. By revitalizing the role of the PLO through the election of a new PNC based on a genuine national partnership, a new national project could emerge as an alternative to the Oslo Accords, which produced fragmented political visions and subsequently led to the Palestinian political schism. This new project would effectively annul all outcomes of Oslo, with the schism at the forefront.

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[29] 'Imran al-Khatib, "A Flawed Initiative That Yields No Benefit," Media Amad, 30/4/2019, https://www.amad.ps/ar/post/294222

[30] Ajras al-Mashriq Program: Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, AlMayadeen Documentaries channel, YouTube, 31/12/2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0xn1xGvydA

2. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the PA

This section examines Father Manuel Musallam's views on the PA, its performance and policies, as well as his stance on security coordination.

a. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the State and Policies of the PA

Father Manuel contended that the PA has failed to achieve any meaningful political or economic success. Politically, he argued, the PA is constrained and lacks a coherent vision aimed at the liberation of Palestine. He observed that it possesses neither the tools to plan such liberation nor the political will to pursue it. He stated, "The PA urges Palestinians to refrain from any form of resistance against Israel."[31] He further added, "The PA is authoritarian toward its own people; it does not foster a sense of agency because it has resigned itself to the dictates of Israel."[32] Father Manuel also criticized the PA for relinquishing the Palestinian people's right of return to their homeland, abandoning all of historical Palestine. He emphasized, "It does not recognize Jaffa, Haifa, Lydd, or Ramla; in doing so, it has invalidated the principle that all of Palestine belongs to the Palestinians." He concluded, "The PA does not protect Palestinians from Israeli assaults; rather, it participates in their oppression and imprisonment alongside the occupation."[33]

Father Manuel Musallam observed that the PA has effectively lost its authority, rendering claims of its necessity for organizing and protecting Palestinians untenable. The PA and its institutions are unable to safeguard the population. They cannot protect Palestinian resistors, leaving them to face a fate that often ends in inevitable death, often without intervention. On occasion, the PA even hands resistors over to Israel or reveals their hiding places, actions that form part of its security coordination with Israel.[34]

Father Manuel cited multiple examples to illustrate the PA's weakness, the impotence of its will, and its inability to deter Israel's attacks on Palestinians in the WB, GS and on Jerusalem and its holy sites:

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[31] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," pp. 100–101.

[32] Father Musallam: The Oppression and Injustice of the PA Will Drive the People Toward Armed Struggle Against It, site of Laji Net News, 26/4/2018, https://laji-net.net

[33] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam.. min Wahiy al-Watan: Qisas wa Hikayat wa Mawaqif Tajma' Bayna al-Din wa al-Siyasah wa al-Adabb* (Father Manuel Musallam.. Inspired by the Homeland: Stories, Tales and Encounters Blending Religion, Politics, and Literature) (Gaza: House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, 2019), pp. 199–200.

[34] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," pp. 103–104.

- The PA has failed to protect any city, village, or RC from Israeli incursions and has not even been able to secure the Palestinian president, his residence, or his office (as exemplified by the siege of Yasir ʻArafat, Abu ʻAmmar).
- The PA cannot prevent the construction of settlements on Palestinian land, nor can it protect activists defending their expropriated territories.
- The PA has been unable to protect its citizens from killings carried out in the streets by Israeli forces.
- The PA has proven incapable of safeguarding even the inclusion of a map in the national education curricula.
- The PA exercises no effective sovereignty over border crossings or passageways.[35]
- The PA has failed to address the state of lawlessness in the WB, to maintain internal cohesion, and in particular to mediate family conflicts, most notably in the city of Hebron.[36]

As for Jerusalem, Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that the PA is incapable of defending the city and its Islamic and Christian holy sites. He presented several pieces of evidence to support this claim, including the following:

- The PA has been unable to prevent the annexation of Jerusalem or the construction of settlements within the city. It has failed to stop the demolition of even a single house, the confiscation of land, or to protect any Palestinian family, whether in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan or Al-Tur.
- The PA has been powerless to prevent settler incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the desecration of cemeteries, or the appropriation of cemetery lands, such as Mamilla Cemetery (*Ma'man Allah* Cemetery), or the disturbance of graves, as occurred in the Yusufiyah Cemetery in Jerusalem.
- The PA failed to prevent the digging of a single tunnel beneath *al-Aqsa* and could not stop the renaming of streets, squares and other sites in Jerusalem.
- The PA was incapable of halting the illegal transfer of land, whether *waqf* (endowment) property or private property, or of reclaiming even a portion of it.

[35] "Will the security of Palestinians in the homeland deteriorate further if relations with Israel are severed or if the PA is dissolved?," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 2/8/2022.

[36] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 3/8/2022.

- The PA failed to abolish entry permits to Jerusalem, making it accessible like other occupied cities, and could not safeguard religious activities or the economic life of Palestinians in the city.
- The PA has proven incapable of repairing a single slab in the courtyards of *al-Aqsa*, addressing a fallen stone, or mending a crack in the walls of the holy sites.
- It has likewise failed to prevent female police officers from monitoring worshippers and visitors in *al-Aqsa*'s courtyards, or to obstruct Israel's supervision of every gate of the compound. The PA could not stop settlers from performing Talmudic or Torah-based prayers in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, nor did it prevent any of them from desecrating the mosques. It also failed to counter an Israeli court decision permitting Jews to pray on *al-Aqsa*'s soil.
- The PA was unable to avert the US decision to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem.
- Diplomatically, the PA has been equally ineffective. Its ambassadors and embassies, which consume a substantial portion of its budget, have produced no tangible results. Not a single ambassador has succeeded in persuading any state to remove the label of "terrorist" from the PLO. This raises fundamental questions about the purpose of maintaining ambassadors, and about what achievements, if any, have been realized in alleviating the suffering of Jerusalem.[37]

Father Manuel Musallam warned of the dangers inherent in the policies of the PA, whether in the WB or in GS. These include suppressing any form of mobilization in the WB, obstructing all forms of resistance against Israel, and adopting the practice of cutting the salaries of prisoners and martyrs' families in the GS as a means of imposing its authority. He stressed that such policies would ultimately drive the people toward an armed uprising against the PA.[38]

Father Musallam also expressed deep dismay at the PA's persistence in clinging to the two-state solution, which has dragged on for nearly 29 years. He emphasized that Israel has systematically undermined every initiative by seeking to annex Jerusalem—the nucleus and capital of a Palestinian state—while simultaneously expanding hundreds of settlements in the WB, fragmenting the Palestinian people.

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[37] "Will the situation in Jerusalem deteriorate further if we end our relationship with Israel or dissolve the PA?," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 29/7/2022.

[38] Father Manuel Musallam: The Oppression and Injustice of the PA Will Drive the People Toward Armed Struggle Against It, Laji Net News, 26/4/2018.

"Israel has nullified UN resolutions and refused to abide by them, foremost among them Partition Resolution 181 of 1947. It has also failed to honor the Oslo Accords of 1993, as well as every Arab and international initiative," Father Musallam stated. He added, "Israel has even disregarded proposals of its own making, such as Benjamin Netanyahu's so-called 'peace for peace.' Given Israel's deliberate obstruction of all such initiatives, the existence of the political system embodied in the PA has become meaningless; it is now a burden on the Palestinian people."[39]

From an economic perspective, Father Manuel Musallam argued that the PA has become merely a consumer model rather than a productive one. He noted that the Preventive Security Service (PSS), police, General Intelligence Services (GIS), and other affiliated bodies rely entirely on the PA's budget, when in fact they should be striving for self-sufficiency rather than burdening its limited financial resources.[40]

Father Manuel Musallam expressed deep regret over the economic policies pursued by the PA, arguing that it has failed to devise an economic plan capable of protecting Palestinian farmers and merchants. He noted that the PA has also mismanaged the PNF through failed investments that undermined its financial viability. Father Musallam explained that the PA relies primarily on taxes collected from citizens, a portion of which is appropriated by Israel. He added, "Israel prevents the PA from initiating economic projects that could employ thousands of workers, and the PA itself lacks the economic capacity to establish factories capable of absorbing such numbers."[41]

He further called for holding accountable the corrupt and the thieves among certain PA officials who have plundered public funds. He stressed that responsibility does not fall solely on the thieves, but also on those who facilitated their theft. "The Palestinian people cannot allow these corrupt figures and thieves to go unpunished," he said, urging the honest officials within the PA to take action against their corrupt counterparts and to return the stolen funds to the Palestinian people.[42]

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[39] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 9/5/2022.

[40] Father Manuel Musallam, *Hadith Umm Qush'am* (Hadith Umm Qush'am), p. 66.

[41] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 27/5/2022.

[42] "We do not aim to strip anyone of their spirit.. rather, we seek to wrest the wallets from the necks of certain PA officials and their corrupt, thieving sons and daughters," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 7/11/2020.

b. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Security Coordination Between the PA and Israel

Father Manuel considered security coordination a wholly unjustifiable crime, asserting that anyone who supports it is complicit in this crime.[43] He stated, "The security coordination pursued by the PA with Israel has fostered a culture in which Palestinians accuse one another of treachery, spying on each other, while simultaneously deepening Israel's control over the Palestinian population in the WB."[44]

Father Manuel argued that such coordination obstructed the spread of a culture of resistance, compelling the PA to suppress all forms of resistance. Even Palestinian school curricula, he noted, neglected to cultivate the spirit of resistance; at home, in the streets, and in workplaces.[45] He also rejected claims portraying security coordination and negotiations with Israel as sacred acts, emphasizing instead that what is truly steadfast and sacred is the resistor and the act of resistance itself, culminating in the full liberation of Palestinian land.[46]

In light of the PA's policies toward the Palestinian people and the inherent risks of security coordination, Father Manuel Musallam called on residents of the WB to engage in civil disobedience against both the PA and Israel.[47]

In response to Father Manuel's appeal to suspend security coordination between the PA and Israel, Yahya Rabah, a former member of Fatah's Supreme Leadership in GS, launched a sharp critique, characterizing Father Manuel as unpatriotic and psychologically unstable. Rabah contended that security coordination is not unilateral, argued that it serves the interests of the Palestinian people, and claimed that the PA is currently at the height of its political and diplomatic engagement with Israel.[48]

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[43] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 104.

[44] Manuel Musallam: The PA Killed the Culture of Resistance and Instilled Fear, Shehab News Agency, 13/3/2017.

[45] Video: Father Manuel Musallam Calls for Following the Paths of Gandhi and Mandela, Quds Net News Agency, 14/3/2017, https://qudsnet.com/post/367131

[46] For Father Manuel Musallam, Coordinating Resistance is Sacred, Negotiations Are Not, site of Khabar Palestinian Press Agency, 9/5/2022.

[47] Father Manuel Musallam Criticizes the PA and Calls for Civil Disobedience and the Overthrow of Oslo, site of Shms News Agency, 7/3/2017, https://shms.ps/p/53606

[48] Yahya Rabah Describes Manuel Musallam as "Psychologically Unstable" Following His Criticism of Security Coordination, Shehab News Agency, 11/3/2017.

Contrary to Rabaḥ's portrayal of the PA's diplomatic efforts against Israel, Najah Abu Bakr, a PLC member representing the Fatah party, has characterized the PA as a diplomatic failure. She argued that the most effective way to confront the myriad challenges facing the Palestine issue, chief among them the "Deal of the Century," is to dissolve the PA, return to the structures of the PLO, and establish a unified leadership abroad to guide the Palestinian political project. Abu Bakr further emphasized that, should the PA be dismantled, opportunities would arise to activate popular resistance, a course of action fully legitimate under UN resolutions and recognized as a right under international law.[49]

Notably, there is a striking convergence between Father Manuel Musallam's assessment of the PA's condition and Abu Bakr's position. This alignment reinforces Father Musallam's view regarding the limited effectiveness of the PA's continued existence.

Summary

- The PLO is currently weak and in need of restructuring and rebuilding. To this end, Father Manuel launched an initiative to rebuild the PLO, starting with elections for the PNC.
- Father Manuel emphasized that the Oslo Accords are illegitimate, as the Palestinian people, both within the GS and in the diaspora, were not consulted or asked for their approval.
- Father Manuel further underscored the necessity of ending the Oslo Accords, describing them as a disaster, a deception and the second *Nakbah*. These accords grant Israel 78% of Palestinian land, while he stressed that all Palestinian territory belongs to the Palestinian people.
- Father Manuel Musallam is the first Christian religious leader in Palestine to launch a comprehensive initiative for reforming the Palestinian political system and ending the schism within Palestinian politics.
- Father Manuel Musallam's initiative to rebuild the PLO has received support from several political and popular forces, with Hamas being one of the most prominent backers.
- Father Musallam emphasized the need to return to the original 1964 PLO Charter.

[49] "Fatah leaders reject returning to security coordination with Israel," site of Independent Arabia, 21/2/2020, https://www.independentarabia.com/node/96351

- He pointed out that the PA is powerless and unable to protect the Palestinian people, noting that Israel is killing Palestinians daily, while the PA remains incapable of halting these actions.
- Father Musallam demonstrated that the PA is not only unable, but completely impotent in halting Israel's settlement expansion, the demolition of homes, land theft, the desecration of graves, and the excavations beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque.
- He also rejected the security coordination between the PA and Israel, describing it as a crime against the Palestinian people.

Second: Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Palestinian Factions and the Political Schism

Father Manuel Musallam has expressed deep concern over the political fragmentation and internal disputes among Palestinian factions. He called on these groups to resolve their differences and to consolidate their efforts in confronting Israeli aggression.

1. Father Manuel's Position on Palestinian Parties and Factions

Father Manuel stressed that he opposes Palestinian factions functioning as competing political entities. He clarified that he supports the resistance itself, rather than the factions claiming to represent it. In other words, he advocates for armed struggle as part of the broader liberation effort, emphasizing that the Palestinian people remain in a state of war and national liberation. All efforts, he argued, must converge toward the ultimate goal of liberating Palestine.[50]

He further observed that Palestinian factions have, in many ways, become part of the problem facing the Palestine issue. The factions are fragmented and lack cohesion, both internally and in their relations with one another. Divergent ideologies and approaches have weakened their collective strength, deepened divisions, and made unification increasingly difficult. This disunity has also undermined coordination of their military capabilities. Father Manuel warned that persisting in this state of fragmentation and internal conflict would have catastrophic consequences for the Palestine issue.[51]

[50] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 10/5/2022.

[51] Ibid.

Regarding financial matters, he urged the factions to secure their own resources independently, without relying on the treasury of the state or the PA. During times of conflict, he stressed, factions should instead provide support to the state or the PA.[52]

The researcher observes that Father Manuel Musallam may have intended to highlight two issues here. The first concerns the PA's budget, much of which, in its allocation, serves the interests of the faction dominating the Authority. Rather than acting as a vehicle to strengthen the Authority through effective governance, this faction has, in practice, become a burden upon it. The second issue pertains to the fact that numerous factions receive budgets without oversight, to the extent that the disbursement of funds to certain factions is conditioned upon their compliance with the directives of the political leadership.

Father Manuel further emphasized that Palestinian factions, whether collectively or individually, are not entitled to pursue any political project or devise independent political solutions without referring back to the Palestinian people and the elected PNC, which represents all Palestinians, both in the homeland and the diaspora.[53]

Regarding Father Manuel's stance toward Islamic forces, it is important to note that, as a Christian cleric, he shares with Palestinian Islamic factions a sense of common destiny, as they are all part of the Palestinian people. Moreover, he aligns with these forces in their resistance to Israel.[54]

In this context, Father Manuel Musallam rejected accusations directed at Islamic forces, particularly Hamas, labeling them as a "terrorist" organization. He emphasized that Hamas constitutes a national liberation movement, employing resistance as a legitimate means to defend the Palestinian people and ultimately achieve their liberation from Israel. He further stressed that Hamas has consistently adhered to both national and Arab consensus. Consequently, he called upon those who level accusations against Hamas to present evidence substantiating their claims and urged them to retract such allegations. Father Musallam underscored that all sectors of the Palestinian people stand in solidarity with Hamas[55] and condemned

[52] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 13/5/2022.

[53] Father Manuel Musallam: The National Vision, YouTube, 15/5/2021.

[54] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," pp. 92–93.

[55] Father Musallam: We Reject the Egyptian Aggression Against Hamas, Alresalah.ps, 1/3/2015, https://alresalah.ps/post/110444

the decisions by both Britain and Australia to designate Hamas as a "terrorist" organization, describing these accusations as unjust. He concluded, "Hamas is an integral part of the Palestinian people and has never been 'terrorist.'"[56]

Father Musallam also noted the existence of a Zionist-driven media campaign seeking to tarnish the image of Hamas by alleging that the movement and the government in Gaza persecute Palestinian Christians residing there. He categorically refuted these claims, highlighting that the stance of Yahya al-Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, is supportive of the Christian community. He added, "The primary objective behind these dubious accusations is to sow discord among the Palestinian people." He further affirmed that Christians and Muslims in Gaza enjoy equal rights and bear equal responsibilities.[57]

Amid attempts to demonize Hamas, Father Manuel Musallam proposed that the movement establish a Christian media center within its structure, tasked with addressing and refuting all allegations leveled against Hamas. He also urged the movement to appoint a Christian advisor to strengthen relationships and present an accurate representation of Hamas to the outside world.[58]

The same perspective applies to the PIJ, which Father Manuel considered an integral part of the Palestinian people. He expressed strong support for the initiative of Ramadan Shallah, the former Secretary-General of the PIJ, regarding his ten-point plan. Father Manuel viewed Shallah's initiative[59] as a solid foundation for rescuing the Palestinian national project, noting that it embodies profound national concepts and significant unifying implications. Such an initiative, he argued, could guide the fragmented Palestinian situation toward stability while safeguarding

[56] Hamas and Its View of Christians…Part of the Palestinian People and Their Struggle to Defend Their National Identity, site of Felesteen Online, 8/12/2021, https://felesteen.news/post/98432

[57] Father Manuel Musallam: Who Is a Friend If Hamas Is Not Our Friend?!, Felesteen Online, 20/12/2020, https://felesteen.news/post/79958

[58] Father Manuel Musallam calls for the establishment of a Christian media center within Hamas, site of Al-Mashreq News, 13/4/2021, https://mashrqnews.com/

[59] The Ten-Point Initiative: Among the most significant proposals put forward by the late Ramadan Shallah was that President 'Abbas should announce the cancellation of the Oslo Accords from the Palestinian side, and that the PLO should formally withdraw recognition of the State of Israel. Furthermore, the initiative calls for the reconstruction of the PLO as the inclusive national framework representing all Palestinian forces and citizens, the resolution of internal schism to achieve national unity, the formulation of a new unified national program, and the development of a comprehensive strategy grounded in the repudiation of the Oslo Accords. For the full Ten-Point Initiative, see The Ten-Point Initiative of the Late Dr. Ramadan Shallah to End Palestinian Schism, site of Saraya al-Quds (Al-Quds Brigades), 6/6/2021, https://saraya.ps/post/61062

Palestinian fundamentals from strategies that have historically undermined the Palestine issue.[60]

The researcher observed a notable convergence between the provisions of Father Manuel Musallam's initiative and those of Shallah, particularly regarding the reconstruction of the PLO as the inclusive national framework for all Palestinians, the termination of the Oslo Accords, the revitalization of resistance, and the resolution of internal schism.

Father Manuel consistently emphasized Palestinian factional unity, urging cohesion, solidarity and alignment among them. He called on both the factions and the Palestinian people to refrain from bickering and accusing one another of betrayal, and to concentrate all Palestinian efforts on the expulsion of Israel.[61]

2. Father Manuel Musallam's Proposal for Ending the Palestinian Schism[62] and His Efforts Toward National Reconciliation[63]

a. Father Manuel's Position on the Palestinian Political Schism

Father Manuel Musallam viewed the ongoing schism between Fatah and Hamas as a natural outcome of the logic underlying the Oslo Accords. These accords, he argued, established institutions whose services in the economic and civil spheres were restricted to Palestinians in the WB and GS, while excluding Palestinians in

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[60] Father Manuel Musallam emphasizes adherence to Dr. Shallah's vision as a means to rescue the national project, site of Islamic Jihad in Palestine, 29/10/2016, https://jehad.ps/post/29

[61] Father Manuel Musallam: Your Heart is Your Weapon, YouTube, 13/8/2022.

