

Christian Population in Gaza Sinks, Reuters Blames Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



A Reuters report about the decrease in Gaza's Christian population – it was 5,000 in 2007, and is now down to 1,000 – lays much of the blame on Israel. No mention is made of Muslim discrimination, persecution, and murder of Gazan Christians. A brief previous Jihad Watch report is [Algemeiner](#), December 17, 2020:

A December 10 Reuters piece written by Nidal al-Mughrabi rightly draws attention to the plight of Christians in the Gaza Strip. Yet the writer comes down with a case of selective amnesia, neglecting to note the history of persecution of this tiny minority by Gaza's rulers.

In the article, Israel's blockade of the Strip – imposed to repel incessant attempts by the Hamas terrorist group to attack the Jewish state – is assigned a disproportionate amount of the blame for the precarious state of the Palestinian enclave's Christians.

Specifically, Israel is singled out as a key reason for the Christian flight from Gaza:

Its [Gaza's] Christian population has declined by two-thirds over the past 15 years, a wave of emigration fueled by economic struggles and a desire to escape fighting between militant groups and Israel.

Actually, the Christian population in Gaza has since 2005 gone from 5,000 to 1,000, which is a decline not of 66%, not of 80%. And that “wave of emigration” was fueled mainly by a desire to escape discrimination and persecution by Muslims in Gaza.

The mass exodus is indeed the result of people wanting to get out of harm's way.

However, Reuters omits the primary cause of their misfortune: It is Hamas violence against the Christian residents of Gaza, not Israel's ongoing battle against the terrorist organization.

The violence that the Christians in Gaza are fleeing is of two kinds: first, they do not want to be caught in the middle of the violence which Hamas provokes when it attacks Israel and Israel responds; second, and much more important, they are fleeing the endless mistreatment – discrimination, persecution, and violence – visited upon them directly by Gazan Muslims – not only members of Hamas and the PIJ, but also by ordinary Muslims. There is no mention in this Reuters story about the many attacks on Palestinian Christians by

Muslims, including vandalizing of churches, and harassment of Christian women (deemed fair game, as Infidels, for such treatment), discrimination against Christians in school admissions and in employment, physical attacks on Christians, vandalizing – including shooting at – churches, and the theft of Christian-owned property, especially land. As to legal remedies for this last, Sharia courts do not give equal weight to the testimony of Christians and Muslims. It is hard for a Christian to obtain justice against a Muslim in such courts.

The piece, "Gaza jeweler struggles to sell Christmas gold," notes that Christian Palestinians "are feeling the economic sting of the health crisis and lockdowns. The pandemic has deepened economic hardship in Gaza, which is run by Islamist group Hamas and is under blockade by Israel. Egypt also imposes border restrictions, citing, as does Israel, security concerns."

What goes unmentioned is the systematic persecution by Hamas.

There were approximately 5,000 Christians living in the Gaza Strip in 2005, the year that Israel unilaterally dismantled 21 Israeli settlements, evacuated some 9,000 Jewish residents, and pulled its army out of the enclave.

In 2007, Hamas violently took over the Gaza Strip, which it has ruled as the de facto Islamist authority ever since. For Hamas, Islam is not only a religion that guides its organizational aims, but also a source of law (sharia) to be imposed on all Gazans.

Long before COVID-19 and the blockades, Hamas-affiliated groups like Swords of Righteousness and the Army of Islam were targeting Gazan Christians with forced conversions, discrimination in schools, attacks on businesses, and martyrdom...

There was the forced conversion, for example, of the

Christians Hiba Daoud and her husband to Islam. Speaking from the home of a Muslim family with whom she had been staying, and that would not let her leave. Daoud claimed it was her own choice to become a Muslim. But her relatives, including her aunt Hatin Ayad, who heard her speak, insisted Daoud had spoken under duress. The fact that Hiba Daoud was not allowed to leave the Muslim family to return to live with her relatives also strongly suggests continued duress.

Christian-owned businesses in Gaza have been attacked. A Christian bookshop was blown up, as was a Christian-owned Internet café. A prominent Palestinian Christian in the Gaza Strip, Rami Ayyad, director of the Protestant Holy Bible Society, was abducted from his home, stabbed and shot. The murder naturally created great anxiety among Gaza's ever-decreasing Christian population. Whenever Muslims in Gaza are angered by something Christians may have said or done anywhere in the world, they take it out on the local Palestinian Christians. When Pope Benedict XVI made his famous remarks during a talk at Regensburg, quoting a 14th century Byzantine emperor, this unleashed a torrent of Muslim fury. The Pope had quoted just one sentence:

"Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

That was enough to set off Muslim rage and violence all over the giddy globe. In Gaza, they reacted by shooting at the façade of the Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza City.

