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For Melanne*file Russian
or Moscow*

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

February 1, 2000

The Honorable William J. Clinton
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), which is headquartered in New York City, has discussed with me its outrage at the illegal seizure of its Jericho Gardens Monastery in Jericho by the Palestinian Authority, and the forcible eviction by the Palestinian police of the Monastery's resident monks. The Palestinian Authority has handed over the Monastery to representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Consulate. I understand that two nuns presently are on the premises, and that they are being forced to live under harsh and onerous conditions. One of the nuns, St. Maria, is from New York, and both are U.S. citizens. Reportedly, the nuns have been taunted and assaulted by Palestinian and Russian representatives who are occupying the Monastery, and the American Red Cross has been refused reasonable access.

The seizure of the Monastery by the Palestinian police, and the mistreatment of the resident nuns, offends accepted notions of civility and respect for religious tolerance. It further violates the Oslo Accords which protect the sanctity of religious sites, and raises serious concerns about the exercise of the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction over Jericho. According to ROCOR, this seizure is the third illegal seizure of its religious property in Jericho and Hebron by the Palestinian Authority.

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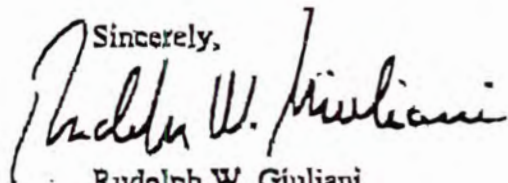
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The Honorable William J. Clinton
February 1, 2000

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Under these circumstances I would urge you to find an immediate solution to this incident which results in the return to ROCOR of the Jericho Gardens Monastery and all other confiscated religious sites, and ensures the safety of the two nuns currently in the Monastery.

Sincerely,



Rudolph W. Giuliani
Mayor

cc: The Honorable Madeline K. Albright
Secretary of State

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Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

75 East 93rd Street, New York, NY 10128 t. (212) 534-1601

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

28 January 2000

Dear Mayor Giuliani:

As you are no doubt aware, our monastery in Jericho, in the Holy Land, was illegally seized by the Palestinian Authority on January 15th. It was handed over to the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Consulate. This is the third illegal seizure of our properties by the Palestinians over the last few years.

Presently, Sr. Maria (Stephanopoulos), who is from New York, and Sr. Xenia (Osenn), two U.S. citizens who are members of our church, are in the compound and refusing to leave. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia is a religious corporation registered in the State of New York (although we have churches and monasteries throughout the world).

President Arafat, apparently under pressure from the U.S. State Department, gave the orders to temporarily divide the property between the Moscow group and us, despite our legal ownership of the property.

For reasons which remain unclear, President Arafat has reneged on that promise, and our nuns are living in a siege-like situation under harsh conditions, with little direct contact with the outside world. Even the Red Cross was turned away by the Palestinian and Russian occupiers, despite the fragile health of one of the nuns, Sr. Xenia.

We acknowledge your keen grasp of the complexities of Middle Eastern matters, and for this reason respectfully request the opportunity to meet with Your Honor and discuss this unbearable situation.

Sincerely yours,

Gabriel
Bishop Gabriel
Deputy Secretary



PRESS GUIDANCE

January 28, 2000

PA: RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH DISPUTE IN JERICHO

BACKGROUND: The Washington Post carried a story (p. A17) today on the long-simmering dispute between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) over properties in Israel and the West Bank. Sister Maria Stephanapoulos, a ROCOR nun and sister of former White House aide George Stephanapoulos, has been protesting the January 15th turnover of a monastery in Jericho to the Russian Orthodox Church. She and another nun are staying at the monastery while the dispute between the two churches continues unresolved.

Has Secretary Albright raised the matters of the Orthodox Church dispute and Ms. Stephanapoulos with Chairman Arafat? What is the extent of the assistance that the Department has provided to Ms. Stephanapoulos?

- Secretary Albright did raise the matter with Chairman Arafat during his visit to the United States on January 20th. Our consulate in Jerusalem is closely monitoring the situation. The consulate remains in regular contact with the Palestinian Authority and with officials of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) in Jerusalem and Jericho.

Palestinian Liberation Organization via Israel

Dear Chairman Arafat:

We are writing to express our extreme distress regarding the Palestinian Authority's actions in using police to forcefully evict U.S. based religious leaders from church property. This action violates the standards of international law and is an unacceptable action against the human rights of the members of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCORA).

The forced takeover of the Jericho church property two weeks ago was not the first use of force by the Palestinian Authority to expel the ROCORA from religious properties. As an authority with jurisdiction over numerous religious properties encompassing several religious denominations, the precedent of using police force to raid church property undermines international standards of judicial process. The dispute between the Moscow based Russian Orthodox Church and ROCORA should be resolved through the legal process rather than by arbitrary action by the Palestinian Authority. As the creator of a Commission to investigate the claims by both churches to the property in Hebron after the hostile eviction of ROCORA monks in 1997, we know you realize the importance of reaching a lasting solution to this property dispute. However, the Commission has never released any findings or reports. This time, concrete action needs to be taken. Unless a final and fair resolution to this conflict is determined by a court adhering to international standards of fairness, we cannot assume that this will be the last forced takeover of religious property by the Palestinian Authority.

As this dispute continues, the welfare of two American citizen nuns has been jeopardized by the hostile actions of the Palestinian police. Both nuns are maintaining their stance in the compound until a fair and judicial process rules on the property dispute between the two churches. While they have been barricaded in the church compound, limited to the gardens, a chapel and a small room on the monastery grounds, Russian diplomats and Moscow based Russian Orthodox monks are permitted to wander the property. Their behavior and freedom to roam the compound endangers the safety of the two nuns. Until a court can determine the ownership of the property, the Russian diplomats and Russian Orthodox monks of the Moscow Patriarchate should be immediately removed from the grounds for the nuns' safety.

In order to stop further conflict, we expect you will work fairly with both Churches to reach a fair solution to this conflict through the judicial process and adhere to the ruling of the court. Until a court decision can be reached based on international standards of fairness, the Palestinian Authority

needs to assure that further land will not be seized. We urge you to promptly work toward turning this conflict over to the courts for a swift decision.

Sincerely,

Current Signers: Reps. Maloney, Pelosi, Bilirakis, Menedez, Lee, Kelly, Hinchey, Franks, Pallone, Crowley, Forbes, Martinez, and Weygand

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