[62] The Palestinian Schism refers to the set of internal power struggles that followed the victory of Hamas in the elections of 25/1/2006, and its subsequent formation of the Palestinian government. These struggles led to deep divergences in political visions and approaches toward both Israel and the international community, as well as disagreements over strategies to lift the blockade. They also produced disputes between the offices of the presidency and the prime minister concerning authority over the security forces, which largely remained loyal to structures originally established by the PA. This situation generated intense internal tensions that escalated into armed confrontation, culminating in the tragic events in GS in June 2007. These events resulted in Hamas's forceful takeover of GS, the political separation of the WB from GS, and the emergence of distinct political structures. See Zaki Ramzi Murtaja, "Palestinian Fragmentation and its Impact on Development in Gaza Governorates and Means of Overcoming it," *Journal of Al-Quds Open University for Educational & Psychological Research & Studies*, vol. 1, no. 34, 2014, p. 267, https://journals.qou.edu/index.php/jrresstudy/article/view/755 (in Arabic)

[63] National Reconciliation denotes the termination of violence among rival factions, the removal of the underlying causes of such violence, and the establishment of peace and security within society, in a manner that ensures the prevention of relapse into further episodes of violence or civil war. See Ahmad Faiq Dallul, "The Role of Palestinian Intellectuals in the National Reconciliation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, 2006–2017" (PhD dissertation, University of the Holy Quran and Islamic Sciences, Khartoum, 2020), p. 300.

the diaspora and those in the 1948 occupied territories. He further observed that the Oslo Accords established security forces tasked with suppressing resistance and pursuing resisters, thereby producing a rift between the PA and the segment of the Palestinian people committed to resistance.[64]

In this regard, Father Manuel warned of the grave dangers posed by the persistence of the Palestinian schism for the future of the Palestine issue. He maintained that this schism leads to the erosion of the Palestine issue and constitutes a principal obstacle to the liberation of Palestine.[65] As he stated, "The continuation of the Palestinian schism serves, first and foremost, the interests of Israeli policy, as Israel exploits this state of division to advance its settlement and Judaization schemes in Jerusalem and the West Bank."[66]

Father Manuel Musallam pointed to several factors that have deepened the Palestinian schism, namely:

- The absence of the PLO's role, which constitutes a principal reason for obstructing national reconciliation. There is no genuine body that represents the entirety of the Palestinian people, inside and outside Palestine, founded upon free and fair elections encompassing all Palestinians. Such a body should possess a political vision grounded in liberation, one that affirms the inadmissibility of relinquishing even a grain of Palestinian soil, and recognizes Israel as a colonial Zionist enterprise that must be resisted.
- External pressures on the PA, exerted by Israel, the wider international community, and certain Arab states. These actors deliberately undermine any agreements reached among the factions toward national reconciliation. Indeed, they go so far as to compel the PA to adopt hostile measures against the GS, including its blockade and the suspension of salaries for prisoners, martyrs and public employees.
- The PA suffers from weakness and estrangement from the Palestinian people and their will, as it aligns itself with one political faction against another. Indeed, it has become part of one faction against another. Consequently, it lacks the legitimacy to impose a solution.

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[64] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 1/8/2022.

[65] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 262.

[66] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 206.

- Certain Palestinian factions benefit from the existence of the PA, since it controls their funding and guarantees their survival. This dependency, in turn, weakens their position when it comes to compelling the parties to the Palestinian schism to pursue reconciliation.
- One side of the Palestinian schism seeks to impose its own political vision on the other, presenting it as the sole path to achieving independence.
- The profound mistrust between the two sides of the Palestinian schism (Fatah and Hamas) has constituted a major obstacle to realizing national reconciliation.[67]

b. Father Manuel's Efforts to Conduct Elections and His Proposals to End the Palestinian Schism

Father Manuel emphasized that elections constitute an urgent necessity and a fundamental right for all Palestinians, both in the homeland and the diaspora. He maintained that elections represent the sole viable mechanism for effecting meaningful political change and for resolving the Palestinian schism. Moreover, he underscored the imperative of preserving the regularity and integrity of the democratic process, advocating that elections be held every four years, and firmly rejected any attempt to subordinate this electoral right to the discretion of a particular faction, political party or authority.[68]

Father Manuel Musallam maintained that the strategic priority of the Palestine issue lies in the election of a capable and virtuous leadership, one fundamentally anchored in comprehensive resistance aimed at the liberation of the entirety of Palestinian territory.[69]

For Father Manuel, the measure of a leader's, or a leadership's, legitimacy is determined by the extent of their commitment to the struggle they champion. Leadership that embraces resistance and the full liberation of Palestine, he contended, is the leadership that authentically represents the Palestinian people.

Palestinian factions have repeatedly sought to hold legislative and presidential elections as a means of resolving the Palestinian schism; however, all such efforts have failed. Father Manuel opposed these elections, arguing that they do not

[67] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," pp. 92–93.

[68] "We must hold elections in order to bring about change," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 1/5/2021.

[69] Father Manuel Musallam: Priorities of the Palestinian People, YouTube, 27/10/2020.

constitute a solution to the schism. He further emphasized that "the legislative elections were intended to entrench the Oslo project and the two-state solution, thereby legitimizing Israel's presence on Palestinian land." Consequently, he rejected the Oslo project and its outcomes, particularly the legislative and presidential elections.[70]

Father Manuel Musallam also criticized Hamas for agreeing to participate in the legislative elections, which are a direct outcome of the Oslo Accords. He observed that the ultimate aim of this agreement is the establishment of a two-state solution. Consequently, by participating in these elections, Hamas would effectively be abandoning its principal objective, the liberation of the entire Palestinian territory, and acquiescing to the outcomes of Oslo.[71]

Father Manuel further argued that the primary goal pursued by the Palestinian factions, particularly Fatah and Hamas, in holding legislative and subsequent presidential elections, is to legitimize their positions and assert their visions for their respective political projects. He emphasized that such elections would not generate new leadership, would not introduce a fresh vision, and would not prioritize the option of resistance over security coordination.[72] Accordingly, Father Manuel called on the Palestinian factions to recalibrate their approach by first conducting elections for the PNC, rebuilding the PLO, and electing new leadership for both the PLO and the PNF. Only through this process could the Palestinian people determine their legitimate representatives and choose a national project rooted in the liberation of the entire Palestinian territory.[73] He added, "Elections must be conducted independently of factional quotas. Anyone who has held leadership positions in the Authority or within a faction for more than five years should be retired, in order to safeguard the integrity of the democratic process."[74]

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[70] Manuel Musallam: Legislative Elections Will Lead Us into a "New Labyrinth" Rather than Provide a "Magic Formula" to Confront Challenges, Shms News Agency, 3/4/2021, https://shms.ps/p/119138

[71] "Hunger Fights Fortresses, and Hunger Submits to Fortresses," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 15/3/2021.

[72] Father Manuel Musallam, *Al-Qalam al-Hadir* (The Roaring Pen), p. 22; and "How Correctly to Address Major Issues Between Us and Israel," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 22/10/2022.

[73] "Brothers in the Conference on the Priorities of the Palestine Issue in the Coming Phase and the Desired Role of Palestinians Abroad," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 19/10/2020.

[74] Father Manuel Musallam, National Vision, YouTube, 15/5/2021.

However, Father Manuel Musallam contended that elections had become impossible under Israel's control over the Palestinians and its repeated efforts to obstruct any progress in the electoral process. He further observed, "The elections may not encompass all Palestinians in the homeland and the diaspora, as host countries in the diaspora often exert control over their will."[75]

In view of these aforementioned impediments, Father Musallam independently advanced a proposal that he regarded as suitable for overcoming the Palestinian schism and fostering both national and political unity. Through his Facebook page, he launched an initiative entitled "Our Path to Electronic Elections."[76] He argued that electronic elections are particularly well adapted to the exceptional Palestinian context, as they are secure, free and feasible. He further explained that his preference for this electoral modality was informed by its potential to inclusively engage all segments of the Palestinian people, whether in the homeland or the diaspora, in shaping unity of opinion, national reconciliation, collective decision-making and resistance.[77]

Father Manuel Musallam justified his insistence on the necessity of conducting electronic elections for several reasons:

- The Israeli occupation refuses to hold elections using traditional ballot boxes in Jerusalem; therefore, electronic elections can overcome the obstacles posed by both the diaspora and the Israeli occupation. They can be conducted in GS, the WB, Jerusalem, the 1948 occupied territories, and throughout all of Palestine.
- Electronic elections have the capacity to establish a unified political body representing all Palestinians, both within the country and abroad.[78]

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[75] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 7/10/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3432399533533788/

[76] Electronic Voting: "Electronic voting constitutes the direct exercise of political rights in elections, allowing voters to select candidates through information technology rather than traditional methods such as paper ballots and ballot boxes. The results are subsequently stored in computer systems according to specific technical and security standards, thereby ensuring the highest levels of transparency, accuracy and security, and guaranteeing the integrity of the electoral process in its electronic form." See Khadr 'Abbas 'Atwan and Hamad Jasim Muhammad, "Security and E-Governance in Iraq: A Strategic Vision for Managing the Voting Process," *Risalat Al-Huquq Journal*, University of Kerbala, Iraq, vol. 1, year 4, 2012, p. 63.

[77] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 26/9/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3399664513473957/

[78] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 9/5/2022.

- Electronic elections are impartial; they do not favor one party over another, nor one faction over another.
- Electronic elections reflect the opinions of all Palestinians, both inside Palestine and across the diaspora.
- Only electronic elections can bring an end to the Palestinian schism, as previous elections have proven incapable of achieving genuine national reconciliation.
- Electronic elections alone provide a secure, feasible mechanism capable of fostering a broad national consensus to confront Israel's colonialist aggression.
- Electronic elections provide an expansive framework for engaging with all Palestinians, enabling not only the precise enumeration of the population but also the systematic regulation of both voters and candidates. Contact with Palestinian communities in the diaspora is notably accessible and well-coordinated, whereas data concerning RCs are already maintained by UNRWA.
- Through such elections, the Palestinian people assert sovereignty over their own destiny, thereby insulating themselves from external interventions that seek to impose foreign agendas.
- The Palestinian people must not defer action in anticipation of changing political circumstances; rather, they bear the responsibility to actively shape and transform those circumstances.
- Comprehensive electronic elections facilitate the emergence of a legitimate, youthful, and capable national leadership, endowed with the freedom and authority to define the national project for the liberation struggle.[79]
- As a consequence, these elections pave the way for a renewed national project, which replaces the Oslo Accords.[80]

Father Manuel Musallam opposed the PA's and certain Palestinian factions' rejection of the concept of electronic elections, emphasizing that, as elections represent a popular demand, it is ultimately the people who should determine their format. In this context, he called for the establishment of a national council composed of 20 experts in digital technology, entrusted with assessing the feasibility of conducting such elections securely, since they are the competent authority to examine the possibility of electronic voting.[81]

[79] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 26/9/2020.

[80] Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 30/3/2020.

[81] "In 1963, I went from the city of Zarqa with friends to the Jordan River, which had overflowed," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 6/2/2022.

Father Manuel was not alone in advocating for this approach. Several scholars have also proposed electronic elections as a viable option. Among them, Dr. 'Issam 'Adwan[82] highlighted the potential of this method, particularly in light of its partial success in countries such as Estonia, France and Australia. Moreover, he argued that electronic elections could effectively overcome obstacles that hinder Palestinians from voting at traditional polling stations, notably Israel's obstruction of elections in Jerusalem.[83]

Summary

- The political divisions among Palestinian factions have constituted a significant obstacle and a political catastrophe for the Palestine issue, manifesting in the fragmentation of Palestinian decision-making and the division of resistance weaponry. In this context, Father Manuel Musallam called upon all Palestinian factions to achieve unity.
- Father Manuel rejected the accusations directed at the Islamic Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas, labeling them as "terrorist," and emphasized that Hamas is a legitimate national liberation movement and an integral part of the Palestinian people.
- The events of the 2007 Palestinian schism represent both a natural consequence and an inevitable outcome of the 1993 Oslo Accords, which generated divergent political visions within the Palestinian arena. This divergence gave rise to two opposing camps: one supporting the agreement and the other opposing it, with the disagreement deepening over time and culminating in the schism.
- Father Manuel opposed attempts by the factions and the PA to hold legislative and presidential elections, arguing that the legislative elections were designed to reinforce the Oslo Accords, which call for the establishment of a Gaza and WB state. Such elections were deemed unacceptable, as they constitute an explicit concession regarding the right of refugees to return to Palestine.
- Electronic elections, he suggested, could provide a solution to the various obstacles and challenges hindering the realization of elections and the resolution of the political schism.

[82] 'Issam Muhammad Ali 'Adwan was born in Gaza City on 24/9/1967. He is a Palestinian refugee from the village of Barbara in the Gaza district, which was destroyed in 1948. 'Adwan is a full-time lecturer at Al-Quds Open University, editor-in-chief of the *Palestinian Historical Journal* issued by the Centre of Palestinian Historiography and Documentation, and director of the East Center for Research and Culture, https://east-cr.com/dr-issam-adwan-cv/

[83] 'Issam Adwan, Palestinian Elections Online, site of East Center for Research and Culture, 14/10/2021, https://east-cr.com/palestinian-i-voting/

Chapter Three

Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Israeli Occupation and Arab and International Policies on the Palestine Issue

Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Israeli Occupation and Arab and International Policies on the Palestine Issue

First: Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Christian Zionism, the Zionist Movement and Israeli Occupation

Father Manuel has consistently confronted the claims of Christian Zionism and the Zionist movement, including the notion of Palestine as the "Promised Land," warning Christian clergy against succumbing to such myths. He has actively opposed Israeli occupation, regarding its presence on Palestinian land as illegitimate.

1. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Christian Zionism and the Zionist Movement[1]

On numerous occasions, Father Manuel Musallam expressed his rejection of certain Christian interpretations of the Old Testament, particularly within the evangelical Protestant tradition, commonly referred to as Christian Zionism. He emphasized that these interpretations are fundamentally flawed and highlighted that the positions of Catholic Church authorities differ significantly from those espoused by Christian Zionists. In his lectures, commentaries, and media interviews, he provided extensive evidence supporting his position. He pointed to numerous popes who explicitly rejected the notion of Palestine as a "Promised Land."[2]

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[1] The Zionist movement is a modern political movement advocating for the resettlement of Jews in Palestine, regarded as the Promised Land, as a means to resolve the so-called Jewish question. See 'Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, *Mawsu'at al-Mafahim wa al-Mustalahat al-Suhyuniyyah: Ru'yah Naqdiyyah* (The Encyclopedia of Zionist Concepts and Terminology: A Critical View) (Cairo: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1975), p. 244, https://archive.org/details/20200703_20200703_0253/page/n243/mode/2up

[2] The names used by Jews to designate Palestine are diverse; it is referred to as the "Promised Land," the "Land of Promise," or the "Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*)." These designations constitute one of the foundations of the Zionist movement, intended to encourage Jews worldwide to migrate to Palestine and colonize it, drawing upon biblical texts to legitimize these objectives. Jews claim that God promised them the land of Palestine for a period of time, though the Torah provides no fixed territorial boundaries for it. See Naifah Hammad Diba, "Jewish Religious Forces in Palestine and Their Relationship with the Zionist Movement, 1902–1948" (Master's thesis, The Islamic University of Gaza, 2012), p. 65.

Among them, Pope Benedict XV,[3] in response to the Balfour Declaration of 2/11/1917, explicitly stating, "No to Jewish sovereignty over the Holy Land."[4]

Father Manuel Musallam pointed out that the Vatican[5] sent an official memorandum to the League of Nations on 15/5/1922, in which it expressed its rejection of the idea of establishing a homeland for the Jews in Palestine.[6]

Father Manuel further clarified that the Roman Catholic Church rejects the eschatological theology[7] and the doctrine of Millenarianism (Chiliasm),[8] which gained traction among Evangelical Protestant Christians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This rejection was formally articulated by the Vatican's Office of Doctrine on 21/7/1944, during the papacy of Pope Pius XII,[9] who explicitly opposed teaching it.[10]

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[3] Benedict XV: Born Giacomo Della Chiesa on 21/11/1854, in the Kingdom of Sardinia, he died in Rome on 22/1/1922. His papacy lasted from 1914 to 1922. He was elected pope a month after the outbreak of World War I, and the greater part of his papacy was occupied with war problems. See Benedict XV, site of Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Benedict-XV

[4] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 17/6/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3098947300212348/

[5] The Vatican: The residence of the Pope, the visible head of the Church. See *Al-Vatican wa Roma al-Masihiyyah* (The Vatican and Christian Rome), translated by Muhammad Jamil al-Qassas (Damascus: Tlas House for Studies, Translation, and Publishing, 1992), p. 11.

[6] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 17/6/2020.

[7] Eschatology: The study of what the Bible teaches about the end times. The Church emphasizes teaching eschatology as it represents the pinnacle and crown of systematic theology, reminding Christians that this world is not their true home and directing their attention beyond current events toward heaven, where they will dwell with Christ and His people forever. See Hope Bolinger, What is Eschatology, site of Christianity.com, 3/10/2022, https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-eschatology.html

[8] Millenarianism is the belief that there will be a 1,000-year period in the future in which Christ will literally rule on earth. See What is millenarianism?, site of Got Questions, https://www.gotquestions.org/millenarianism.html

[9] Pius XII: Born Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli on 2/3/1876 in Rome, Italy, and died on 9/10/1958 in Castel Gandolfo. He served as Bishop of Rome and head of the Roman Catholic Church for a long tenure and had a long, tumultuous and controversial pontificate (1939–1958). During his reign, the papacy confronted the ravages of World War II (1939–1945). See Pius XII, Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pius-XII; and see Millenarianism (Chiliasm): Decree of the Holy Office, July 21, 1944, site of Dicastry for the Clergy, https://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/dx0.htm

[10] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 17/6/2020.

He emphasized that even if the Vatican, represented by the Pope, were to change its stance on Zionist ideas and recognize the land of Palestine as "Israel," Father Manuel would continue to reject such beliefs. In this regard, he asserts, "When His Holiness says, 'This is the land of Israel,' I will stand before him and say: This is the land of Palestine, and our holy sites are sacred to both Christians and Muslims alike."[11]

Father Manuel Musallam explained that the primary objective of the Zionist movement is to empty the land of its Palestinian inhabitants; it seeks a land without a people. This, he stressed, confirms that the conflict is fundamentally over the land.[12]

He further called upon Christian clergy to resist the notion of the "Promised Land," arguing that those who neglect to confront Zionist claims betray their own mission.[13] Likewise, he urged Christians to reject Christian Zionism, which advocates the idea of the "Promised Land," for the very same reasons.[14]

Accordingly, Father Musallam affirmed that Palestine is not a "Promised Land," but rather that Israel represents a settler-colonial enterprise of replacement and dispossession. Therefore, Arabs must neither cooperate, coordinate, nor normalize relations with Israel, nor recognize it as a state on 78% of the land of Palestine. Moreover, not a single grain of Palestine's soil may rightfully be relinquished to this occupying entity.[15]

Through Father Manuel Musallam's statements, the researcher discerned two principal motives that have profoundly shaped his rejection of Zionist ideas and of Israel:

- The religious and doctrinal motive: This is evident in his consistent call upon Christians, particularly members of the clergy, to resist such ideas, which he deemed fundamentally incompatible with Christian teachings. In his view, to accept them would constitute a betrayal of the Christian message.

[11] Hadeel 'Awni 'Attallah, *Hiwarat fi al-Fikr wa al-Hayat* (Dialogues in Thought and Life) (Gaza: *Felesteen* Newspaper, Al-Wasat Media and Publishing Company, 2014), p. 208.

[12] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 198.

[13] Father Manuel Musallam: The Promised Land, YouTube, 4/2/2022.

[14] Father Manuel Musallam Calls for Resistance to "Zionist Christianity," Arabi21, 28/12/2017.

[15] Father Manuel Musallam: The Promised Land, YouTube, 4/2/2022.

- The national motive: This is expressed in his insistence that he would stand with his people and oppose even the Vatican, the supreme religious authority of the Catholic Church to which he belongs, were it to endorse the Zionist narrative that asserts the land of Palestine as the land of "Israel."

2. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Nature of the Struggle with Israel

Father Manuel had numerous confrontations with Israel and consistently encouraged the Palestinian people to resist it. His first recorded clash was in 1981. Reflecting on that experience, Father Manuel recounts:

> When Israel assassinated Na'im Khader, the PLO representative in Belgium, I confronted this crime by organizing the first street-cleaning campaign in Zababdeh. At that time, we followed a practice whereby, if one of us was killed, the residents of the area would take up brooms and go out into the streets. I also encouraged angry demonstrations. The military governor immediately opposed me and prevented me from sweeping the streets with a broom. That moment marked the beginning of my conflicts with the army, which was infuriated by my activities. They detained me for nearly two weeks at the police station.[16]

Father Manuel Musallam stated that, as a result of his activism in confronting Israel and its criminal policies, the authorities began to seriously consider expelling him to Marj al-Zuhur. He added that the military governor had threatened him with this measure;[17] however, Father Manuel was not deported to Marj al-Zuhur, perhaps due to the absence of sufficient evidence that could implicate him.

Nevertheless, Israel continued to harbor hostility toward Father Manuel because of his resistance activities. When he was assigned to Gaza (1995–2009) to carry out his mission of serving the Latin Christian community there, Israel prohibited him from leaving the Gaza throughout nearly fifteen years of service. During that entire period, he was permitted to visit his family in Birzeit only on two rare occasions, which he himself described as "two lonely visits."[18]

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[16] Hadeel 'Awni 'Attallah, *Hiwarat fi al-Fikr wa al-Hayat* (Dialogues in Thought and Life), p. 210.

