Christian towns around Bethlehem are surrounded on all sides by settlers who steal their water and attack their families

Govornik: Ro Khanna
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> The mayor of Bethlehem describes the humanitarian and territorial crises facing Palestinian Christians in the West Bank: severe water scarcity (receiving less than 50 liters per capita daily versus settlers' 400+), displacement by 25 illegal settlements that control 80% of the land, and restrictions on freedom of movement even to pray at holy sites.

SAŽETAK

The mayor of Bethlehem speaks to a U.S. congressman about the daily hardships faced by Palestinians in the Bethlehem area, where Christian communities with deep historical roots struggle under military occupation and settler expansion. He documents a severe disparity in water access—Palestinians receive less than 50 liters per capita per day against WHO recommendations of 150, while settlers receive over 400 liters. The mayor details how 80% of land in the region has been seized, with residents now confined to 20% under the Oslo Accords, surrounded by 25 illegal settlements. Movement restrictions prevent residents from freely accessing essential services, schools, and holy sites: even as mayor, he requires special permission to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. He recounts a personal account of his critically ill father unable to be transferred to a Jerusalem hospital without coordination through Israeli checkpoints, losing critical time. The mayor invites congressional delegates to witness the situation firsthand and calls for recognition of three fundamental Palestinian demands: land, water, and freedom of movement.

KLJUČNE PORUKE

- Palestinians in Bethlehem receive less than 50 liters of water per capita daily, far below the WHO standard of 150 liters, while Israeli settlers in the same region receive over 400 liters per day.

- Eighty percent of land in the Bethlehem area has been seized; Palestinians now live on 20 percent of their former territory, surrounded by 25 illegal settlements.

> Movement restrictions require Palestinians, including the mayor, to obtain special permission to access holy sites such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and to travel between towns.

> Medical emergencies are complicated by checkpoint procedures: the mayor's critically ill father lost critical time when transfer to a Jerusalem hospital required coordination through Israeli checkpoints.

> The mayor's core demands on behalf of Palestinians are land, water, and freedom of movement—described as basic rights essential to survival and dignity.

> The Hanania family, mentioned in the Bible, has deep historical roots in the land preceding the modern occupation.

ČLANAK

Opening and Historical Roots

Thank you, Mr. Congressman. This is really my first time having a congressman come to Beit Sahour and the Bethlehem area. I am the mayor of Bethlehem, the city where Jesus Christ was born. My family name is Hanania. We are mentioned in the Bible several times, and we are proud that we are deeply rooted in this land. All the time we are trying our best to survive in the Holy Land.

Water Disparity and Daily Hardships

I can give you a simple example: water. According to the World Health Organization, we should receive 150 liters per capita per day. But unfortunately we are receiving less than 50 liters. How much are the settlers getting? They are getting more than 400 liters per capita per day. That is outrageous. A lot of people come to the mayor's office and tell me, "Please, I want to wash my clothes. I want to have a shower—just a weekly shower." This is the reality we face.

Land Seizure and Settlement Expansion

You can't control your own ground nor your own air. You are surrounded by 25 illegal settlements in a town where your family goes back before Jesus Christ was born. Eighty percent of the land was taken. We are living on 20 percent of the land under the Oslo Accords. This should have all been part of a Palestinian state.

Restrictions on Movement and Access to Holy Sites

We also cannot travel freely across all the borders and gates. Even to go to pray at the mosque or the church, we need permission. You cannot go to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where Jesus was crucified without special permission. Even as a mayor, I

need special permission. When my father was in critical condition at the hospital in Bethlehem, I wanted to transfer him to a hospital in Jerusalem. It had to be coordinated by a local ambulance to take him to the Israeli checkpoint. Imagine being in critical condition at an Israeli checkpoint and losing all that time. But this is still happening until today under human occupation.

A Message to Congress

If after my trip, more American members of Congress and senators started to come—because I'm hoping I won't just be the one—what will my message be to them about what should change? On behalf of my colleagues, we officially invite them to come and live our situation. After that, we have just one sentence: be ambassadors for the reality. All the congressmen can come and see the three basic things that we want. We want our land, we want water, and we want the freedom of movement. It's very simple—land, water, freedom of movement. As simple as that. We call on everybody in the United States to come here. We hope the government of the United States will give freedom to the Palestinian people.

#Palestinian displacement and land seizure #Water scarcity and resource disparity #Restrictions on freedom of movement #Israeli settlements in the West Bank #Bethlehem and Christian Palestinian communities #Humanitarian conditions under occupation #Access to holy sites

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