It's not surprising that Christians in Gaza would convert to Islam: they are under great pressure to do so. If they want to obtain decent employment, or have their children admitted to better schools, if they want to be free of physical harassment (especially of Christian women) by Muslims who have been taught in the Qur'an to regard all non-Muslims as the "most vile of created beings" (98:6), if they want to be free of the

constant insecurity that dhimmis feel in Muslim lands, converting to Islam provides immediate relief. Some Gazan Christians have found another way out: they leave the Strip and move to Europe, America, Australia, where they can practice their faith without fear.

The Christian population of Gaza has been going down since 1948. The only time it did not decrease, but held steady, was between 1967 and 2005, when Israel controlled the territory. In Bethlehem, the story is much the same though the dates are different. From 1948 to 1967, the city, which was 85% Christian at the beginning, under Jordanian rule declined slowly, but during Israel's control, from 1967 to 1995, remained steady just as it did in Gaza. The Israelis provided protection for the Palestinian Christians from Muslim depredations.. Once the city was turned over to the Palestinian Authority by Israel in 1995, the decline in the Christian population resumed, and greatly increased. Bethlehem, which was 85% Christian in 1948, is 16% Christian today.

Christians in Bethlehem began to suffer greatly for their religious beliefs once the PA took control of the city in 1995. Life in Bethlehem has been increasingly marked by land theft with little to no legal recourse; harassment of Christian women; Christian businesses being forced to pay protection money; discrimination against Christians with regards to job opportunities; and churches being looted and vandalized.

Had Reuters wanted its readers to truly understand the plight of Palestinian Christians in Gaza, it might have included in its report the evidence from Bethlehem that explains that city's Christian flight – that is, the mistreatment and persecution of Christians by Muslims similar to that they experience in Gaza. And in PA-ruled Bethlehem, where there is no Israeli blockade, there is no possibility of blaming the

Jews for the dire situation of the city's Christians. But Bethlehem was not mentioned in the Reuters report.

The result, similar to Gaza, was emigration en masse. In 1947, Christians comprised about 85% of the city's population, and that figure has plunged to approximately 16%.

One recent study on the global persecution of Christians ranked the "Palestinian Territories" 49th out of 50. According to the report, "Islamic oppression" is fueling this tyranny against a religious minority. In addition, the study reveals that "Islamic extremist militants are also present in the West Bank, causing Christians to fear being attacked," and that the persecution is particularly brutal for converts to Christianity.

Surely the Reuters report ought to have mentioned how significant "Islamic oppression" is in the Palestinian territories, making them 49th out of 50 states (or in this case, a pseudo-state) on a list of oppressors of Christians. But the authors of the report were determined to minimize Islamic persecution of Christians and to place blame on Israel, which has never knowingly attacked any Christians, for being Christians, in the Middle East. The Jewish state has instead in the past helped Lebanese Christians to survive attacks by Palestinian and other Muslims during the Lebanese Civil War, even arming and training a largely Christian self-defense force, the South Lebanon Army.

The Reuters article opted not to add a couple of lines of relevant context about the alarming situation of Gaza's tiny, vulnerable Christian population.

There is thus no secret about why so many Christians have been leaving Gaza and the West Bank, for the safety of the Western, Christian (or post-Christian) lands, of Europe, North America, and Australia. Nor about why some Christians in Gaza and the West Bank, weary of being harassed, discriminated against,

persecuted, attacked, and even murdered, would choose – just as tens of millions of non-Muslims (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists) over the past 1,400 years have chosen – to convert to Islam in order to escape the persecution, the misery, the extortion, that were the lot of dhimmis. And then there are still, in Gaza and the West Bank, those diminishing numbers of brave Christians who chose to neither leave nor convert, but stubbornly hold on as witnesses for Christ in a Muslim sea.

Reuters owes its readers another, more truthful report on the Christians in Gaza. It is Christian women who are harassed by Muslims, it is Christians who are discriminated against in employment, whose children are kept out of good schools, who find their churches attacked, their businesses bombed, even their church leaders, like Rami Ayyad, murdered. Instead Reuters would have you believe that the Jewish state is at fault, because it supposedly provokes violent encounters with Hamas (no, Israel does not provoke – it responds to –the violence that originates with Hamas), with the Christians left helpless and vulnerable in the middle.

Reuters could do even more. It could explain why all over the Middle East Christians have been leaving and moving to non-Muslim lands. Israel had nothing to do with the repeated attacks on Christian Copts in Egypt. Israel had nothing to do, either, with the decline of Iraq's Christian population from 1.5 million in 2003, to 120,000 today. Reuters should correct its error, and make clear that it is not Israel, but Islamic doctrine, and the behavior it elicits among Believers, that explains the plight of Christians in so many Muslim lands.

Will Reuters have the decency to do this?

Don't be silly.

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