[17] Ibid., p. 211.

[18] Ibid., pp. 211–212.

a. The Concept of the Israeli Occupation in the Thought of Father Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel Musallam defined the Israeli occupation as:

> the process undertaken by the Zionist movement to seize the entirety of Palestinian land, from Ras al-Naqoura in the north to Umm al-Rashrash in the south, in two stages: the first in 1948 and the second in 1967. The territories that Israel occupied, upon which it subsequently established its structure, are occupied Palestinian lands that ought to be fully liberated.[19]

He further maintained that Israel is not a state but rather a rogue formation[20] that successfully gathered a segment of Jews dispersed across Europe and other parts of the world, brought them to Palestine, and established an entity of their own. In this regard, he argued, this formation represents the culmination of Zionist political and Jewish efforts[21] initiated by Theodor Herzl.[22]

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[19] "How many men in GS stand as one thousand, and how many among these thousands are content with mere demonstrations, passing by uncounted!," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 26/5/2021.

[20] Rogue State: A state that regularly violates international standards of acceptable behavior. It evokes images of a state that is outwardly aggressive, a threat to international peace, highly repressive, xenophobic, and arrogant, and which has no regard for the norms of international society. The sort of behavior that the international community regards as 'rogue behaviour' includes the development of chemical and biological weapons, attempting to buy the materials necessary for the construction of nuclear weapons, drug trafficking, failure to live up to international treaties, sponsorship of terrorism, invasion or the unwarranted provocation of neighboring states, and the construction of long-distance missile delivery systems. See Martin Griffiths, Terry O'Callaghan and Steven C. Roach, *International Relations: The Key Concept*, 2nd edition (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 284, https://hostnezt.com/cssfiles/internationalrelations/International%20Relations%20Key%20Concepts%202nd%20Edition%20By%20Martin%20Griffiths.pdf

[21] Political Zionism "is to make Palestine directly or indirectly a 'Jewish State'—or as it is sometimes termed, a 'Jewish Commonwealth.' " See Isaac Alfred Isaacs, *Palestine: Peace and Prosperity or War and Destruction? Political Zionism: Undemocratic, Unjust, Dangerous* (Melbourne: Ramsey Ware Publishing, 1946), pp. 7–8, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-760983744/view?partId=nla.obj-760991910#page/n9/mode/1up

[22] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 202.

Theodor Herzl: The founder of the Zionist movement, Herzl put an end to its infiltrative and immature beginnings and succeeded in shaping its evasive discourse. Furthermore, he was able to secure the tacit Zionist contract between the Western world and the Zionist organization, which came to be regarded as the unelected representative of world Jewry. This, in turn, made possible the signing of the Balfour Declaration, the most pivotal event in the history of Zionism. All subsequent Zionist currents either emerged directly from under his mantle or drew upon the folds of his elusive rhetoric. See 'Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, *Mawsu'at al-Yahud wa al-Yahudiyyah wa al-Suhyuniyyah* (The Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism) (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk, 1999), vol. 6, p. 227.

b. The Nature of the Conflict with the Israeli Occupation in the Thought of Father Manuel Musallam

Father Manuel distinguishes several forms characterizing the nature of the conflict with Israel: the colonial conflict, the civilizational and cultural conflict, and its evolution into a religious conflict.

The Colonial Conflict

Father Manuel traces the origins of the Zionist colonial invasion and the early activity of Christian Zionism to the Puritan Lodge in Britain in 1655. At that time, Oliver Cromwell,[23] head of the Puritan Lodge from 1649 to 1659, convened a conference to permit Jews to return and reside in the territory during the Commonwealth, following their expulsion by King Edward I in 1290. During this conference, a connection was established between the ideas of Christian Zionism and Britain's strategic interests. Consequently, Cromwell developed an early conviction regarding the necessity of settling Jews in the Holy Land in Palestine.[24]

Father Manuel Musallam clarified that the idea of establishing Israel was purely a colonial project, aimed at dominating and exploiting the Arab homeland, especially after Europeans discovered petroleum and other resources in this region stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf. They began convening conferences and devising plans to control it and extract its wealth, as exemplified by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 issued by the British government, which called for the establishment of a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine. This colonial endeavor built its military, political and economic strategies around establishing an entity that would divide the Arab world into its Asian and African components. Palestine was thus chosen both as a connecting link between Arab countries and as a means of controlling the Suez Canal to safeguard the commerce they intended to exploit from Arab lands.[25]

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[23] Oliver Cromwell: Born in 1599. An English soldier and statesman, who led parliamentary forces in the English Civil Wars and was lord protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland during the republican Commonwealth. Cromwell helped to bring about the overthrow of the Stuart monarchy. He died on 3/9/1658, in John Morrill and Maurice Ashley, Oliver Cromwell, Encyclopedia Britannica, 21/4/2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Oliver-Cromwell

[24] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 17/6/2020.

[25] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 97.

Father Manuel further argued that the Israeli occupation functions primarily as a military base serving the colonial interests of the US and Western European states.[26]

Civilizational and Cultural Conflict

Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that the conflict extends beyond mere colonialism; the Zionist invasion seeks to erase Palestinian Arab civilization and obscure its heritage. This is pursued through the systematic displacement of Palestinians, the depopulation of their lands via over 250 documented massacres, the renaming of Palestinian cities and villages, and the forced relocation of Arabs. Additional measures include the acquisition of lands and endowments, house demolitions, expulsions, transfers,[27] and apartheid[28] policies. Collectively, these strategies aim to supplant one civilization with another throughout Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem, and dispossess Palestinians of it.[29]

Regarding the cultural dimension, Father Manuel highlighted that the content of Israeli educational curricula, which propagate anti-Arab racism, along with the narratives disseminated by Zionist-controlled media, have significantly fueled a cultural conflict. He further noted that approximately 80% of Israeli society is mobilized by its government and Zionist ideology toward brutal violence against the Palestinian population. Israeli media portray all Palestinians as terrorists, instilling fear among Israeli soldiers, who are then predisposed to kill Palestinians at a distance, believing their lives are threatened if they approach. Father Manuel

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[26] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 169.

[27] Transfer: The forced displacement and relocation of a population from one place to another without their consent or volition, often exposing them to extermination. The Zionist movement employed transfer against the Palestinian people by relocating Jews from exile to Palestine while transferring Palestinians from Palestine to exile. See ‘Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, *Mawsu‘at al-Yahud wa al-Yahudiyyah wa al-Suhyuniyyah* (The Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism), vol. 2, p. 86.

[28] Segregation, or Apartheid: The separation of a social or ethnic group from the rest of society and treating them poorly, applying the same forms of racial discrimination, but after isolating and displacing the oppressed groups into separate communities. Israel has implemented apartheid policies against Palestinians through the construction of the apartheid wall, aiming to confiscate additional lands and permanently annex them to Israel, and to fragment Palestinian territories into isolated cantons. This prevents any future possibility of establishing a Palestinian state and obstructs Palestinians from exercising their fundamental and legitimate right to self-determination. See ‘Abdul Ghani Salameh, Aspects of Apartheid in Israeli Policies, site of Research Center, PLO, https://www.prc.ps/مظاهر-الابارتهايد-في-السياسات-الإسرا/

[29] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, “A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam,” p. 99.

also observed that Israeli educational materials inculcate hatred in Jewish students toward Arabs, reinforcing systemic racism. He cited the Israeli book *Scenes from School Life* by researchers Idan Yaron and Yoram Harpaz. The narrative follows a 10th-grade Israeli girl from a high school who declares, "For me, personally, Arabs are something I can't look at and can't stand," adding, "I am tremendously racist. I come from a racist home. If I get the chance in the army to shoot one of them, I won't think twice. I'm ready to kill someone with my hands, and it's an Arab."[30]

The Shift Toward Religious Conflict

Father Manuel Musallam warned against the plans of Israel, which seeks to transform the conflict from a historical and civilizational struggle into a religious one. This intent, he emphasized, has been evident since the inception of the Zionist project. Father Manuel drew on statements by Zionist leaders, such as Herzl, who declared, "If we ever get Jerusalem, and if it is within my ability, I will clean it first. I shall remove everything that is not sacred…, I shall..burn those ruins which are not sacred."[31]

Father Manuel Musallam explained that the notion of the "Jewish state," promoted by Israel, is intended to draw the region into the furnace of a religious war, with the ultimate aim of expelling non-Jews on the basis of religious belief.[32] This agenda, he noted, is manifested in the ongoing assaults on Jerusalem, particularly on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which is an integral component of Islamic faith. The repeated incursions into the mosque are designed to legitimize the Israeli claim of unfettered access to it. Father Manuel further clarified that the ultimate objective behind the Zionist movement's continuous excavations beneath and around *al-Aqsa* Mosque is its destruction.[33]

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[30] Or Kashti, Israeli Teenagers: Racist and Proud of It, site of *Haaretz* newspaper, 23/8/2014, https://www.haaretz.com/2014-08-23/ty-article/.premium/racist-and-proud-of-it/0000017f-e709-df5f-a17f-ffdf1ec90000

[31] Naty Gabbay, The Beautiful Postcards Theodor Herzl Sent to His Daughter, site of the Librarians, 3/4/2019, https://blog.nli.org.il/en/herzl-postcards-daughter/; and see Bila Hudud [Without Boundaries]: The Position of Jerusalemites on Trump's Decision to Recognize Jerusalem as Israel's Capital, with Father Manuel Musallam, Al Jazeera Arabic channel, YouTube, 21/12/2017.

[32] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 202.

[33] Ajras al-Mashriq Program: Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, AlMayadeen Documentaries channel, YouTube, 31/12/2017.

In this context, Father Manuel issued a stark warning regarding Israel's practices and assaults against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, including the excavations beneath it and the installation of electronic gates. He stressed that these measures, along with other related projects, risk transforming the conflict from one rooted in history and civilization into a religious confrontation. He added, "Israeli attempts to build the Temple in place of *al-Aqsa* Mosque would inevitably convert the struggle into a religious conflict, for *al-Aqsa* Mosque is inseparable from Islamic creed, as previously emphasized."[34]

Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that Israel seeks to eradicate and exclude all non-Jewish presence in Palestine; it rejects the existence of both churches and mosques, as well as the presence of Palestinian Christians and Muslims. He further explained, "The attacks have not been limited to Muslims; they have also targeted Christians, their churches and monasteries. Some Zionist associations even call for the demolition and burning of churches." Father Musallam cited the example of the extremist Zionist organization Lehava,[35] whose leader, Rabbi Bentzi Gopstein, called for the burning of churches in Jerusalem, coinciding with the celebration of Christmas.[36] He warned that these ongoing assaults, coupled with continuous excavations, will ultimately lead to a religious war.

[34] Muhammad Abu Rukbah, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Kalimah ila al-Ummah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Message to the Ummah), p. 214.

[35] Lehava is an acronym for "Prevention of Assimilation in the Holy Land." It is a far-right Israeli Zionist organization, founded in 2005 by the extremist activist Ben-Zion (Bentzi) Gopstein. The organization seeks to prevent intermarriage "miscegenation" and the "assimilation of Jews and Arabs in the Holy Land." Lehava focuses on restricting contact between Jews and Palestinians, particularly by opposing mixed marriages, and some describe it as the "Jewish morality police." Mustafa Abu Sneineh, Lehava: The anti-Palestinian, far-right Israeli group marching in Jerusalem, site of Middle East Eye, 29/4/2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-lehava-extremist-group-marching-jerusalem

[36] On 4/8/2015, Gopstein called for the burning of churches in Israel, "the rabbi said that his comments were made in the context of theoretical Jewish law." Leader of Israeli anti-assimilation group says he supports burning churches, site of i24 News, 6/8/2015, https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/81117-150806-leader-of-israeli-anti-assimilation-group-says-he-supports-burning-churches; and Father Manuel Musallam…. The Israelis are the beasts of the earth, preparing for a religious war, site of Ramallah News, 18/1/2016, https://ramallah.news/post/53095

3. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the Aggressiveness and Brutality of Israel

Father Manuel presented extensive evidence supporting his view that Israel is a repressive and sadistic entity that persists in killing Palestinians through all possible means, and that it bears no relation to humanity. He substantiated this position by citing numerous criminal and brutal acts perpetrated by Israeli forces against the Palestinian people. Among the most horrific examples he highlighted were the cases in which Israeli settlers burned Palestinian children alive, leaving the flames consuming their bodies until death, and the burning of their homes and families.[37]

The researcher concurred with Father Manuel's assessment regarding the burning of children alive, referring specifically to the case of the martyred youth Muhammad Abu Khdeir (16 years old) from occupied Jerusalem, who was abducted on 2/7/2014, by three settlers. It is worth recalling that the abductors had set a trap for Muhammad: one of his killers approached him and asked for directions to Tel Aviv, inquiring which road they should take. Out of kindness, Muhammad walked with them to the end of the street and pointed the way with his hand. In that moment, he became the prey they had plotted against. They forced the innocent boy into their car, took him to a forest in the depopulated village of Deir Yassin west of occupied Jerusalem, and burned him alive.[38]

Regarding the burning of Palestinian homes and families, this phenomenon is exemplified by the tragic case of the Dawabsheh family. On 31/7/2015, while the family was asleep, settlers infiltrated the village of Duma near Nablus under cover of darkness and threw incendiary bottles into their home. Consequently, the infant Ali was martyred, while his parents and brother Ahmad sustained severe burns.

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[37] Father Manuel Musallam, *Hadith Umm Qush'am* (Hadith Umm Qush'am), p. 78; and see for example, Diaa Hadid, Video Shows Israeli Extremists Celebrating Palestinian Child's Death, *The New York Times* newspaper, 24/12/2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/25/world/middleeast/ali-dawabsheh-arson-death-israel-wedding-video.html

[38] Jodi Rudoren, Autopsy Suggests Palestinian Teenager Was Burned to Death After Abduction, *The New York Times*, 5/7/2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/06/world/middleeast/autopsy-suggests-palestinian-boy-was-burned-alive-reports-say.html

The father, Sa‘ad, succumbed to his injuries within days, and the mother, Riham, passed away more than a month later. Their four-year-old son Ahmad survived, though he suffered burns over 60% of his body, necessitating years of recovery.[39]

Father Manuel Musallam cited evidence of the Israeli occupation's brutality and sadism, including its use of internationally prohibited weapons against civilians in GS. Notably, during its 2008/2009 war on GS, Israel employed white phosphorus; a fact confirmed by the Goldstone Report, which explicitly documented Israel's use of this weapon. In light of Israel's denial, Father Manuel offered personal testimony corroborating the findings of the Goldstone Report. He stated, "I saw, at the Rosary Sisters' School in Tel al-Hawa, Gaza, an unexploded white phosphorus bomb. Experts came at my request and removed it from the school." He further recounted witnessing smoke rising from the bodies of individuals struck by this internationally banned weapon, adding: "The Israeli air force and artillery decimated civilians in Gaza during the aforementioned war."[40]

Father Manuel Musallam clarified that Israel does not commit its crimes out of any genuine threats that would necessitate self-defense, but rather as an excessive use of force and repression aimed at diminishing the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and coercing them into relinquishing their legitimate rights and their land.[41]

He further explained that the repeated assaults on journalists, ranging from live fire injuries to outright killings, stem from Israel's intent to obscure the reality of its crimes by silencing the witnesses to truth. A striking example, he noted, is the assassination of journalist Shireen Abu ‘Akleh on 11/5/2022, while she was carrying out her professional duty. The Israeli forces deliberately killed her in order to bury the truth along with her.[42]

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[39] Suspected settler violence claims the lives of a Palestinian father and son, site of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCAH-oPt), 28/8/2015, https://www.ochaopt.org/content/suspected-settler-violence-claims-lives-palestinian-father-and-son; and Today marks the first anniversary of the Dawabsheh family arson, site of Palestinian News Agency (WAFA), 31/7/2016, https://www.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=D83zGwa698911249773aD83zGw

[40] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 198.

[41] Ibid., p. 79.

[42] Father Musallam: Israel assassinated the martyr Abu ‘Akleh because it felt defeated in every confrontation with the resistance fighters, Shehab News Agency, 11/5/2022, https://shehabnews.com/p/100404

Father Manuel Musallam pointed to further evidence attesting to the sadism of Israel, namely its assault on Palestinians in every dimension of their lives. First, it targeted their livelihood by bulldozing their lands and fields, uprooting hundreds of thousands of olive and orange trees, demolishing their homes in an effort to constrict them, and forcing them to leave their homeland. Second, it restricted their freedom of movement within their towns and villages by erecting checkpoints on both major and minor roads, and by preventing them from reaching their holy sites, including *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Churches of the Holy Sepulchre and the Nativity. Moreover, in order to consolidate its control over every detail of Palestinian life and to seize their land, Israel constructed the apartheid wall around WB and Jerusalem.[43] For these reasons, Father Manuel maintains that Israel is not a state but rather a brutal, sadistic and rogue occupation that kills unarmed civilians and devastates the land with both prohibited and non-prohibited weaponry. Consequently, its very existence must be resisted.

4. Father Manuel Musallam on Israel's GS Siege[44]

a. The Nature of the GS Siege, According to Father Manuel

Father Manuel Musallam endured the harsh siege imposed on the GS together with his people, while serving as the priest responsible for the care of the Holy Family parish in Gaza. He emphasized the extreme difficulty of leaving and re-entering the GS, noting that Israel permitted him to exit only twice during his tenure in Gaza between 1995 and 2009.[45]

Father Manuel further pointed out that the majority of the Gaza's population are refugees who were forcibly displaced from their towns and villages, such as Jaffa, Haifa, Safad, al-Majdal, Jerusalem, Barbara, and Simsim, among others.

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[43] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 105.

[44] The Gaza Siege: This siege began in mid-2006, following Hamas's electoral victory and its formation of the tenth government. The siege can be defined as the confinement of the people of Gaza Strip (GS), preventing their exit from or entry into the territory, halting commercial movement, and even restricting the entry of humanitarian aid and other essential supplies. The resulting consequences have inflicted severe harm on the population, healthy individuals and the sick alike, due to shortages of food, water, medicine and fuel, as well as rising unemployment. See Jehan Abu Shammala, "The Gaza Siege: Reality, Dimensions and Implications," *Rouya Turkiyyah* Journal, SETA Foundation for Political, Economic, and Social Research, year 6, no. 3, 2017, p. 110, https://rouyaturkiyyah.com/issues/2017/23/3

[45] Pope of Gaza, Father Manuel Musallam, complains about the Israeli siege, site of *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 5/1/2007, https://www.alquds.co.uk

This displacement occurred in two stages, in 1948 and in 1967, at the hands of Zionist militias that destroyed their homes, seized their lands, and established on their ruins an entity that is known today as Israel.[46]

Father Manuel Musallam described the nature of the siege imposed on the Gazans as both complex and multifaceted, involving multiple actors. Israel enforces the blockade on GS, while Arab states, through their normalization with Israel, contribute to this injustice. The PLO and the PA also play a role in sustaining the siege, and the international community, through its silence, is complicit. Furthermore, the Palestinian schism has exacerbated the conditions of the blockade on GS.[47]

Father Manuel expressed profound concern regarding the severity of the economic situation faced by Gazans under this intricate siege. He highlighted that the economy of GS has been completely devastated, with unemployment and poverty rates reaching alarming levels. Consequently, the majority of the population suffers from hunger, oppression, and hardship as a direct result of the siege.[48]

Father Manuel Musallam pointed out that GS is subjected to an unjust economic policy imposed by Israel. All trade in GS passes through crossings controlled by Israel, and Israel often detains goods at its ports until they spoil. The blockade imposed on GS forces the population to purchase from Israel, even compelling merchants to do so. At times, merchants are obliged to buy products they do not need in exchange for access to essential goods. Father Manuel continued, "This unjust policy extends beyond trade to the fishing sector. Israel prevents Palestinian fishermen in GS from venturing more than six miles into the sea, frequently kills and detains fishermen, and confiscates their catch. As a result, the number of fishermen has declined from 4,000 to approximately 300."[49]

Father Manuel also highlighted that Israel has exacerbated the humanitarian situation in GS through its criminal measures against its residents. These include bombing the sole electricity plant in GS, leaving inhabitants in near-total darkness

[46] Good Morning Program: Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, AlFalstiniah TV channel, YouTube, 27/11/2012.

[47] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 84.

[48] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam.. min Wahiy al-Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam.. Inspired by the Homeland), p. 221.

[49] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 112.

with only minimal hours of electricity supply. Moreover, residents face severe water shortages, further complicating daily life.[50] Father Manuel added, "The besieged population of GS suffers from critical shortages of medicine and a deteriorating health situation." Ninety types of medicines and medical supplies are missing from hospitals and health centers due to the blockade. He added, "The Israeli occupation continuously refuses to allow the entry of fuel and petrol necessary for vehicles and domestic use."[51]

b. Father Manuel Musallam's Activism to Break the GS Siege

Father Manuel has been actively engaged in defending the rights of Palestinians trapped in GS through the Popular Committee Against the Siege, of which he is a founding member.

