

Vatican removes nativity display featuring baby Jesus lying on keffiyeh

From the [Jewish Chronicle](#) and the [Catholic Herald](#)

Following a flurry of controversy, the Vatican has removed a nativity decoration that included a baby Jesus atop a black-and-white keffiyeh, a symbol linked to Palestinian nationalism.



Pope Francis [opened the annual nativity scene at the Vatican on Saturday . . .](#) Speaking at the event, a wheelchair-bound Francis called on believers to “remember the brothers and sisters, who, right there [in Bethlehem] and in other parts of the world, are suffering from the tragedy of war,”

Artists Johny Andonia and Faten Nastas Mitwasi, Palestinians from Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem, designed the display in Rome.

On Sunday, the Palestinian Mission to the United Nations wrote on X that “the Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine on behalf of the State of Palestine gifted the nativity scene made in Bethlehem to the Vatican and in the presence of the pope who prayed for peace.”

The backlash came almost immediately from religious entities and individuals worldwide.

On Monday, B’nai B’rith International described feeling “disturbed by the Vatican display of a Palestinian-made nativity scene featuring Jesus on a keffiyeh and the pope’s appearance with it.” The group said the display “isn’t just politicisation, but revisionism. It presents (only) Palestinians as innocent victims—and Jesus as a Palestinian, not a Jew.”

In response to the display’s removal, David Parsons, senior vice president and spokesman for the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, noted that

“we are relieved at reports that the Vatican has decided to remove the provocative nativity display with an infant Jesus resting on a black-and-white keffiyeh, which is an unmistakable symbol of Palestinian nationalism...This crèche not only denigrated Jewish heritage, it also undermined core tenets of the Christian faith. Indeed, millions of Christians worldwide were instantly incensed by this exhibit ahead of the Christmas season. The Vatican did the right thing in taking it down”

...Objections to the scene included the historical contradictions in how this particular Nativity was depicted. Referring to Jesus’s own historical Jewish roots – having been born to Jewish parents in what was then the Roman province of Judea – one online commentator wrote, “Does the pope think Jesus wasn’t a Jew either? Did he even read the Bible?”

Another discontented observer said on social media

platform X that, “The Pope is exploiting Christmas to advance the ridiculous effort to rebrand Jesus as Palestinian rather than what He was – a Jew who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of a Messiah.”

Carving statues and religious scenes from olive wood has been a pillar of the Holy Land’s economic and cultural identity for centuries. The Star of Bethlehem that hung above the scene was made from mother of pearl and encircled by an inscription in both Latin and Arabic reading: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to all people.” Sheep in the scene are handmade with felted wool by children from Ma’n Lilhayt, a Catholic charity providing employment opportunities for disabled individuals.

A Vatican spokesman did not respond to a *Crux* request for comment on the presence of the Nativity scene in the Paul VI Hall, and whether it represented a political statement on the part of the Holy See.