He has repeatedly voiced, across satellite channels as well as his Facebook and YouTube pages, his firm opposition to all siege policies imposed by Israel. He has similarly rejected all measures taken by the PA against the besieged GS, including the withholding of salaries for prisoners and families of martyrs. Father Manuel has emphasized that some 2 million Palestinians in GS remain confined under the siege, suffering from acute shortages of essential living necessities.[52]

Father Manuel has warned against the PA's policy of starvation toward GS, noting that such measures could precipitate a civil war that would endanger Palestinian national security and stability. He has consistently affirmed that true authority resides with the Palestinian people.[53] Accordingly, Father Manuel has called for peaceful civil disobedience against the PA to end the siege and punitive measures imposed on GS, and to ensure that Palestinians in GS enjoy all their economic and national rights.[54]

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[50] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 216 and 219.

[51] The head of the Popular Committee and Father Manuel Musallam called on the international community to take action to break the blockade on GS, site of Arab 48, 25/4/2008.

[52] Father Musallam: Gaza has the right to live despite 'Abbas, his authority, and his organization, Alresalah.ps, 5/8/2018, https://alresalah.ps/p/186395

[53] Father Musallam criticizes the PA for its "siege of GS," site of Quds News Network, 17/5/2018, https://qudsn.co/post/148628.

[54] Father Manuel Musallam: Gaza deserves that we begin peaceful civil disobedience against the Authority, Alkofiya Satellite channel, 17/5/2018, https://www.alkofiya.tv/ar/post/2443

In the context of these unjust policies that reinforce the siege on GS, Father Manuel Musallam called upon Palestinians abroad and in the diaspora, as well as Arab and Muslim countries, to combat poverty in GS by providing both material and moral support and by working toward the lifting of the imposed siege.[55] He urged Christians worldwide to come to the aid of GS, to actively work to break the siege imposed by Israel, and to supply the necessary material assistance and essential goods that strengthen the resilience of Gaza population and alleviate their suffering.[56]

Father Manuel also called on the international community, through all its institutions, to take immediate and urgent action to protect Palestinians in GS and to work toward ending the imposed siege. He appealed to Arab populations to mobilize in support of the besieged people of GS, noting that all previous Arab initiatives have failed to effectively lift the siege.[57]

Summary

- Father Manuel Musallam challenged Zionist Christian claims and certain Protestant interpretations that portray Palestine as the "Promised Land" and the "return of the chosen people." He emphasized that such assertions are baseless and have no connection to historical or factual truth, urging Christians to resist these beliefs.
- Father Manuel rejected the notion of Israel as a legitimate state, characterizing it instead as a rogue entity. He framed it as an expansionist colonial invasion and called for the declaration of historical Palestine from its sea to its river, from Ras al-Naqoura to Umm al-Rashrash, as a land and people under occupation. He also advocated for the activation of all forms of resistance to end the presence of this colonial invasion.
- Father Manuel endured numerous violations, including detention at an Israeli police station, threats of expulsion, restrictions on visiting his family, and impediments to his movements, all as a result of his activism against Israeli occupation.

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[55] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), pp. 218–219.

[56] Father Musallam criticizes the PA for its "siege of GS," Quds News Network, 17/5/2018.

[57] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam.. min Wahiy al-Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam.. Inspired by the Homeland), p. 221.

- Father Manuel Musallam argued that all Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people were not acts of self-defense, but rather deliberate measures aimed at extinguishing the aspirations of the Palestinian people to return to their land and exercise their right to self-determination.
- Father Manuel Musallam actively confronted the hostile practices carried out by Israel through various committees and organizations dedicated to resisting the occupation. He called for the lifting of the Israeli siege on GS, emphasizing that the people of GS are enduring severe hardships as a result of the blockade.
- He maintained that Israel bears primary responsibility for the siege of GS, yet he also noted that the blockade is reinforced by the complicity of multiple actors, including the PA and certain Arab states, which has exacerbated the crisis and suffering in GS.
- Father Manuel Musallam urged Palestinians both abroad and within the occupied territories, Arab and Muslim countries, Christians worldwide, as well as local, regional and international institutions, to take immediate action to provide aid to the residents of GS and to work toward ending the imposed siege.

Second: Father Manuel's Position on Arab and International Policies Toward the Palestine Issue

Father Manuel held that all Arab and international initiatives aimed at resolving the Palestine issue were ineffective and, in fact, reinforced the existence of Israel. In this section, we will examine Father Manuel's perspectives on Arab, Islamic and international initiatives.

1. Father Manuel's Position on the Policies of Arab and Muslim Countries Toward the Palestine Issue and Their Normalization with Israel

In numerous interviews, Father Manuel articulated his position regarding the policies of Arab and Muslim countries toward the Palestine issue, emphasizing the national and religious significance of Palestine. He cautioned these countries against normalizing relations with Israel, highlighting the detrimental effects such

normalization has on Palestinian and Arab identity. Father Manuel also criticized the prevailing Arab and Muslims' silence regarding the acts of terrorism perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people, as well as against Christian and Islamic holy sites.

a. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Arab Initiatives and Their Role in Supporting the Palestine Issue

Father Manuel is among those who believe that the Arab homeland, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf, belongs to all Arabs. He maintains that Arabs share a single nationality on a unified, undivided land. The political borders imposed between Arab peoples, and the establishment of multiple national identities, such as Egyptian, Saudi, Jordanian, Algerian, Palestinian and others, are, in Father Manuel's view, remnants of colonialism designed to control the wealth of this vast homeland while keeping it weak and fragmented. He emphasized the urgent need for political unity among Arab countries and for the consolidation of their peoples.[58] From this perspective, Father Manuel asserts that the land of Palestine possesses a broader national dimension: it belongs to all Arabs, and the Palestinian people themselves hold an intrinsic national identity as part of the wider Arab nation.[59]

Father Manuel expressed profound disapproval of the Arab initiatives that have been proposed to resolve the Palestine issue, describing them as disgraceful and treacherous. He argued that the underlying aim of these initiatives was normalization with Israel. For instance, during the 1973 war, Arab states attempted to advance the Palestine issue, yet this effort culminated in the disastrous "Camp David" Accords between Egypt and Israel on 17/9/1978. This was followed by the 1982 initiative, which paved the way for the Oslo Accords of 1993, through which Arab states and the PLO relinquished control over 78% of Palestinian land. Subsequently, the peace agreement, known as the Wadi Araba Treaty, was concluded with Jordan in 1994. As a result, Father Manuel concluded that all Arab initiatives, alongside the PLO, had failed to establish a Palestinian state capable of unifying the Palestinian people.[60]

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[58] Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 30/12/2015.

[59] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 102.

[60] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 9/5/2022.

Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that all Arab conferences and the summit resolutions issued by the League of Arab States (LAS) over the past 75 years have failed to end Israel's occupation of Palestine. He argued that the only viable solution to terminate the occupation lies in Arab unity.[61] Father Manuel also criticized Arab states for their role in weakening the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people, noting that this influence has manifested on multiple levels: militarily, psychologically and through the media.

Militarily

Father Manuel Musallam explained that Arab countries neither train nor arm a Palestinian army or resistance, nor do they provide any access through their borders to reach Palestine. He further noted that no Arab state supplies the resistance forces in Palestine with any weapons, not even light arms. Father Musallam added, "The Palestinian people residing in Arab countries are rendered powerless; they contribute neither to repelling Israel nor to engaging in the struggle against it. The Arab role has been confined solely to the humanitarian aid these states extend to the Palestinian Authority."

Psychologically

Father Musallam observed that Arab countries do not contribute to instilling a national upbringing among Palestinian refugees living within their territories. There is, he argued, no cultural or educational framework that ties Palestinians to their homeland. He added, "There are persistent attempts to integrate Palestinians into the sociopolitical fabric of their host countries, while these states simultaneously prohibit Palestinians from engaging in any national activity within their borders."[62]

Father Musallam urged Arab states to abandon the path of submissive conciliation pursued with Israel. Instead, he called for the adoption of a national and pan-Arab course of action that categorically refuses to recognize Israel's existence on the soil of Palestine.[63]

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[61] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 197.

[62] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," pp. 101–102.

[63] Father Manuel Musallam to Abdullah bin Zayed: You will feel shame and disgrace when you see Netanyahu praying in al-Aqsa Mosque, Al Jazeera Mubasher channel, YouTube, 15/9/2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f376EGJp2g

Media

Father Manuel Musallam also underscored the weakness of Arab media in exposing the crimes of Israel. He remarked, "This media apparatus grew even weaker after Arab states normalized relations with the Israeli occupation; this, in turn, emboldened Israel to expand and persist in its crimes against the Palestinian people."[64]

He further argued that the failure of Arab states to provide the Palestinian resistance with weapons has forced resistance forces to seek alternative sources of support. From this need, channels of communication opened between Palestinian resistance groups and states that openly embrace the principle of resistance. This dynamic, Father Musallam noted, explains the relationship between Palestinian resistance forces and Iran, which supports them militarily, financially and morally.

b. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Arab Normalization with Israel

According to Father Musallam, normalization entails "the recognition by Arab states that Israel is the rightful owner of the land, and that any Jew worldwide is entitled to come and settle upon it." He further elaborated, "Normalization constitutes an explicit endorsement of Zionist myths proclaiming a 'return to the Promised Land,' while simultaneously rendering Palestinian presence on their homeland illegitimate."[65] Based on this understanding, Father Musallam judged any political or economic relations between Arab states and Israel to be both a crime and a profound moral lapse. He asserted that "the normalization of Arab states with Israel represents an abandonment of national principles, and a betrayal of the Palestine issue and of the Palestinian people."[66]

Father Manuel Musallam explained that the Israeli occupation seeks to achieve two main objectives through normalization with Arab states:

The domestic dimension: This consists of dismantling and erasing Palestinian identity and eliminating any prospects for the establishment of a political entity that unites Palestinians on their land, Palestine. Consequently, the entirety of Palestine would fall under the control of Israel.

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[64] Father Manuel Musallam, Oral interview, Birzeit, 12/8/2022.

[65] Father Manuel Musallam to Abdullah bin Zayed: You will feel shame and disgrace when you see Netanyahu praying in al-Aqsa Mosque, Al Jazeera Mubasher channel, YouTube, 15/9/2020.

[66] A Letter from Palestine to the UAE, "Our beloved sister, we have learned that you have undertaken normalization and full peace with the Zionists occupying Palestine," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 16/8/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3268746766565733

The regional dimension: This entails fragmenting the Arab stance and policies toward the Palestine issue, undermining its pan-Arab character, and removing it from the sphere of Arab concern. The ultimate aim is thus to isolate the Palestinians and weaken their position both locally and regionally.[67]

In this regard, Father Musallam warned of the grave danger normalization with Israel poses to the aspirations of the Palestinian people for establishing an independent state over the entirety of their national territory. He further stressed, "Normalization with Israel represents a blatant violation of the right of return and the erasure of the right of 9 million Palestinians to return to their homeland."[68] Father Musallam also observed that normalization has significantly expanded Israel's influence in the Arab region, while simultaneously elevating the scope of its political, economic, social and cultural ambitions there.[69]

Father Manuel Musallam argued that the claims advanced by normalization-oriented Arab governments, that normalization with Israel would usher in economic prosperity, political stability, well-being and security for them and their peoples, are nothing but falsehoods. In reality, Israel seeks normalization with Arab states primarily to secure an economic advantage over them, exploiting commercial agreements to fuel its own superior growth.[70]

Furthermore, Father Manuel warned Arab leaders of the broader repercussions of normalization for the Arab region's identity. He stressed that both the US and Israel are working to fragment the region's cultural and civilizational fabric by resurrecting long-dormant identities, such as Syriac, Aramaic and Pharaonic, while also promoting artificial ethnic categories. Such strategies, he maintained, are designed to dilute the region's cohesive strength, which is grounded in the unity of language, religion and national belonging.[71]

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[67] Here Jerusalem – Special Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, AlFalstiniah TV channel, YouTube, 15/1/2018, https://youtu.be/m0N3Ctx7414?si=9LfHChZcsWjRrp0o

[68] Manuel Musallam: Jerusalem Burns Again Due to Arab Normalization and the Crimes of the Israeli Occupation, Quds News Network, 31/8/2020, https://qudsn.co/post/178400

[69] Father Manuel Musallam, *Hadith Umm Qush'am* (Hadith Umm Qush'am), p. 85.

[70] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 208.

[71] Ibid., p. 190.

Father Musallam explained that the economic growth in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has acted as a motivating factor for Israel to pursue normalization and establish relations with the country. He further noted that Israel pursues several colonial, economic, military and security objectives through its normalization with the UAE, which include:

- Facilitating Israel's access to the shores of the Arabian Gulf.
- Seizing the natural resources in the Gulf region, such as petroleum.
- Achieving military and security goals, including espionage on Arab states and containing resistance movements in Lebanon, Syria, GS, Iraq and Iran.
- Sowing and deepening divisions among Arab states to keep them weakened, particularly among states with existing political tensions, such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen.[72]

Father Manuel also warned that Israel seeks additional objectives through normalization with the UAE, including controlling the independence of the country's political decision-making and influencing its political orientation.[73]

Father Manuel Musallam explained that the US and Israel pursue an additional objective through this normalization: to exploit the geographic position of the UAE as a corridor for US and Israeli forces in any potential future conflict with Iran. In doing so, the UAE would effectively be transformed into a theater of military operations, thereby constituting a direct threat to its sovereignty and security.[74]

Furthermore, Father Manuel emphasized that the claims advanced by the Arab regimes engaging in normalization, that such measures serve the Palestine issue, benefit the Palestinians, and prevent the annexation of the Jordan Valley, are entirely unfounded. He substantiated the falsity of these assertions with the following observations:

1. Normalization with Israel has neither halted attacks on Palestinians nor safeguarded their holy sites. On the contrary, it has significantly facilitated the

[72] Father Manuel Musallam to "Al-Estiklal": Emirati Normalization Violates the 'Umar Covenant," site of Al-Estiklal newspaper, 27/8/2020, https://www.alestiklal.net/ar/article/dep-news-1598464159 (in Arabic)

[73] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 4/9/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3331156420324767/

[74] A Letter from Palestine to the UAE, "Our beloved sister, we have learned that you have undertaken normalization and full peace with the Zionists occupying Palestine," Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 16/8/2020.

expansion of violent, arbitrary and sadistic policies targeting Palestinians, including mass arrests and systematic violations of their rights. This occurs because Israel perceives Palestinians as isolated, with no external accountability for its acts of aggression, which in turn emboldens its coercive measures. Simultaneously, the Palestinians' sense of being alone on the ground has undermined both their morale and their strategic positioning.[75]

The researcher concurs with Father Manuel Musallam's view that the normalization agreements signed on 15/9/2020 between the UAE and Bahrain with Israel did not halt attacks on Palestinians or their sacred sites. For instance, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health's 2021 annual report, the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces reached 355, including 256 from GS and 90 from the WB. Among them were 87 children and 60 women, while the total number of injuries approached 16,500.[76]

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), by 26/12/2022, the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces had reached 224, comprising 171 from the WB and 53 from GS.[77] These figures demonstrate that Israel's criminal operations against Palestinians did not cease following the signing of the normalization agreements.

With regard to attacks on holy sites, *al-Aqsa* Mosque was stormed by more than 36 thousand settlers during 2021, including members of the Israeli Knesset. The annual report of the Jerusalem Unit notes that this represents a 106% increase compared to 2020.[78] In 2022, the number of settler incursions into *al-Aqsa* rose to 60,089; a grave development, reflecting nearly a doubling in a single year. Furthermore, Israeli forces prevented the Islamic Waqf Department in occupied Jerusalem from carrying out restoration work within *al-Aqsa* Mosque 103 times during 2022, despite the urgent need for such maintenance.[79]

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[75] Father Manuel Musallam: Israel Has Overreached Because It Knows Palestinians Have No Support and No One Will Help Us," site of Al Jazeera Mubasher, 10/5/2021, https://ajm.me/3l6hld

[76] Israeli Occupation Attacks during 2021, site of Palestinian Ministry of Health, https://site.moh.ps

[77] H.E. Dr. Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) presents a brief on the status of the Palestinian people at the end of 2022, site of Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 29/12/2022, https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4397

[78] Annual Report 2021 on Israeli Attacks on Occupied Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem Unit, Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs – Gaza and Jerusalem Department, Palestine Scholars Association (PSA), https://palscholars.org/

[79] 2022 Report Series on Israeli Attacks on Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem Unit, Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs – Gaza and Jerusalem Department, PSA.

It is evident from these reports that the normalization of relations between Arab states and Israel has not curtailed the latter's crimes against the Palestinian people and their holy sites. On the contrary, Israel has intensified its criminal practices against Palestinians and their sacred places, exploiting the silence generated by normalization.

2. All of Jerusalem is under Israeli control, as are the Jordan Valley areas, and the entirety of Palestine remains under occupation. The aim of these agreements is essentially to establish a US–Israel alliance, advancing toward the shores of the Arabian Gulf, with the objective of containing and striking the resistance wherever it is present.[80]

In this context, Father Manuel Musallam observed that Israel seeks to legitimize its presence in Jerusalem through normalization and the establishment of relations with Arab states. He therefore warned against normalization, regarding it as a catastrophe for Jerusalem and its future. Father Musallam further outlined several risks that normalization poses to the city of Jerusalem, which include the following:

1. The dismantling of the Arab national character of the city of Jerusalem, the erasure of Palestinian Arab identity, and the undermining of the Palestinian people's steadfastness, as Jerusalem has historically embodied their identity.
2. Normalization constitutes an explicit denial of the Palestinian refugees' right to return to the city of Jerusalem.
3. The principles enshrined in the 'Umar Covenant have been disregarded, severing the historical connection between Palestinian Christians and the broader Muslim world in the Arab region.[81]

In this context, Father Manuel Musallam rejected any negotiations with Israel concerning the Arab city of Jerusalem. He urged Palestinians, Arabs and others not to consider Jerusalem as disputed territory, emphasizing that any negotiation affecting the city or its holy sites constitutes a betrayal and a source of shame. Father Musallam called upon both Muslims and Christians to actively work toward liberating Jerusalem from Israeli occupation, viewing this as a personal and

[80] Father Manuel Musalla: Jerusalem Must Reject the Normalizers and Throw Them into the Garbage, New Turk Post Agency, 17/8/2020, https://newturkpost.com/news/66837

[81] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 23/8/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3290585934381816

collective religious obligation. He further asserted that any weapon not engaged in the liberation of Arab Jerusalem is a weapon of treachery.[82]

Amid the rush of Arab regimes toward normalization and the isolation of Palestinians in confronting Israeli occupation, Father Musallam called for the formation of a new Palestinian leadership, free from divisions, which rejects failed peace process initiatives and security coordination. This leadership, he argued, should determine the methods of resisting the occupation, whether through armed struggle or international legitimacy. Yet, should armed resistance be chosen, every Palestinian has a duty to participate.[83]

c. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on Muslim Countries and Their Role in Supporting the Palestine Issue

Father Manuel Musallam expressed deep dismay at the drift of most Muslim countries toward the quagmire of normalization with Israel. He noted that nearly 45 out of 57 Muslim countries worldwide have normalized their relations with Israel, establishing political and economic ties with it.[84] In his view, such normalization, coupled with the disregard of the violations committed against *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem, constitutes a betrayal of faith and of the message of *Surat al-Isra'*, in which *Allah* declares: "*Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-haram to al-Masjid al- Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.*"[85] He emphasized that normalization entails abandoning the very site of the Prophet's Night Journey.[86]

Moreover, Father Manuel lamented the negligence of Muslim countries in defending the Muslims of Palestine. He underscored that women, children and the elderly are killed daily in Jerusalem, while Islamic and Christian holy sites are desecrated on a daily basis by Israeli forces, all unfolding under a chilling silence from the Muslim world.[87]

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[82] Father Manuel Musallam, Jerusalem in the Eyes, Facebook, 2/1/2016.

[83] Father Manuel Musallam to "Al-Estiklal": Emirati Normalization Violates the 'Umar Covenant," Al-Estiklal newspaper, 27/8/2020.

[84] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 12/8/2022.

[85] *Suratal-Isra'* (The Night Journey): 1, https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=1

[86] Father Musallam to Arab Normalizers: You Do Not Deserve Palestine, Felesteen Online, 22/2/2019, https://felesteen.news/post/42801

[87] Father Manuel Musallam, O Muslims where are you?, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 1/9/2021.

Father Manuel Musallam drew attention to the decline in the quality of Islamic discourse directed toward the European West, noting that this constitutes a significant challenge to the global presence of the Palestine issue. He added, "The media tools and instruments available to Islamic institutions and forces are exceedingly weak compared to those of Israeli media, and Islamic media remains incapable of developing a new language of communication with the non-Muslim world." In this regard, Father Musallam emphasized the urgent need for a strong Islamic media capable of defending Islamic causes, foremost among them the city of Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites, while also exposing the reality of Israel as a settler-colonial project and refuting all fabricated religious claims upon which Israel relies.[88]

Through his participation in the 35th Islamic Conference via Facebook, Father Musallam further urged all Muslim countries to put an end to internal conflicts, wars and oppression, and instead to uphold the language of peace and love as enjoined by the Holy Quran. He also called upon Muslims to defend the city of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque, affirming that they constitute an integral part of Islamic belief.[89]

2. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the International Community and Its Policies Toward the Palestine Issue

Father Manuel expressed deep discontent with what he regarded as the hypocrisy of the international community toward the Palestine issue. He emphasized that the international community has failed in its essential duty of upholding justice, as it has proven unable to compel Israel to implement the resolutions it has adopted, most notably Resolution 194. Likewise, it has failed to condemn crimes perpetrated by Israel that amount to war crimes. According to Father Manuel, the international community has confined itself to the role of a passive observer, limiting its response to mere expressions of denunciation while massacres are committed against the Palestinian people.

[88] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 12/8/2022.

[89] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 10/10/2021.

a. Father Manuel's Position on the Nature of the International System

Father Manuel argued that the international system, represented by the UN and the Security Council, is fundamentally corrupt and unjust, with international law effectively held hostage by the major powers.[90] He explained that the core of this corruption lies in the structural imbalance of the system, whereby the victorious powers of World War II (1939–1945) dominate the decisions of the UN and its Security Council through the instrument of the "veto."[91] Foremost among these powers is the US, which, according to Father Manuel, has used the veto approximately 44 times to shield Israel.[92]

b. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on International Initiatives and Policies Toward the Palestine Issue

Father Manuel emphasized that international initiatives concerning the Palestine issue have primarily served to address the concerns of Western states, which were eager to remove Jews they viewed as causing unrest within their own countries. The first such initiative emerged in 1947 with the UN Partition Plan, Resolution 181, which Father Manuel described as a "diabolical initiative." This resolution allocated 54% of Palestine to the Zionists, despite the fact that, on the eve of the resolution, they controlled no more than 7% of the land. In effect, the UN granted the Zionist militias 6 times the territory they previously held.[93]

Father Manuel further noted that following the 1948 war, the Zionist militias seized more than 80% of Palestine's territory, committing massacres, destroying villages, and forcibly displacing the Palestinian population. In response, the UN issued Resolution 194, which stipulated the return and compensation of refugees. Yet, over the past 75 years, this resolution has never been implemented, and the

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[90] Hasan al-Amrani and Hayat Khattabi, "A Dialogue with Father Manuel Musallam," p. 106.

[91] Veto: A right held by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council—Russia, China, Britain, France and the US—that empowers them to reject any resolution presented to the Council without providing justification. The origin of the word *veto* is Latin, meaning "I object." Its contemporary usage became more widespread after the end of World War II and the establishment of the UN in 1945. The objection of any one of the five permanent members among the Council's fifteen members suffices to block a resolution, even if the remaining fourteen members support it. See Veto, site of Political Encyclopedia, https://political-encyclopedia.org.

[92] Dialogue of the Hour | Monsignor Manuel Musallam – Head of the Comittee, Al Mayadeen Programs channel, YouTube, 17/6/2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhGVTjpID3o

[93] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 10/5/2022.

Palestinian people continue to endure diaspora as a result of the UN's inability to compel Israel to relinquish its occupation.[94]

Father Manuel Musallam clarified that the claims of European countries, that they sent to Palestine Jewish victims from Europe, particularly those who suffered under Nazi Germany, presenting them as refugees, are entirely false and bear no relation to the truth. In reality, these European states sent to Palestine Jewish militias whose members had been trained in the use of arms, and it was these militias that occupied Palestine in 1948.[95] Father Manuel added, "The UN has consistently shown total bias in favor of Israel,[96] as was evident in the 1967 war. The adoption of Resolutions 242 and 338 did not compel Israel to end its occupation of the WB, GS or other territories seized during that war."[97]

Father Manuel Musallam expressed profound dismay at the hypocrisy and double standards practiced by the international system and European countries regarding the Palestine issue.[98] He noted that the international system treats the wars waged by Israel on GS—employing all manner of bombs, missiles, and white phosphorus—as acts of self-defense, while simultaneously condemning the Palestinians' defense of themselves with rudimentary rockets, labeling them as "terrorists." In reality, Israel perpetrates all forms of terrorism against the Palestinian people.[99]

Father Manuel further characterized the European and UN role in the Palestine issue as farcical, stemming from the absence of adherence to international law and the dominance of global powers over UN decisions. He drew Palestinians' attention to the stark reality that they have no remaining option but to resist and to use force to reclaim their rights and recover the land occupied by the Zionist militias.[100]

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[94] Ibid.

[95] The Promise of the Hereafter, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 30/9/2021.

[96] Father Manuel Musallam, *Hadith Umm Qush'am* (Hadith Umm Qush'am), p. 47.

[97] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 234.

[98] Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, Abouna Manuel Musallam page, Facebook, 13/6/2020, https://www.facebook.com/100002913254897/videos/3087520934688318

[99] Ibrahim Bassam Khader, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Filastini al-Hawa wa al-Huwiyyah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Palestinian in Spirit and Identity), p. 235.

[100] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 10/5/2022.

3. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the US and Its Policy Toward the Palestine Issue

a. Father Manuel's Position on the Nature of US Policy in Resolving the Palestine Issue

Father Manuel contended that US policy is entirely biased in favor of Israel, actively opposing Palestinians and labeling them as "terrorists." He regarded this stance as a reflection of the influence of Christian Zionism, which drives US decision-making. This form of Christian Zionism, rooted in millenarian beliefs and the anticipation of the Messiah's return, laid the ideological foundation for Israel's presence on Palestinian lands. It continues to safeguard Israel's interests and protect it through its influence over US administrations and policy.[101]

Furthermore, Father Manuel observed that there is a colonial and security dimension that the US seeks to implement by ensuring the continued existence of a strong and dominant Israel over the Arab countries in the region.[102] Accordingly, Father Musallam regarded Israel as a military base executing the strategic plans and ambitions of the US and European states in the *Mashriq* (Levantine) Arab region.[103]

b. Father Manuel Musallam's Position on the "Deal of the Century" and His Opposition to It

Father Manuel clarified that the decision taken by former US President Donald Trump on 6/12/2017, which stipulated the transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem, constitutes a grave sin. He viewed it as a declaration of war on Jerusalem and Palestine, entailing several significant consequences:

- It revealed that the US is not a genuine sponsor of "peace," and that its policy toward the Palestine issue is subordinated to the agendas of the Zionist movement and Christian Zionism, of which Donald Trump himself is a member. The US thus functions as an instrument for implementing the Zionist project in Palestine.
- The decision affirmed to Palestinians, as well as to political forces and factions, that the only viable path to liberation from Israel is resistance.

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[101] Father Manuel Musallam, interview, 3/8/2022.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam.. min Wahiy al-Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam.. Inspired by the Homeland), p. 169.

- The decision further divided the Arab states into two distinct camps. The first camp comprises those who resist normalization, namely the Arab and Muslim peoples and some Arab governments; while the second camp embraces normalization, treating Israel as a democratic state and a sponsor of "peace."[104]
- The US decision also demonstrated the collapse and failure of all political settlement agreements and "peace" initiatives, foremost among them the Oslo Accords. It rendered all outcomes of these agreements, such as "security coordination," null and void. Consequently, this decision represents a declaration of the end of the current world order and the definitive death of international legitimacy.[105]

In this regard, Father Manuel Musallam emphasized that the US decision clearly exposed the profound weakness of UN institutions and the Security Council, as well as the absence of both international law and international legitimacy. The repeated use of the US veto, dozens of times before the major powers, to shield Israel from accountability for its crimes, coupled with the latter's failure to respond to the US policy that dominates and dictates the solution to the Palestine issue, ultimately enabled the US to take such a grave and unjust decision against the Palestinian people. Father Musallam further called for confronting the "Deal of the Century" and the transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem through civil disobedience in Jerusalem, to be expanded across the entirety of Palestinian territory. He added that Arab peoples must also launch civil disobedience movements in their capitals in order to support the Palestinian people in resisting the Israeli occupation.[106]

Given the ramifications of the "Deal of the Century," Father Manuel Musallam urged the Palestinian leadership to adopt strategic steps grounded in resistance. Measures intended to transform the reality that the US and Israel are attempting to impose on the Palestinians, and these include:

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[104] Here Jerusalem – Special Interview with Father Manuel Musallam, AlFalstiniah TV channel, YouTube, 15/1/2018.

[105] 'Abdul Hamid Qutub, Father Manuel to "Al-Sharq": Trump's decision has undermined international legitimacy and awakened the Palestinian, site of *Al-Sharq* newspaper, Qatar, 8/12/2017, https://shrq.me/pbedci

[106] Father Manuel Musallam, "Father Manuel Musallam calls for civil disobedience in Jerusalem in response to Trump's decision," Palestine Today Agency, 12/12/2017, https://paltoday.ps/ar/post/312598

- Declaring Palestine, from the sea to the river and from Ras al-Naqoura to Umm al-Rashrash, as a land and people under occupation. This affirmation underscores that Palestine and the Palestinians constitute a single entity across the entire Palestinian territory, and that Israel represents nothing more than a transient wave of colonial armies that once swept through our land, like the Greeks, the Romans, the Crusaders and others. Accordingly, Israel should be stripped of the designation of a "entity." As Father Musallam emphasized, "We are not two entities, as the PLO recognized in Oslo, locked in conflict over the land of Palestine. Rather, we are one Palestinian entity confronting a settler-colonial invasion."
- Reexamining the Balfour Declaration, the partition of Palestine, the 1967 War, the 1970 war in Jordan, the war in Beirut, the Oslo Accords, the "peace" agreements, normalization, settlements, economic arrangements, the siege on GS and the Arab Peace Initiative. Their reality is far different from what we were led to believe. While we once considered them isolated events, in fact they were preparatory stages for the "Deal of the Century."
- The PLO, which presently holds institutional authority, should announce that PNC elections will be conducted in the homeland and the diaspora exclusively by expedited electronic means, and should promptly undertake the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
- The reconstituted PLO must evaluate the past, rectify the present, and plan for the future; it should proclaim the unity of the people with the organization in confronting the Israeli occupation, declare a return to its original national charter and to armed resistance, seek autonomy from the occupation, take refuge in the countryside and in the resolve of its people, and operate covertly when necessary.
- Empower the people and the resistance throughout the homeland and the diaspora, and mobilize and arm the entire Palestinian people.[107]

[107] Father Manuel Musallam's Vision for the Liberation of Palestine: The Deal of the Century as the Last Page of a Book Entitled "The Establishment of a Jewish National Homeland in Palestine," site of Iran Al-Youm, 4/2/2020, https://iran-alyoum.com/?p=40303

Summary

- Father Manuel Musallam called upon the Arab states to achieve political unity, emphasizing that current political borders are a colonial legacy that must be overcome. He argued that such unity should serve as a prelude to the liberation of the entirety of Palestinian land.
- He expressed his discontent with Arab initiatives that have sought to resolve the Palestine issue, characterizing them as failed undertakings incapable of fulfilling the aspirations of the Palestinian people.
- He further maintained that the normalization of relations between Arab and Muslim countries and Israel constitutes both a national and a religious betrayal. In his view, normalization agreements have significantly facilitated Israel's entrenchment and have intensified its aggressive actions against the Palestinian people.
- Father Manuel Musallam observed that the nature of the international system is fundamentally unjust, as only five states possess the right of veto, which enables them to obstruct any resolution. The US, in particular, has repeatedly exercised this privilege to block resolutions condemning Israel. Consequently, Father Manuel concluded that it is impossible for the Palestinian people to secure their rights through such an inequitable system; rather, their rights can only be reclaimed through resistance.
- Father Manuel argued that US policy toward the Palestine issue is a reflection of the influential Christian Zionism in the US. Hence, reliance on the US as a means of achieving Palestinian rights is, in his view, untenable.
- He considered former US President Donald Trump's decision to relocate the embassy to Jerusalem as an unmistakable indication of the failure of all political peace process initiatives, foremost among them the Oslo Accords.

Chapter Four

The Palestinians' Perspective on the Roles of Father Manuel Musallam in Service of the Palestine Issue

The Palestinians' Perspective on the Roles of Father Manuel Musallam in Service of the Palestine Issue

First: The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective on the Role and Status of Father Manuel Musallam

1. The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective[1] on Father Manuel's Role in Confronting Israel and Supporting Palestinian Resistance

This section seeks to examine the perspectives of the Palestinian political elite, across diverse ideological and party affiliations, with respect to the roles that Father Manuel Musallam has undertaken in the service of the Palestine issue.

a. The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective on Father Manuel Musallam's Role in Confronting the Zionist Movement and Israeli Aggression

Many Palestinian leaders have concurred on the significance of Father Manuel Musallam's activist role in confronting Zionist ideology and Israeli aggression. In this context, Ghazi Hamad[2] noted that Father Musallam played a crucial role in challenging the teachings promoted by the Zionist and Christian Zionist movements, which he considered inconsistent with Church doctrine. Hamad emphasized that Father Musallam's efforts were not limited to theoretical critique; rather, he actively urged Christians to resist doctrines such as the notions of the "Promised Land" and the "Chosen People," highlighting their inaccuracy and advocating

[1] Political Elite: These are individuals or groups who possess a political discourse and position themselves as leaders or guides of society, or segments thereof. They subsequently seek to attain political power through either legitimate or illegitimate means. See Sa'd Rahim, Political Elites… Cultural Elites: An Introduction, site of al-Hewar Al-Mutamaddin, issue 1568, 1/6/2006, https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=66330

[2] Ghazi Hamad: Born in 1964. Palestinian physician and politician, Deputy Minister of Social Development, and a senior leader within the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), member of its Political Bureau. He held various governmental and media positions, including former Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Risala* weekly newspaper. See Dr. Ghazi Hamad, site of Zawaya Foundation for Thought and Media, https://zawayanet.com/

for the preservation of the entirety of Palestinian territory.[3] In this regard, Khalid Mish'al[4] commended Father Musallam's efforts in opposing Israeli aggression through various forums and committees dedicated to resisting Israel. Similarly, Jamil Mezher[5] praised Father Musallam for contesting Israel's narrative, stating: "Father Musallam is among those steadfast in upholding Arab values and identity in the face of the false, biblical Zionist narrative; it is therefore unsurprising that we find in this activist, Father Musallam, a revolutionary committed to truth and the indignant Palestinian voice rising against Israeli occupation."[6]

Nasser al-Din al-Sha'er[7] lauded Father Manuel Musallam for his pivotal role in exposing Israel's hostile practices against the Palestinian people, noting that "I have known Father Manuel as a deeply patriotic individual, who rejects the occupation and actively advocates for its termination."[8]

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[3] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 370.

[4] Khalid Mish'al: Born on 28/5/1958, in Silwad, Ramallah district. Historically one of the founders of Hamas, member of its Political Bureau since its inception in the early 1990s, and chaired the Political Bureau 1996–2017. See Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Faris Khalid Mish'al Kama 'Ariftuhu: Arba'un 'Aman min al-Mawaqif wa al-Zikrayat* (The Knight Khalid Mish'al as I Knew Him: Forty Years of Positions and Memories) (Gaza: House of Wisdom Institute for Consulting and Conflict Resolution, 2021), p. 31.

[5] Jamil Mezher: Born on 16/7/1964. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Administration. A refugee from the village of al-Maghar in occupied Palestine, he resides in the Nuseirat area of the central governorate in GS. He was elected Deputy Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) at the Eighth National Conference of the Front, held in early May 2022. See Who is Jamil Mezher, Deputy Secretary-General of the Popular Front?, Quds Net News Agency, 20/5/2022, https://qudsnet.com/post/534649

[6] Jamil Mezher, interview via WhatsApp, Palestine, 11/11/2022.

[7] Nasser al-Din al-Sha'er was born on 9/12/1961 in the village of Sebastia. He received his early education in schools in Nablus and earned a Bachelor's degree in Islamic Jurisprudence and Legislation from An-Najah National University, followed by a Master's degree from the same university. He later completed his PhD at the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Manchester, United Kingdom. Al-Sha'er worked as a teacher at several schools in Nablus and as a lecturer at An-Najah University. He currently serves as Dean of the Faculty of Shari'ah at An-Najah National University in Nablus. Al-Sha'er was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education in the tenth Palestinian government, headed by Isma'il Haniyyah, following Hamas' victory in the 2006 legislative elections. See Who is Dr. Nasser al-Din al-Sha'er?, Felesteen Online, 23/7/2022, https://felesteen.news/post/113518

[8] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 264.

In this context, Ibrahim Abu al-Naja[9] noted that Father Manuel is a firm believer in the principle of resistance and confrontation against Israel, emphasizing that Father Manuel repeatedly called for active opposition to Israeli occupation.[10] In this vein, Salah al-'Awaisi[11] commended Father Manuel's efforts in urging Palestinian youth to employ all available means to resist the Israeli occupation.[12]

Dimitri Diliani[13] praised Father Manuel Musallam for his steadfast opposition to Israel, noting his leadership of numerous bodies that hold Israel accountable, such as his chairmanship of the Independent Palestinian Committee for the Prosecution of Israeli War Criminals (HUKM). Diliani added, "Father Manuel has maintained a firm stance, rejecting the presence of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian land."[14] In the same context, Ahmad Yusuf commended Father Manuel's role as a platform for exposing and confronting Israel's crimes. He described him as one of the most prominent figures in the contemporary Christian sphere, distinguished by his words, writings and activism, as well as his positions and statements against Israel and its acts of aggression.[15]

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[9] Ibrahim Musa Ibrahim Abu Al-Naja was born on 27/7/1943 in Khan Younis, southern GS. He completed his secondary education at Khan Younis Secondary School, earning his high school diploma in the scientific section in 1961. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Education and Psychology from Alexandria University in Egypt in 1966. In 1962, he worked as a teacher in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Abu Al-Naja is a member of the High Leadership Council of the Fatah movement and served as the First Deputy Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in GS 1996–2005. He was appointed Minister of Agriculture in 2004 and Governor of Gaza Governorate in 2018. See Ibrahim Abu Al-Naja, Vision for Political Development, https://vision-pd.org.

[10] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 342.

[11] Salah al-'Awaisi: Palestinian politician, Secretary of the Fatah Leadership – GS (Democratic Reform Movement).

[12] Salah al-'Awaisi, interview via WhatsApp, Gaza, 16/10/2022.

[13] Dimitri Diliani: Palestinian politician, President of the National Christian Coalition in the Holy Land, member of the Revolutionary Council of the Fatah Movement, and a leader in the Democratic Reform Movement of Fatah.

[14] Dimitri Diliani, interview via WhatsApp, Jerusalem, 19/10/2022.

[15] Ahmad Yusuf, "Father Manuel Musallam: Pioneer of Christian–Islamic Relations, Khabar Palestinian Press Agency, 25/8/2022, https://khbrpress.ps/post/340612

Salah ‘Abdul ‘Ati[16] concurred with other members of the political elite in affirming that Father Manuel is a patriotic figure and a revolutionary in his confrontation with Israel’s practices. ‘Abdul ‘Ati observed that Father Manuel’s activism led Israel to arrest and interrogate him on several occasions, as well as to obstruct his movements and freedom of travel. He further remarked, “Father Manuel represents the continuation of the Palestinian Christian struggle against Israel,” likening his struggle to that of Archbishop Hilarion Capucci.[17]

b. The Palestinian Political Elite’s Perspective on Father Manuel’s Role in Supporting the Palestinian Resistance

Father Manuel played a distinctive role in defending the Palestinian resistance, and numerous political leaders commended his contributions to strengthening it. Hasan al-Saifi, former Deputy Minister for Religious Endowments in GS, praised Father Manuel’s supportive stance toward the resistance, highlighting above all his efforts to promote a culture of defending the homeland that transcends religious and partisan affiliations, and his role in embedding the concept of resistance within the Palestinian people. According to al-Saifi, Father Manuel emphasized that the Palestinian fighter safeguards the honor of the Palestinian people. Moreover, he defended the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance as a right of the Palestinian people, firmly rejecting its characterization as an act of terrorism.[18]

In this context, Ayman Daraghmeh[19] noted that Father Manuel Musallam played a pivotal role in inspiring the spirit of Palestinian resisters to defend their homeland; he consistently urged them to embrace resistance and struggle, telling

[16] Salah ‘Abdul ‘Ati was born on 5/5/1975 in Gaza, Palestine. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Law from al-Azhar University in Gaza and a Master’s degree in Political and Social Sciences, specializing in Arab Studies, from the Institute of Regional Studies at al-Quds University (Abu Dis), where he graduated with distinction in 2007. He is a former PFLP leader, served as Director of the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) office in Gaza, and worked as the ICHR coordinator for public awareness and training. See site of Human Rights Activist Salah Muhammad ‘Abdul ‘Ati, http://salah-abdalati.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html.

[17] Salah ‘Abdul ‘Ati, Oral interview, Gaza, 20/10/2022.

[18] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 35.

[19] Ayman Daraghmeh: Born in 1963 in the city of Tubas, he holds a PhD in Chemistry. He was elected as a PLC member representing Hamas in 2006 and is a member of the Palestinian National Council (PNC). See Ayman Daraghmeh, Vision for Political Development, 28/8/2019.

them, "You are a resister, not a terrorist."[20] Along similar lines, Nasser al-Din al-Sha'er emphasized that Father Manuel defended the Palestinian people's right to resist; a right acknowledged by all religions, moral codes and legal frameworks. He further explained that Father Manuel categorically rejected the criminalization of resistance so long as the homeland remained under Israel, aligning himself with nationalists and standing with them on this principled cause.[21]

In the same vein, Ahmad Yusuf observed that Father Manuel was a steadfast supporter of resistance, viewing it as a legitimate right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves. He added, "Father Manuel repeatedly called for the activation of resistance, its development and its support through financial means."[22]

Similarly, Salah al-'Awaisi concurred with his predecessors on the significance of Father Manuel's stance in support of resisting Israel. Al-'Awaisi recalled that when the First *Intifadah* erupted in December 1987, Father Manuel opened the doors of the Latin Church to all resisters, regardless of their organizational affiliation or religious identity. The church, by virtue of its sacred status, became a sanctuary for all fighters. He added, "Father Manuel, on many occasions, confronted Israeli forces who were pursuing the demonstrators."[23]

In this regard, Mahmud al-Zahhar[24] praised Father Manuel Musallam for his contributions to the Palestinian national struggle, describing him as courageous and highlighting his role in protecting Palestinian resistance fighters. Many fighters pursued by Israel sought refuge with him, and he never hesitated to receive them. Al-Zahhar recalled an incident during Israel's 2008/2009 assault on GS, which targeted Palestinian leadership in the territory; Father Manuel contacted al-Zahhar and advised him to take shelter at his home.[25]

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[20] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 282.

[21] Ibid., p. 264.

[22] Ahmad Yusuf, interview via WhatsApp, Gaza, 26/10/2022.

[23] Salah al-'Awaisi, interview, 16/10/2022.

[24] Mahmud Khalid al-Zahhar: Born in 1945, Gaza City. A Palestinian political leader of Palestinian father and Egyptian mother. He is affiliated with Hamas. Al-Zahhar served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government formed by Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah following Hamas's majority victory in the 2006 PLC elections. See Mahmud al-Zahhar, Aljazeera.net, 22/12/2014, https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2014/12/22/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1 (in Arabic)

[25] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 279.

Similarly, Khalid Mish'al affirmed that Father Manuel consistently acted to protect Palestinian resistance members, noting that his home was always open to them. His protection extended beyond his residence, encompassing the church as well. Mish'al added, "Father Manuel repeatedly called for support of the resistance."[26]

In this context, Salah 'Abdul 'Ati commended Father Manuel for fostering and reinforcing a culture of resistance among Palestinian youth. He remarked, "Father Manuel repeatedly emphasized his support for the resistance as a path to liberate Palestine."[27] Musa Abu Marzuq[28] also praised Father Manuel's tangible support for the Palestinian resistance, emphasizing that his actions transcended mere rhetoric. He noted that Father Manuel had sheltered numerous resistance members both in his home and in the church, thereby making a substantial contribution to fostering a culture of resistance against Israel.[29]

Also, Walid al-Qutati emphasized the credibility of Father Manuel Musallam's defense of the Palestinian resistance, stating, "Father Manuel encouraged all segments of Palestinian society, including Christians, to resist Israel. He was careful to avoid any interference with the resistance's arms, considering them inviolable, and viewed them as the sole path toward the liberation of Palestine."[30]

'Imad al-Faluji[31] concurred with al-Qutati's assessment, noting that Father Manuel was unwavering and refused to adopt a philosophy of defeatism or submission to the occupier. He added, "Father Manuel rejected the notion of petitioning for rights through lamentation or leniency. He believed that justice

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[26] This view is cited from Khalid Mish'al's foreword, "A Resistant Father and a National Figure of Whom We Are Proud," to Ahmad Yusuf's book, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 31.

[27] Salah 'Abdul 'Ati, interview, 20/10/2022.

[28] Musa Abu Marzuq: Born in 1951 in Rafah Camp in GS. He is a founding leader of Hamas and served as head of its Political Bureau between 1993 and 1995. He was also deputy head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, in addition to having previously overseen the activities of the Palestinian Muslim Brothers (MB) in Egypt, the UAE, and the US. See Musa Abu Marzuq, Vision for Political Development, 16/12/2020.

[29] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 276.

[30] Ibid., p. 292.

[31] 'Imad al-Faluji was born in 1963. He was among the leadership of Hamas and held the top position in its internal leadership 1989–1991. He won a seat in the legislative elections in 1996 and subsequently assumed the Ministry of Telecommunications. See 'Imad al-Faluji, *Min Qalb al-Sultah* (From the Heart of the Authority) (Gaza: Al-Yaziji Library, 2008), p. 2.

must be seized through resistance, consistently calling for the opposition to Israel by all possible means, and urging everyone to support the resistance in enhancing its capabilities."[32]

In this context, Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi[33] described Father Manuel Musallam as both a resistance front and a defensive army, emphasizing his consistent support for the Palestinian resistance. Al-Lidawi refuted the claim that Father Musallam was compelled to shelter and assist fighters in GS out of fear of Islamic movements, deeming this accusation unfounded. He substantiated his argument by noting that when Father Musallam returned to his hometown of Birzeit, he did not alter his stance on the Palestinian resistance; rather, he maintained his unwavering support for it.[34]

The researcher attributes the praise of Father Musallam by the leadership of the Islamic movement in Palestine to the alignment between his national vision and that of the Islamic movement, which is committed to the liberation of Palestine from the Israeli occupation.

2. The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective on Father Manuel Musallam's Role in Promoting National Unity among Palestinians

Father Manuel Musallam has undertaken concrete steps to advance national unity, consistently striving to end the Palestinian schism, consolidate the Palestinian ranks, and foster Islamic–Christian coexistence.

a. The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective on Father Musallam's Efforts to End the Palestinian Schism and Achieve National Reconciliation

Father Musallam has long advocated for national unity and the resolution of the Palestinian schism. Numerous Palestinian political figures have recognized the seriousness and sincerity of his efforts toward national reconciliation.

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[32] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 320.

[33] Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi: A Palestinian born in 1964 in the Jabalia Refugee Camp in GS. He served as the primary representative of Hamas in Syria 1991–1993, and as its representative in Lebanon 1994–1998. He participated in the founding of the Al-Quds International Institution (QII) in Lebanon and was its first secretary. He worked in Hamas's Arab Relations Department and later oversaw the movement's labor unions portfolio 2001–2004. See Dr. Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi, *Al-Bayan e-Magazine*, https://albayan.co.uk/AuthorBio.aspx?authorid=2273

[34] Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi, Manuel Musallam: A Resistance Front and a Defensive Army, site of Al-Safsaf, 22/10/2018, https://www.al-safsaf.com

Wajjeh Abu Zarifa[35] praised Father Musallam's commendable initiatives to halt bloodshed and mitigate the divisions among Palestinians, noting: "Father Manuel called on all parties to work toward ending the cycle of violence." Similarly, Walid al-Qutati lauded Father Musallam's determined attempts to achieve reconciliation, stating: "Father Manuel's positions regarding the resolution of the Palestinian schism and the call to unify Palestinian ranks in confronting Israel are numerous." He further highlighted that Father Musallam had taken practical measures to overcome the schism, notably through the 2019 initiative aimed at ending it.[36]

In this regard, Musa Abu Marzuq praised Father Manuel Musallam's efforts in advancing national reconciliation, noting that Father Manuel had sought, through national institutions, to bring an end to the Palestinian schism. Abu Marzuq further emphasized, "Father Manuel is an active member of the National Action Committee for Ending the Schism."[37]

Along similar lines, Ghazi Hamad observed that Father Manuel's stance on the Palestinian schism went beyond mere declarations. Indeed, Father Manuel immersed himself in national initiatives and worked diligently to engage with political forces, striving to bring them to common ground and to move from a state of national fragmentation and escalating discord toward greater consensus and coordination.[38]

For his part, Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi highlighted Father Manuel's profound dismay at the persistence of the Palestinian schism. He noted that Father Manuel consistently called for reconciliation, unity of purpose and consolidation of ranks. Father Manuel firmly believed that so long as the schism endures, Palestinians will enjoy neither freedom nor dignity. To this noble end, he dedicated his person, heart, voice, pen and public discourse in the pursuit of reconciliation and the restoration of full Palestinian national unity.[39]

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[35] Wajjeh Abu Zarifa is a journalist and political researcher, the Director of the Palestine Center for Democratic Dialogue and Political Development, a professor of political science, a PNC member, a member of the political bureau of the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), and a member of the General Secretariat of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate. See Wajjeh Abu Zarifa, site of al-Shabaka – The Palestinian Policy Network, https://al-shabaka.org

[36] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 290.

[37] Ibid., p. 276.

[38] Ibid., p. 370.

[39] Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi, Manuel Musallam: A Resistance Front and a Defensive Army, Al-Safsaf, 22/10/2018.

In this context, Salah 'Abdul 'Ati lauded Father Manuel Musallam's efforts during the events of the Palestinian schism in preserving the internal front in GS, particularly following attacks on churches in Gaza by unidentified individuals. Certain parties sought to exploit these incidents to undermine Hamas; however, Father Musallam acted as a steadfast safeguard against such allegations, clearly affirming that the movement bore no responsibility for these acts and highlighting the presence of actors intent on fomenting discord in Gaza.[40]

Moreover, Basim Na'im[41] commended Father Musallam's persistent endeavors to overcome the Palestinian schism. He observed, "Despite Father Musallam's advanced age and illness, he did not refrain from organizing numerous initiatives and activities during the early years aimed at ending the schism, and he continually called upon the rival political factions to achieve unity."[42]

b. The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective on Father Manuel's Efforts to Promote Muslim–Christian Coexistence

Father Manuel Musallam played a pivotal role in fostering Muslim–Christian relations across Palestine. He approached others not through sectarian, religious or political distinctions, but with a wholly national perspective. Numerous Palestinian leaders have recognized his patriotism and his contribution to strengthening coexistence between Muslims and Christians. Ahmad Yusuf, for instance, regarded Father Manuel as a pioneer in Muslim–Christian relations, emphasizing that he made no distinction between Christian and Muslim. He established numerous schools in the village of Zababdeh and the city of Gaza to accommodate Palestinian children irrespective of their religious background, with Palestinian identity serving as the sole criterion for admission. Furthermore, Father Manuel encouraged Christians to stand alongside their Muslim brothers in defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque and to uphold

[40] Salah 'Abdul 'Ati, interview, 20/10/2022.

[41] Dr. Basim Na'im was born in January 1963 in the town of Beit Hanoun, in the northern GS. Naim served as the head of the medical bloc affiliated with Hamas and worked as a physician in the Ministry of Health before being appointed Minister of Health in 2006. In the same year, he also served as Acting Minister of Social Affairs after Israel arrested its incumbent minister, Fakhri Turkman. See Dr. Basim Na'im Muhammad Na'im: Minister of Youth and Sports, Ma'an News Agency, 15/3/2007, https://www.maannews.net/news/56639.html

[42] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 297.

the Arab character and heritage of Jerusalem. Through these actions, he embodied an exceptional Christian voice that both reflected a robust national presence and demonstrated profound attachment to the Palestinian land.[43]

In this regard, Sheikh Ibrahim ‘Abdullah Sarsur[44] lauded Father Manuel’s efforts, portraying him as an exemplary *Mashriq* Christian whose identity is deeply rooted in his heritage, Arabism and the Islamic–Christian cultural tradition. He embodied a faith profoundly committed to the unity of destiny and purpose shared by Muslims and Christians alike, both within Palestine and across the broader Arab and Islamic East.[45]

Salah al-‘Awaisi also praised Father Manuel Musallam for his roles within Christian-Islamic institutions and for his direct engagement with the Palestinian public. Father Manuel’s activities in this realm had a significant impact on bridging sectarian divides between Christians and Muslims in GS.[46] ‘Attallah Abu al-Subah likewise commended Father Manuel’s contributions to promoting Christian-Muslim coexistence in Palestine, noting that he welcomed all members of the Palestinian people in his school, regardless of their religious beliefs.[47]

Within this framework, Mahmud al-Zahhar emphasized that what most distinguished Father Manuel Musallam was his refusal to adopt a rigidly sectarian religious outlook that separates people based on confessional affiliation. He was not a cleric preoccupied with hostility toward other religions; rather, he possessed a deep knowledge of Islam, and his cultural outlook in this regard was shaped by a national and pan-Arab consciousness. Father Manuel’s religiosity was, above

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[43] Ahmad Yusuf, “Father Manuel Musallam: Pioneer of Christian–Islamic Relations, Khabar Palestinian Press Agency, 25/8/2022.

[44] Ibrahim ‘Abdullah Sarsur was born in 2/2/1959 in the occupied city of Kafr Qasim. He studied English literature and English linguistics at Bar-Ilan University during the 1970s. He served as the head of the local council in Kafr Qasim 1989–1998 and has been the leader of the southern branch of the Islamic Movement within the occupied Palestinian territories since 1999. He is a former member of the Knesset and one of the heads of the High Follow-Up Committee (HFC) for the Palestinian citizens in the 1948 occupied territories. See Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur, site of Ma‘refa, https://www.marefa.org

[45] Ibrahim ‘Abdullah Sarsur, Father Manuel Musallam: A Model of Muslim–Christian Relations in the East, Al-Watan Voice, 4/12/2019, https://pulpit.alwatanvoice.com/articles/2019/12/04/508212.html

[46] Salah al-‘Awaisi, interview, 16/10/2022.

[47] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 268.

all, practical, rooted not in cloistered ritual alone. Thus, when he spoke of the homeland, he worked for its benefit; when he spoke of the people, he acted in service to them.[48]

Similarly, Walid al-Qutati underscored the high level of awareness that Father Manuel displayed, noting his pivotal role in strengthening national unity between Muslims and Christians. He viewed the land of Palestine as the shared inheritance of Arab Muslims and Arab Christians alike. In his perspective, *al-Aqsa* Mosque belonged equally to the Arab Christian, while the Church of the Holy Sepulchre belonged equally to the Arab Muslim. This understanding of the intrinsic nature of Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine significantly reinforced interfaith cohesion.[49]

In the same vein, Major General Mazen Ezzeddin[50] observed that Father Manuel contributed to the promotion of Muslim-Christian relations through his leadership of the Latin Patriarchate School, a Christian institution where the majority of students and teachers were Muslims. Father Manuel transformed the school into a national platform that welcomed participation from all political movements and national forces, rendering it a true home for all Palestinians; both Christian and Muslim.[51]

In this regard, Musa Abu Marzuq praised Father Manuel Musallam's patriotic stances, describing him as a national and political religious figure of notable erudition. He commended Father Musallam's role in protecting the people of Gaza during the 2008/2009 war on the GS, when he opened the church and its courtyards to the public, sheltering those whose homes had been bombed in the church and its annexes, thereby shielding them from the machinery of Israeli repression. He

[48] Ibid., p. 279.

[49] Ibid., p. 290.

[50] Salamah Zaidan Abu al-Qasim, commonly known as Mazen Ezzeddin, was born on 2/2/1947, in Deir al-Balah in the Central Governorate. He pursued his early education through the completion of secondary school in the governorate's schools, and later obtained a master's degree in history from the joint program between Ain Shams University and al-Aqsa University. He joined the Palestinian revolution in 1966 and has since served as a member of the National Security Council, a member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council, and a member of the PNC. See Salamah Zaidan Abu al-Qasim, *Al-'Askariyyah al-Filastiniyyah (1948–1973)* (The Palestinian Military (1948–1973)) (Jerusalem: Industrial Islamic Orphanage, 2009), p. 1.

[51] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 338.

further provided them with food, drink and means of tending to their wounds, while also strengthening their morale. Such actions contributed significantly to fostering Christian–Muslim relations.[52]

From the perspective of the researcher, what distinguishes Father Manuel Musallam in this matter is his adoption of concrete measures that directly enhanced Christian–Muslim coexistence in Palestine. The researcher contends that the foundation for these practical steps lay in his sound understanding of the content of the Covenant of 'Umar, which established tolerance and fraternity between Muslims and Christians in Palestine; a principle to which Father Musallam himself has previously referred.

3. The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective on Father Manuel Musallam's Role in Defending Jerusalem and the Holy Sites

Many Palestinian political leaders have recognized the integrity and sincerity of Father Manuel Musallam's role in defending Jerusalem and its holy sites. Walid al-Qutati highlighted Father Manuel's deep regard for the city and its holy sites, considering them emblematic of all of Palestine. Father Manuel emphasized that Palestine without Jerusalem is meaningless, and Jerusalem without its holy sites is equally inconceivable. Al-Qutati further noted, "Father Manuel has consistently adopted firm national stances, opposing the US decision to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem," affirming that Jerusalem remains a unified capital for the Palestinians.[53]

Musa Abu Marzuq praised Father Manuel's patriotic positions regarding Jerusalem and both Islamic and Christian holy sites. He added, "Father Manuel has defended *al-Aqsa* Mosque and warned Palestinians and Arabs against Zionist schemes, encouraging Muslims and Christians alike to strive for the liberation of Jerusalem."[54] Similarly, Wajjeh Abu Zarifa lauded Father Manuel's efforts in safeguarding *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the broader Islamic and Christian holy sites. He noted that Father Manuel cautioned Muslims and Christians about the Zionist movement's designs to seize control of these religious landmarks.[55]

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[52] Ibid., p. 275.

[53] Ibid., pp. 289–300.

[54] Ibid., p. 276.

[55] This view is cited from Dr. Wajjeh Abu Zarifa's foreword, "Men: Their Capabilities and Deeds as Exemplars," in the book: Muhammad Abu Rukbah, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Kalimah ila al-Ummah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Message to the Ummah), p. 12.

In this context, Khalid Mish'al emphasized that Father Manuel Musallam has consistently been active in numerous initiatives, conferences and committees aimed at defending and supporting the city of Jerusalem. Mish'al added, "Father Manuel does not differentiate in his defense between Christian and Islamic holy sites."[56] Nasser al-Din al-Sha'er also praised Father Manuel's role in safeguarding both Islamic and Christian holy sites, describing him as a comprehensive patriot. Al- Sha'er highlighted that Father Manuel defends *al-Aqsa* Mosque with the same vigor and commitment as he defends the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other Christian holy sites.[57]

Dimitri Diliani likewise commended Father Manuel's contributions through various bodies and committees dedicated to protecting both Christian and Islamic holy sites.[58]

Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi noted that Father Manuel Musallam viewed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and *al-Aqsa* Mosque through the same lens, seeing both as Palestinian holy sites; Islamic and Christian alike. He added, "Father Manuel has worked within numerous institutions to defend Jerusalem and its holy sites."[59] Ahmad Yusuf remarked, "Father Manuel has a commanding voice and an impressive presence, particularly regarding settler violations and their targeting of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, as well as policies aimed at Judaizing the Islamic and Christian heritage landmarks of Jerusalem and its surrounding urban areas."[60]

Ayman Daraghmeh noted that Father Manuel Musallam warned against Israel's attempts to seize control of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. When Israeli forces decided to prohibit the call to prayer via loudspeakers, Father Manuel opposed this decision and urged Muslims to raise the call from the churches, emphasizing that the adhan is an honor for Arab Christians and an integral part of their cultural heritage.[61]

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[56] This view is cited from Khalid Mish'al's foreword, "A Resistant Father and a National Figure of Whom We Are Proud," to Ahmad Yusuf's book, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 32.

[57] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 264.

[58] Dimitri Diliani, interview, 19/10/2022.

[59] Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi, Manuel Musallam: A Resistance Front and a Defensive Army, Al-Safsaf, 22/10/2018.

[60] Ahmad Yusuf, Father Manuel Musallam: Pioneer of Christian–Islamic Relations, Khabar Palestinian Press Agency, 25/8/2022.

[61] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 283.

Through these positions, it can be argued that Father Manuel made a significant contribution to defending Jerusalem and its holy sites within the national frameworks in which he operated. The researcher observes that Father Manuel's defense of Islamic holy sites, particularly *al-Aqsa* Mosque, surpassed his defense of Christian holy sites. This may be attributed to his belief that Islamic holy sites, and *al-Aqsa* Mosque above all, are the primary targets of Israel.

4. The Palestinian Political Elite's Perspective on Father Manuel Musallam's Opposition to the Oslo Accords, the PA and Its Policies

Many Palestinian political leaders have concurred on the firmness of Father Manuel Musallam's stance against the Oslo Accords. Walid al-Qutati noted that Father Musallam was never influenced by a defeatist philosophy that would legitimize Israel, both as thief and occupier, in its possession of land it had expropriated from Palestine. In all of his meetings and statements, he consistently emphasized that the entirety of Palestinian territory belongs solely to the Palestinian people. Al-Qutati further highlighted that Father Musallam rejected the approach of the peace process, particularly the Oslo Accords, considering them a clear abandonment of the Palestinian people's right of return to Palestine.[62]

In this regard, Jamil Mezher remarked:

> Father Manuel Musallam is a courageous patriot who does not fear speaking truth to power; a forthright Palestinian who rejects equivocation; and a principled opponent of the peace process and negotiations, which he regarded as an explicit concession of the greater part of Palestine. For these steadfast values that defined his character, Israel and the proponents of the peace process launched a sustained campaign of vilification against him.[63]

Similarly, Ghazi Hamad observed that Father Manuel never hesitated to oppose the Oslo Accords, calling for their annulment on the grounds that they were the root cause of the setbacks suffered by the Palestine issue.[64]

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[62] Ibid., p. 288.

[63] Jamil Mezher, interview, 11/11/2022.

[64] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 369.

With regard to the policies of the PA, Musa Abu Marzuq affirmed that Father Manuel consistently opposed the PA's political trajectory and remained a constant critic of its stance toward Israel. He stood firmly against its disreputable measures targeting the resistance and its leading figures. Abu Marzuq further stated, "Father Manuel repeatedly denounced the PA's security coordination with Israel, and on several occasions called for civil disobedience as a means of confronting the Israeli occupation and the PA's policies."[65]

Salah al-'Awaisi also praised Father Manuel Musallam for his opposition to PA policies, his repeated criticism of security coordination between the PA and Israel, and his call for civil disobedience to overthrow both the PA and Israel, which he regarded as two sides of the same coin.[66]

In this context, Dimitri Diliani stated, "Father Manuel Musallam represents a model of the free national voice that fears no reproach in speaking the truth. We have seen him criticize the PA when necessary, just as we have seen him criticize the opposition when circumstances demanded it."[67]

Along the same lines, Ayman Daraghmeh highlighted Father Manuel's courage in denouncing the policies of the PA, noting that he never wavered in declaring his opposition to the Oslo Accords, whether in the media or in private gatherings. Daraghmeh further added, "Father Manuel repeatedly urged the PA to lift the punitive measures it had imposed on Gaza Strip, and he called upon the people of the West Bank to take action in solidarity with Gaza and to pressure the PA into removing the sanctions enforced on Gaza Strip."[68]

Ahmad Yusuf noted that Father Manuel adopted a firm stance against the security coordination between the PA and Israel, viewing such coordination as serving primarily the interests of Israel. He further directed strong criticism at several PA policies, including the suspension of salaries for prisoners and martyrs,

[65] Ibid., p. 275.

[66] Salah al-'Awaisi, interview, 16/10/2022.

[67] Dimitri Diliani, interview, 19/10/2022.

[68] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 277.

among others. According to Yusuf, "Father Manuel called for civil disobedience against the PA in order to compel it to retract these policies."[69]

Similarly, al-Qutati and Daraghmeh concurred on Father Manuel's role in exposing and denouncing the punitive measures imposed by the PA on GS, emphasizing that the primary aim of these measures was to undermine the popular base of resistance. They added, "Father Manuel called for civil disobedience against the PA to force it to abandon its policies toward Gaza."[70]

Summary

- Father Manuel Musallam firmly rejected the claims advanced by Christian Zionists that Palestine constitutes a "Promised Land." He called upon Christian clerics to resist such notions. Moreover, he opposed Israel's presence on Palestinian soil, affirming that the entirety of Palestinian land belongs to the Palestinian people.
- Father Musallam protected members of the resistance by providing them with safe locations away from Israeli targeting. He likewise fostered a culture of resistance among Palestinians.
- Father Musallam engaged with the parties to the Palestinian schism, urging them toward national unity. He also strengthened Muslim–Christian coexistence, both through the school he administered and through his prominent position within national frameworks.
- Father Manuel Musallam made a substantial contribution to the defense of Jerusalem and its holy sites through the national frameworks in which he was active. He consistently called upon both Muslim and Christian Palestinians to safeguard these holy sites, with particular emphasis on *al-Aqsa* Mosque.
- He also played a national role in defending the rights of his people by openly rejecting the punitive measures imposed by the PA against the GS. Furthermore, he opposed the Oslo Accords and called for their annulment, regarding them as a principal cause of the Palestinian schism and the erosion of the Palestine issue.

[69] Ahmad Yusuf, interview via WhatsApp, Gaza, 26/10/2022.

[70] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 291.

Second: The Perspective of Palestinian Academics and Independent Figures on Father Manuel Musallam's Role and Status

This section aims to explore the perspectives of leading academic and independent Palestinian figures regarding Father Musallam's contributions to the Palestinian national struggle.

1. The Perspective of Palestinian Academics and Independents on Father Manuel Musallam's Role in Confronting Israel and Supporting Palestinian Resistance

Many researchers and academics have acknowledged the activist role played by Father Manuel Musallam in opposing Israel and supporting Palestinian resistance. In this context, Usamah Abu Nahl[71] noted that Father Manuel consistently adopted a stance rejecting Israel's presence in Palestine during his tenure as president and member of various institutions and organizations active in confronting the Israeli occupation. Abu Nahl further added, "Father Manuel actively defended the [Palestine] issue both within Palestine and internationally."[72]

Similarly, Ibrahim Abu Shbeka[73] praised Father Manuel's efforts in exposing the reality of Christian Zionism, its objectives, and its misguided beliefs. Abu Shbeka emphasized, "Father Manuel warned Arabs and Palestinian Christians about the dangers posed by these objectives and ideologies." He continued, "Father Manuel did not limit himself to revealing the aims of Christian Zionism; he also

[71] Usamah Abu Nahl: Born in 1963 in GS, he holds a master's and a doctorate in Modern and Contemporary History. He has authored several books and scholarly studies on the Palestine issue and serves as a professor of Modern and Contemporary History in the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, at Al-Azhar University in GS. See Taysir Yunus Jabarah and Sa'id 'Abdullah Al-Bishawi, *Mu'jam al-Mu'arikkin al-Filastiniyyin fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Dictionary of Palestinian Historians in the Twentieth Century) (Ramallah: Dar Al-Shiama' for Publishing and Distribution, 2010), p. 57.

[72] Usamah Abu Nahl, Oral interview, Gaza, 25/5/2022.

[73] Ibrahim Abu Shbeka: Born in GS, Palestine, he holds a doctorate in Islamic History and serves as a lecturer in the Department of History and Archaeology at The Islamic University of Gaza. See Ibrahim Ahmad Hasan Abu Shbeka, site of The Islamic University of Gaza, http://site.iugaza.edu.ps/ishbeka/cv

actively contested Zionist myths, such as the notion of the 'Chosen People' and the 'Promised Land,' urging Palestinian Christians to challenge these ideas."[74]

'Abdul Sattar Qasim[75] praised Father Manuel Musallam for his steadfast stance toward the resistance, emphasizing that Palestinian resistance is a strategic imperative. He argued that the Palestinian people cannot secure respect or reclaim their rights without it. Qasim affirmed support for all forms of resistance, whether peaceful, popular, or armed, stressing that what matters is the establishment of a sufficiently strong Palestinian force capable of ensuring the security of the Palestinian people and reclaiming their rights, particularly the right of return for refugees who have endured displacement for 75 years.[76]

Jamal 'Amr praised Father Manuel Musallam's steadfast struggle against Israel and his unwavering support for the resistance, considering him a hero of the homeland.[77] In the same vein, Sami al-'Arian[78] affirmed that Father Manuel is an icon of national struggle against Israel, noting that he devoted decades to resisting Zionism and its ideological tenets, and urging Palestinians and Arabs alike to confront the Israeli occupation.[79]

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[74] This view is cited from Dr. Ibrahim Abu Shbeka's foreword in the book: Muhammad Abu Rukbah, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Kalimah ila al-Ummah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Message to the Ummah), p. 19.

[75] 'Abdul Sattar Qasim: Born in 1948 in Deir al-Ghusun, Palestine, he held a PhD in Political Philosophy from the US and attained the rank of Professor in Political Philosophy. He authored numerous research papers and books in the field of political philosophy. He passed away on 1/2/2021. See Taysir Yunus Jabarah and Sa'id 'Abdullah Al-Bishawi, *Mu'jam al-Mu'arikkin al-Filastiniyyin fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Dictionary of Palestinian Historians in the Twentieth Century), p. 281.

[76] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 311.

[77] Father Manuel... The hero who defends Muslim holy sites, Alqanat 9 Channel, YouTube, 13/5/2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-k6cs4Xl7U

[78] Sami al-'Arian: Palestinian political activist, born on 14/1/1958 in Kuwait. Al-'Arian emigrated in 1975 to the US, where he pursued his studies and later became a professor of computer engineering at the University of South Florida. During the Clinton and Bush administrations, he was invited to the White House and actively campaigned for Bush's presidential election in 2000. See Bill Varian, Al-Arian's rise in U.S. began in academics, site of Tampa Bay Times, 21/2/2003.

[79] This view is cited from Sami al-'Arian's foreword in the book: Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study), p. 29.

Also, Sami al-Astal[80] commended Father Manuel's efforts in entrenching the principle that rights are seized through struggle rather than granted as favors by Israel and its rogue colonial entity. Father Manuel stressed that neither the UN nor the Security Council would restore rights to their rightful owners, and that weak states cannot reclaim their rights through complaint and lamentation, but only through resistance and the shedding of blood in the pursuit of liberation. He added, "Father Manuel feared no one in the occupation army, and he constantly repeated, 'Resistance is the only path to the liberation of Palestine.'"[81]

In this context, Wafa' Bahani remarked of Father Manuel Musallam that "the Palestinian people, and indeed the Arab and Islamic worlds and peoples across the globe, know him for his boldness and courage in defending the rights of the Palestinian people, for his resistance to Israel, and for his tireless defense of the resistance and its members."[82]

Sa'id Jamil Tamraz[83] likewise praised Father Manuel's role in confronting Israel, highlighting his refusal to make concessions to an Israeli occupation that seeks to extend its control and sovereignty over all Palestinian territory and that persistently denies the Palestinian people their national and historical rights. He added, "Father Manuel does not accept any compromise regarding his full and inalienable rights. He is a supporter of the resistance, which he regards as the foundation for the liberation of Palestine, and he has urged a shift from a posture of resistance and self-defense to one of offensive action."[84]

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[80] Sami al-Astal: A Palestinian born in Khan Younis. He holds a PhD in history and serves as a lecturer in the Department of History at al-Aqsa University in Gaza. He is also a member of the Union of Palestinian Academics (UPA).
See Biography of Dr. Sami Muhammad al-Astal, site of UPA, https://upapal.org

[81] This view is cited from Sami al-Astal's foreword in the book: Muhammad Abu Rukbah, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Kalimah ila al-Ummah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Message to the Ummah), p. 15.

[82] This view is cited from Wafa' Bahani's foreword in the book: Father Manuel Musallam, *Al-Qalam al-Hadir* (The Roaring Pen), p. 4.

[83] Sa'id Jamil Tamraz was born on 7/12/1963 in Deir al-Balah, GS. He holds a master's degree in modern and contemporary history. He serves as Director of the Documentation Department at the Abdallah al-Hourani Center for Studies and Documentation and is a researcher specializing in the Arab–Israeli conflict.

[84] Sa'id Jamil Tamraz, Oral interview, Gaza, 18/10/2022.

Usamah ‘Antar[85] concurred with his predecessors in asserting that Father Manuel Musallam supported the resistance against Israel. ‘Antar responded to claims suggesting that Father Manuel’s stance in favor of the resistance was the result of pressure from Hamas or other resistance factions while he was residing in GS. ‘Antar considered these claims unfounded, emphasizing that Father Manuel did not alter his supportive position even after leaving GS in 2009 and returning to Birzeit. On the contrary, Father Manuel continued to endorse the resistance against Israel and consistently called on all to support and strengthen it.[86]

In this context, Milad ‘Ayyad[87] observed that Father Manuel played a courageous role in confronting Israel, refusing to yield to either Israeli or ecclesiastical threats. Father Manuel consistently prioritized the national interest, with ‘Ayyad noting, “Father Manuel’s struggle represents a continuation of the Christian resistance against the Israeli occupation, comparable in determination to that of Hilarion Capucci in opposing the Israeli occupation.”[88]

Husni Muhammad al-‘Attar[89] also highlighted that Father Manuel distinguished himself from the outset through his revolutionary and courageous stances against the Israeli enemy, as well as his advocacy for and defense of Palestinian rights to resist and live on their land with dignity. Al-‘Attar added, “Father Manuel took pride in his connections with the resistance, particularly with Hamas, and in his advocacy for resistance through tunnel digging and armament. He was proud of

[85] Usamah ‘Antar was born on 26/12/1966 in the city of Gaza, GS. He has held academic positions at several Palestinian universities, including Al-Azhar University, the Islamic University of Gaza, and Al-Aqsa University. He is also a member of the Palestinian Academics Union. See Dr. Usamah Muhammad ‘Antar, UPA.

[86] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 264.

[87] Milad Suhail Fu’ad ‘Ayyad: A Palestinian Christian born in the city of Gaza. He holds a Master’s degree in Contemporary Historical Studies from Al-Aqsa University in GS and is a researcher specializing in the history of Christians in Palestine.

[88] Milad ‘Ayyad, interview, 23/5/2022.

[89] Husni Muhammad al-‘Attar: Born in 1956 in the city of Rafah, Palestine. He holds a Master’s degree in Doctrine and Contemporary Schools of Thought. He has worked as a teacher and university lecturer and is a member of the Palestinian Writers and Authors Association, as well as several forums and associations. See Husni al-‘Attar, Curriculum Vitae, site of Noor Library, https://www.noor-book.com

the role of Christians in resisting Israel and strongly opposed the cooperation of certain church officials with the Israeli occupation."[90]

2. The Perspectives of Academics and Independents on Father Manuel Musallam's Role in Promoting Palestinian National Unity

Father Manuel's efforts to advance national reconciliation and bring an end to the Palestinian schism have been widely commended by researchers and academics. 'Abdul Sattar Qasim noted that the pursuit of national unity and the resolution of the Palestinian schism stood at the forefront of Father Manuel's priorities, as he regarded them as the firmest foundation upon which the Palestinian people could rely. He added, "Father Manuel called upon all parties to forgo any political or material gains that might undermine national unity."[91]

Sa'id Jamil Tamraz praised Father Manuel Musallam's efforts to achieve national unity, stating, "Father Manuel is convinced that unity is the key remedy for all the hardships and challenges facing the Palestinian people." Tamraz highlighted Father Manuel's repeated calls to Palestinian factions to prioritize national interest over partisan, sectarian and both external and internal alliances, and to discard all outdated programs and visions that have fragmented the Palestinian people. Tamraz continued, "Father Manuel has urged the factions to develop a unified national vision and project and to implement it on the ground." He further added:

> Father Manuel has advocated for comprehensive elections in both the homeland and the diaspora for all Palestinians. He believed that electronic elections for the PNC would be the only safe and feasible option given the exceptional circumstances of Palestinians worldwide, making traditional ballot-box elections impossible, starting from Jerusalem and the territories occupied in 1948.

Tamraz concluded that electronic PNC elections in the homeland and diaspora would establish legitimate authority for the Palestinian people.[92]

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[90] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 304.

[91] Ibid., p. 311.

[92] Sa'id Jamil Tamraz, interview, 18/10/2022.

'Abdul 'Aziz al-Shiqaqi[93] praised Father Manuel Musallam's efforts to advance the national reconciliation file. Al-Shiqaqi noted that he had worked with Father Manuel as part of an independent team during the Cairo dialogue in 2009, aiming to end the Palestinian schism and restore political unity. He added, "Father Manuel repeatedly called on both Hamas and Fatah to bring an end to the schism."[94]

In the same context, Nash'at Al-Aqtash, a member of the academic faculty at Birzeit University, praised Father Manuel Musallam's efforts through various committees and bodies in which he participated to end the Palestinian schism, highlighting his persistent calls to restore cohesion among the Palestinian people.[95]

Similarly, Sami al-Astal commended Father Manuel's comprehensive national vision for ending the Palestinian schism and restoring national unity, regarding it as a viable pathway out of the ongoing division.[96] Husam Abu Al-Nasr also emphasized Father Manuel's role in addressing the schism, noting that he actively opposed it and worked through initiatives and committee formations to reorganize the Palestinian political house and achieve national unity. He stated, "Father Manuel called upon all political factions, particularly those involved in the schism, to prioritize national interest over partisan agendas and to embrace unity."[97]

3. The Perspectives of Academics and Independents on Father Manuel Musallam's Role in Promoting Muslim-Christian Coexistence

Numerous social leaders, whether academics, researchers or clergy, have commended Father Manuel Musallam for his pivotal role in fostering Muslim-Christian social relations. In this regard, 'Abdul Sattar Qasim highlighted Father Manuel's profound religious tolerance, noting his strong rejection of both religious and sectarian fanaticism, which he considered a force that fragments the unity of the people. Qasim further emphasized, "Father Manuel makes no distinction

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[93] 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Shiqaqi: Born in 1955 in Rafah, he graduated from the Faculty of Pharmacy at Al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1979. He is the President of the Consortium of Independent Palestinians (CIP), a member of the Committee of the Palestinian Reconciliation, and a member of the Security Committee in the Cairo dialogue. See 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Shiqaqi, Personal Information, site of Araby Media Group, https://arbyy.com

[94] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 316.

[95] Ibid., p. 346.

[96] Ibid., p. 16.

[97] Ibid., p. 300.

between Muslim and Christian, nor between Catholic and non-Catholic." As evidence of his patriotic commitment, Qasim recalled that when Israel decided to close *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Father Manuel called upon Muslims to perform their prayers in churches.[98]

'Abd al-Fattah Muhammad El-'Awaisi[99] highlighted Father Manuel Musallam's understanding of the Pact of 'Umar and the principles and laws it embodied, which laid the foundations for genuine peace and enduring coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem and beyond. He further noted, "Father Manuel has repeatedly emphasized the necessity for both Muslims and Christians to adhere to this pact, out of his conviction that it possesses the capacity to secure authentic and lasting coexistence between the two communities."[100]

'Abdul 'Aziz Abu Safiyah, secretary to Father Manuel Musallam at the Holy Family School, commended Father Manuel's role in serving the Palestinian people regardless of sect or religion. Abu Safiyah noted, "Father Manuel provided assistance without regard to religious affiliation; he viewed all as children of Palestine, entrusted to his care. He felt it his duty to support the poor and to respond to the needs of orphans among them."[101]

Similarly, Jawad al-Hasheem praised Father Manuel Musallam's national role in consolidating and strengthening Muslim-Christian relations. He became a prominent voice in defense of Islamic holy sites, foremost among them *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Father Manuel also urged Christians to defend *al-Aqsa* Mosque. For these

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[98] Ibid., p. 310.

[99] 'Abd al-Fattah Muhammad El-'Awaisi: Born in Jerusalem in 1955, is Professor of International Relations at several international universities. He was the first to hold a Chair in Jerusalem Studies in the United Kingdom and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (UK). He has launched numerous international academic initiatives, most notably the establishment in 1994 of the field of inquiry known as Islamicjerusalem (*Bayt Al-Maqdis*) Studies. Since 1997, he has served as the chair of the Annual International Academic Conference on Islamicjerusalem Studies and has been the founding editor of the *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies*. See Prof. Dr./ 'Abd al-Fattah Muhammad El-'Awaisi (al-Maqdisi), site of Rwaq, https://www.rwaq.org/users/aelawaisi-20140825183749

[100] This view is cited from Prof. Dr. 'Abd al-Fattah Muhammad El-'Awaisi's foreword in the book: Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study), p. 20.

[101] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 268.

reasons, al-Hasheem described Father Manuel as a devout clergyman, a sincere patriot, and a politically astute figure.[102]

Sa'id Jamil Tamraz concurred with al-Hasheem on the importance of Father Manuel Musallam's role in strengthening Muslim-Christian relations, rising above partisan, ethnic and sectarian divides. Tamraz noted, "Father Manuel used to visit all his Muslim neighbors to extend greetings on their religious holidays and social occasions, and they, in turn, would visit him with congratulations and well wishes." Tamraz further observed that Father Manuel succeeded in bringing together a wide circle of Palestinian scholars, religious leaders, as well as figures in politics, science and culture. With them, he engaged in dialogue, cultivated mutual acquaintance, and exchanged ideas. Owing to his principled positions and his national ties, Father Manuel became a member of the Christian-Islamic Commission in Support of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites.[103] In this regard, Khalid Ibrahim al-Talahmeh[104] emphasized that Father Manuel played a pivotal role in consolidating the culture of national unity and interfaith fraternity among our people, while also safeguarding rights and national fundamentals.[105]

Elham Shamali[106] viewed Father Manuel Musallam as a model of Muslim-Christian coexistence, noting that he repeatedly called upon Muslims and Christians to unite in confronting Israeli assaults on Islamic holy sites. She emphasized that Father Musallam, on more than one occasion, placed the church at the disposal

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[102] This view is cited from Jawad al-Hasheem's foreword in the book: Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam.. min Wahiy al-Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam.. Inspired by the Homeland), p. 16.

[103] Sa'id Jamil Tamraz, interview, 18/10/2022.

[104] Prof. Dr. Khalid Ibrahim al-Talahmeh received his doctorate in Code of Civil and Commercial Procedure. By presidential decree, he was appointed a member of the Supreme Constitutional Court as of 1/6/2021. He has worked in higher education for more than 22 years: first at Al-Balqa Applied University (1999–2006), and subsequently at Birzeit University (2007–2021). Over this period, he advanced steadily through the academic ranks, beginning as a lecturer in 1999, then assistant professor in 2006, associate professor in 2013, and ultimately full professor in 2020 at Birzeit University. See Prof. Dr. Khalid Ibrahim al-Talahmeh, site of The Supreme Constitutional Court, https://www.tscc.pna.ps

[105] This view is cited from Prof. Dr. Khalid Ibrahim al-Talahmeh's foreword in the book: Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Al-Kahin wa al-Muthaqqaf wa al-Mu'allim* (The Priest, Intellectual and Educator), p. 2.

[106] Dr. Elham Jabr Salem Shamali was born in 1977 in the city of Gaza, Palestine. She holds a PhD in Modern and Contemporary History and is a UPA member. See Dr. Elham Shamali, UPA.

of Muslims during the wars on GS. She further remarked, "Father Musallam is a national figure who has always strived to unify the Palestinian ranks."[107]

Similarly, Patriarch Michel Sabbah[108] described Father Musallam's role in promoting Muslim-Christian coexistence as exceptional, highlighting that his efforts were characterized by sincerity, strength and love, transcending sectarian and religious sentiments. Patriarch Sabbah added, "Father Musallam's appeal to Muslims—'If your mosques are destroyed, come and pray in our churches'—embodies the essence of social unity between Muslims and Christians in Palestine."[109]

Husam Abu al-Nasr concurred with Patriarch Sabbah's assessment that Father Manuel Musallam possessed a comprehensive national vision that opposed sectarianism, partisanship, regionalism, and factionalism, and that embodied Christian–Muslim unity. Abu al-Nasr substantiated Father Manuel's national vision by recounting, "When Israel bombed GS and displaced civilians, Father Manuel Musallam opened the doors of his church, providing shelter for Muslims under attack, and supplied them with food and drink."[110]

In this context, Usamah 'Antar praised the significant national role played by Father Manuel Musallam in fostering Islamic-Christian coexistence. 'Antar observed that wherever Father Manuel was present, whether in northern or southern Palestine, he cultivated cohesive relationships grounded in mutual affection and solidarity between Muslims and Christians. He added, "Father Manuel encouraged members of the Christian community not to confine themselves to living in a single neighborhood. The so-called Christian quarters of the early twentieth century no

[107] Elham Shamali, Oral interview, Gaza, 23/7/2022.

[108] Michel Sabbah was born in 1933 in the city of Nazareth. He began his priestly studies at the Latin Patriarchal Seminary in Beit Jala and was ordained a priest in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. He later completed his doctoral dissertation in Paris. Subsequently, he was appointed director of the National Secondary School in Amman and later president of Bethlehem University. In 1987, the Vatican appointed him as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and he also served as president of the Catholic Family within the Middle East Council of Churches. See Patriarch Michel Sabbah, site of Yasser Arafat Foundation, 12/8/2024, https://yaf.ps/page-2622-en.html

[109] This view is cited from Patriarch Michel Sabbah's foreword in the book: Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 28.

[110] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 299.

longer exist; instead, the home of a Christian now often stands beside that of a Muslim." He continued, "Father Manuel also reinforced the concept of citizenship among the Palestinian people."[111]

4. The Perspectives of Academics and Independents on Father Manuel Musallam's Role in Defending Jerusalem and Its Holy Sites

Sheikh 'Ekrima Sabri[112] praised Father Manuel's steadfast positions and his defense of both Islamic and Christian holy sites. Sheikh Sabri attested to Father Manuel's character, stating, "I have witnessed, through Father Manuel's actions and conduct, that he is a true son of the homeland, unyielding and uncompromising. He condemns and resists whenever Islamic or Christian holy sites are threatened, or when Jewish settlers attempt to alter their religious or historical character." Sabri emphasized that Father Manuel's positions stem from a profound sense of national belonging, coupled with a civilizational understanding and awareness of the human heritage of the land blessed by *Allah*.[113]

In this context, Toufiq Jam'an al-Bench underscored Father Manuel Musallam's patriotism in defending Islamic holy sites, observing that he resisted and confronted Israeli attacks on them with the same dedication he would show toward Christian holy sites.[114]

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[111] Ibid., p. 265.

[112] Sheikh 'Ekrima Sabri: Born in 1938 in the city of Qalqilya, Sheikh 'Ekrima Sabri obtained his doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence from al-Azhar University in Egypt in 2001. He is the founder and head of The Muslim Scholars and Olama' in Palestine (established in 1992), and head of Al-Fatwa Supreme Council in Palestine, in addition to being the preacher of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Furthermore, he is a founding member of The League of the World Islamic Mosques Conference in Mecca, as well as a member of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) in Jeddah, affiliated with the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Moreover, he is a founding member of the Assembly of Sharia Scholars in the US. In 1998, he was elected president of the Supreme Muslim Council in Jerusalem. See Curriculum Vitae, site of Dr. Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, https://ekrimasabri.net

[113] This view is cited from Sheikh 'Ekrima Sabri's foreword in the book: Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study), pp. 14–15.

[114] This view is cited from Dr. Toufiq Jam'an al-Bench's foreword in the book: Ahmad Faiq Dallul, *Al-Kahin wa al-Muthaqqaf wa al-Mu'allim* (The Priest, Intellectual and Educator), p. 16.

Along similar lines, Sami al-'Arian emphasized that the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites occupy a central place in Father Manuel's thought. He perceives all of Palestine through the lens of Jerusalem, regarding the sanctity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque as equivalent to that of the Church of the Nativity. Al-'Arian added, "Father Manuel rejected any concessions or negotiations concerning the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites, considering them the exclusive property of the Palestinians and the Arab world."[115]

In this regard, Milad Suhail 'Ayyad noted that Father Manuel played a significant patriotic role in defending Jerusalem and its holy sites. He added, "Father Manuel made no distinction between Christian and Islamic religious holy sites, defending both the blessed *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as national symbols that express the identity and history of the Palestinian people."[116]

Tariq Hassuna[117] stated, "Father Manuel Musallam was distinguished by his vigorous and unwavering defense of both Islamic and Christian holy sites, as well as the rights of the Palestinian people."[118]

Sami al-Astal highlighted the repeated calls by Father Manuel Musallam for Arab and Muslim countries to support the Palestine issue, Jerusalem, and its Islamic and Christian holy sites, warning them of the Israeli schemes aimed at achieving total control over the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites.[119]

Journalist Wafa' Bahani praised Father Manuel's positions regarding Jerusalem and its holy sites, noting that he was renowned for defending the city, opposing Israeli measures against it, and emphasizing that Palestine has no meaning without Jerusalem, just as Jerusalem has no meaning without its identity, holy sites, mosques and churches. His struggle carried a distinctive character; he disdained

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[115] Ahmad Yusuf, *Nafna wa la Tahun.. al-Quds wa al-Aqsa fi al-Mashhad al-Nidali al-Filastini: Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Namuzajan* (We Perish, Yet Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Remain Sacred in the Palestinian Struggle: Father Manuel Musallam as a Case Study), p. 30.

[116] Milad 'Ayyad, interview, 23/5/2022.

[117] Tariq Ziad Hassuna: Born on 1/6/1987 in Gaza City, he holds a Master's degree in Modern and Contemporary History and serves as a researcher for the Ministry of Interior and National Security in Gaza.

[118] Tariq Hassuna, Oral interview via Messenger, 17/10/2022.

[119] This view is cited from Sami al-Astal's foreword in the book: Muhammad Abu Rukbah, *Al-Abb Manuel Mussalam Kalimah ila al-Ummah* (Father Manuel Musallam: A Message to the Ummah), p. 15.

conferences that yielded no practical results for the Palestine issue and was keen to underscore that what is taken by force can only be regained by force.[120]

Husni Muhammad al-'Attar praised Father Manuel Musallam's steadfast positions regarding the city of Jerusalem, highlighting his unwavering defense of the city and the rights of Muslims within it, as well as his rejection of all Israeli measures there; including Judaization, tunneling and excavations beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Among his well-known statements, Father Manuel asserted, "Palestine has no meaning without Jerusalem, and Jerusalem has no meaning without its identity, its holy sites, its mosques and its churches." He further added that Father Manuel consistently opposed Arab visits, whether religious or political, to Jerusalem under Israeli occupation.[121]

5. The Perspectives of Academics and Independents on Father Manuel Musallam's Opposition to the Oslo Accords and the PA's Policies

Father Manuel opposed the Oslo Accords and rejected the PA's policies, particularly security coordination with Israel and the blockade of GS. 'Abdul Sattar Qasim noted that Father Manuel was a steadfast opponent of the Oslo Accords, adding, "Father Manuel considered that the PLO erred in signing this agreement." Qasim explained Father Manuel's rejection of the Oslo Accords on several grounds, which are:

- The Israelis have made no concessions to the Palestinians, and the establishment of the PA was an Israeli demand intended to establish a cooperative security apparatus aligned with their interests.
- The Oslo Accords neither provide for the establishment of a Palestinian state, nor recognize the right of return, nor mandate a freeze on settlements. All core issues concerning the Palestine issue were deferred to final-status negotiations, which have yet to commence.
- The Oslo Accords failed to respect Palestinian national unity and laid the groundwork for internal Palestinian conflicts.

[120] This view is cited from Wafa' Bahani's foreword in the book: Father Manuel Musallam, *Al-Qalam al-Hadir* (The Roaring Pen), p. 4.

[121] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 303.

- As a consequence of the Oslo Accords, the number of settlements and settlers increased, land confiscation escalated, and the Israelis intensified their killing and destruction of the Palestinian people. This agreement has left us farther than ever from freedom and liberation; whereas previously we were pursued by Israeli security apparatuses, we now face pursuit by Palestinian security forces.[122]

In this context, Usamah Abu Nahl emphasized Father Manuel Musallam's rejection of security coordination between the PA and Israel. Abu Nahl added, "Father Manuel repeatedly called for civil disobedience to bring down both the PA and Israel, considering that the Palestinian people live in a disgraceful situation under the persistence of such coordination."[123]

Along similar lines, Jawad al-Hasheem commended Father Manuel Musallam for his courage in speaking the truth, noting that he never compromised national interests for the sake of appeasement. He pointed out that Father Manuel criticized the Oslo Accords, called for their abrogation, and added, "Father Manuel censured the PA's policies and demanded an end to security coordination."[124]

In the same vein, Wafa' Bahani praised Father Manuel Musallam's role in upholding a moral and ethical framework that refuses any compromise on the full and inalienable Palestinian rights, as well as the continuous struggle, through all legitimate means, to achieve this goal. At the same time, she highlighted his insistence on safeguarding comprehensive Palestinian national unity, which excludes no party and marginalizes no faction. She further noted his steadfastness in confronting "submissive" policies, his call for ending all forms of security coordination with Israel, and his advocacy of popular options that reject any concessions to Israel.[125]

Researcher Tariq Hassuna praised the role played by Father Manuel in opposing the policies of the PA and his consistent criticism of its security coordination with Israel. He continued, "Father Manuel urged the PA to lift the blockade imposed on GS."[126]

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[122] Ibid., p. 312.

[123] Usamah Abu Nahl, interview, 25/5/2022.

[124] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam.. min Wahiy al-Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam.. Inspired by the Homeland), p. 14.

[125] This view is cited from Wafa' Bahani's foreword in the book: Father Manuel Musallam, *Al-Qalam al-Hadir* (The Roaring Pen), p. 4.

[126] Tariq Hassuna, interview, 17/10/2022.

Similarly, Husam Abu al-Nasr highlighted Father Manuel's steadfastness in his positions toward the PA's policies, stressing that he never allowed any situation or event to pass without responding firmly. This persistence, he noted, rendered him unpopular with the PA, particularly because of his opposition to its policies and his continuous rejection of its decisions.[127]

Summary

A review of the perspectives of Palestinian academics and independents on the role of Father Manuel Musallam highlights the following points:

- Father Manuel firmly rejected all Zionist and Christian Zionist myths that portray Palestine as a "Promised Land," and he urged religious leaders to resist such ideas and myths.
- Through available media platforms and television appearances, Father Manuel opposed Israel's presence in Palestine, asserting that its existence is illegitimate, and he called upon Palestinians to resist this occupation.
- Father Manuel contributed to strengthening national unity through his persistent calls to end the Palestinian schism, restore cohesion, and preserve the internal front, particularly by fostering Christian–Muslim coexistence.
- He actively opposed Israeli violations and attacks on Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites, working through national frameworks dedicated to their defense. He urged Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims, to safeguard Jerusalem and its holy sites, foremost among them *al-Aqsa* Mosque.
- Father Manuel resisted PA policies, particularly security coordination with Israel and punitive measures against the GS, and called for the annulment of the Oslo Accords.

[127] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Abb Manuel Musallam Ayqunat Watan* (Father Manuel Musallam: An Icon of the Nation), p. 300.

Conclusion

The author reached several key findings, most notably:

1. Arab Christians were among the first to recognize the Zionist threat and actively resisted it, exposing the movement's schemes, particularly through their leadership of Palestinian press institutions.
2. Father Manuel Musallam witnessed the events of the 1948 Palestinian *Nakbah*, which profoundly shaped his activist and nationalist character.
3. Father Manuel Musallam contributed to fostering Christian–Muslim coexistence in Palestine and actively promoted national identity and patriotism through the educational institutions he led, as well as through his work in national committees and organizations.
4. Father Manuel Musallam viewed Jerusalem as representing all of Palestine and the Arab world, attributing to it a national dimension. He argued that Palestinians without Jerusalem have no identity, rejected framing the city as disputed territory, and opposed any compromises regarding Jerusalem and its holy sites, considering the city entirely the rightful property of Palestinians and Arabs.
5. Father Manuel actively defended Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites through various committees and national bodies dedicated to their protection. He also called upon Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims, as well as Arabs more broadly, to participate in the liberation of Jerusalem.
6. Father Manuel Musallam called for the return of all Palestinian refugees to the entirety of Palestine and for their compensation in accordance with UN Resolution 194, emphasizing that the only path to realizing their return and bringing an end to Israel's occupation is through resistance.
7. He insisted that Palestinian prisoners should be treated as prisoners of war rather than labeled as "terrorists."
8. Father Manuel maintained that all Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are illegitimate and advocated resisting their presence, including attacks directed at settlements from within, with the stated aims of undermining Israeli air superiority and deterring the use of nuclear weapons.

9. Father Manuel Musallam called for supporting families whose homes are threatened with demolition by Israel, assisting them by all available means, working to rebuild destroyed homes, and providing funds to construct new ones, all to strengthen their resilience against repeated Israeli aggressions.
10. He regarded resistance in all its forms, most notably armed struggle, as a legitimate and natural right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves and their land against Israeli aggression, and urged everyone to support and develop the resistance.
11. Father Manuel Musallam called for the unification of all military wings, their separation from political factions, and the strict maintenance of secrecy in their resistance activities. He rejected any interference with Palestinian resistance arms, considering them the property of the Palestinian people and the sole guarantee for reclaiming their rights.
12. He advocated civil disobedience against the Israeli occupation and called for peaceful civil disobedience against the PA, both aimed at breaking the siege on GS. Father Manuel also promoted civil disobedience in numerous other contexts, specifically as a means to defend *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Islamic and Christian holy sites, and to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners.
13. Father Manuel Musallam sought to reform the Palestinian political system by restructuring the PLO. To this end, he launched an initiative to rebuild the PLO, making him the first Palestinian Christian cleric to propose a comprehensive plan for reforming the Palestinian political system and ending the Palestinian schism.
14. He called for the annulment of the Oslo Accords and their 1993 outcomes, regarding the agreement as a second *Nakbah* for the Palestine issue. He viewed it as an explicit concession of 78% of Palestinian land and the erasure of Palestinian refugees' right of return. Father Manuel rejected holding any elections under the Oslo Accords framework and instead advocated first conducting elections for the PNC.
15. Father Manuel Musallam held that the PA is entirely incapable of protecting Palestinians, their land and their holy sites, and that there is no justification for its continued existence. He called for the immediate cessation of security coordination between the PA and Israel, emphasizing that such coordination primarily serves Israeli interests.

16. He viewed the political schism among Palestinian factions as a major obstacle and a political catastrophe for the Palestine issue, leading to the fragmentation of Palestinian decision-making and the division of resistance arms. Accordingly, Father Manuel urged all Palestinian factions to achieve unity.
17. In light of the obstacles to holding Palestinian elections through traditional ballot boxes, Father Manuel Musallam proposed conducting elections electronically as an alternative.
18. Father Manuel clarified that the claims and interpretations of Christian Zionists and some Protestant groups, portraying Palestine as the "Promised Land" and the "return of the chosen people," are false and bear no relation to reality. He called on Christians to resist these beliefs. He rejected recognizing Israel as a legitimate state, insisting that it is a rogue entity, and described it as a settler-colonial invasion. He further advocated declaring historical Palestine, from its sea to its river, and from Ras al-Naqoura to Umm al-Rashrash, as a land under occupation.
19. Father Manuel Musallam confronted the hostile practices carried out by Israel through committees and bodies dedicated to resisting the occupation. He called for lifting the Israeli siege on the GS, highlighting the suffering it caused to its people. As a result, he was subjected to numerous Israeli violations, including detention at an Israeli police center, threats of deportation, restrictions on visiting his family, and impediments to his movements.
20. Father Manuel urged Arab states to pursue political unity, viewing existing political borders as a colonial legacy that must be abolished, as such unity is essential for liberating Palestine. He also considered normalization by Arab and Muslim countries with Israel a betrayal both nationally and religiously.
21. Father Manuel Musallam viewed the international system as inherently unjust, noting that only five countries hold veto power and can block any resolution. The US has repeatedly used its veto to prevent the condemnation of Israel. Consequently, he concluded that it is impossible for the Palestinian people to secure their rights under this unfair system. He also argued that US policy toward the Palestine issue reflects the influence of Christian Zionism in the US, and therefore, the Palestinian people can reclaim their rights only through resistance.
22. Numerous Palestinian political elites across various ideologies, as well as academics and independents, praised Father Manuel Musallam's struggle, commending his bold and principled stances on issues affecting the Palestinian people.

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- Born in Beit Hanoun, GS, Palestine.
- Holds a BA in History with a minor in Political Science from al-Azhar University in Gaza 2020, graduating with distinction and honors.
- Earned an MA in Modern and Contemporary History in 2023 from the Islamic University of Gaza. His thesis was entitled “The Struggle Role of Father Manuel Musallam and His Political Positions on the Palestine Issue, 1938–2022.”
- Served as a researcher at the Center for Oral History and Palestinian Heritage, Islamic University of Gaza.
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- Research interests include the Palestine issue, the contributions of Palestinian Christians in political, social, economic and cultural spheres, and studies in oral history.
- The author has published several articles on political platforms and journals focused on the Palestine issue and has participated in numerous academic seminars and conferences, primarily addressing the Arab–Israel conflict.

The Revolutionary Priest Manuel Musallam
Listen, Oh Palestine

This Book

The Christians of Palestine constitute an integral part of the Palestinian national fabric and have played a significant role in the Palestinian national project since the onset of the British occupation of Palestine in 1917. Through their participation in Islamic-Christian associations, they contributed to the formation of the national leadership of the Palestinian people. Moreover, they made substantial efforts to raise public awareness about the dangers posed by both the British and Israeli occupation. They actively participated in political leadership and in the armed struggle against the British and Israeli occupation.

The author chose Father Manuel Musallam to highlight his national role exercised through Palestinian national frameworks and to underscore his political positions on key issues affecting the Palestinian people, including Jerusalem and the holy sites, the refugees, the issue of prisoners, settlement expansion and the Palestinian resistance. The book also emphasizes Father Manuel's initiatives aimed at putting the Palestinian political house in order, particularly within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA), ending the Palestinian schism, and advancing the Palestinian elections agenda. Furthermore, the book addresses Father Manuel's positions regarding Christian Zionism, Israeli practices toward the Palestinian people, and Arab and international initiatives and policies concerning the Palestine issue. It also highlights his contributions to charitable and cultural work, as well as his role in strengthening Islamic-Christian relations in Palestine.

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