

Speech of mister Samir Qumsieh
director of Al-Mahed Nativity TV Station
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You are really welcome here, dear friends from Italy. I would like to brief you on our TV station. First of all you have to know that the Palestinian Authority, in a rare and unique step, has allowed the private media to operate and gave the possibility of an investment for the private sector in the media; this is the first time it happens in this country.

This permission made it possible to establish the Al-Mahed Nativity TV station. Since we are in Bethlehem, where Christianity sprang, so I have selected the name of Nativity Church (in Arabic Al-Mahed means Nativity).

Since we started in September 1996 it was my target and it was in my thinking that we broadcast Christian masses and cover Christian festivals and celebrations. And so we started to cover Sunday masses from all the Christian denominations since that time.

To tell you the truth, I had to face a lot of troubles, a lot of problems but, with God support, we could continue. So we have continued this service and covering all the Christian activities and festivals of all the denominations that are settled in the Holy Land, without discrimination. Since its establishment the Al-Mahed Nativity TV station is playing a very important and effective role, making the voice of the Christianity loud and clear.

But now there is the opportunity to brief you also on the present situation here.

We, as a minority, are suffering a lot of problems. Since I came here I am started to realize what is going on. I really began to keep an archive for all the case that are happening and I am keeping the 13 Heads of Churches in the Holy Land notified of what is going on.

Continuing about Al-Mahed Nativity TV station, we have father doctor Peter Madros who is presenting on Tuesday a program "Gospel and life" which is talking about the Christianity, about Christian doctrine and principles; this program is very popular in our country, especially among the Christians, but we can say that also Muslims watch it. Moreover we had many - we cannot count - appreciation letters and gratitude shields of various organizations: governmental, private and religious that are all appreciating what we are doing. So this is one part.

On the other part we cover, as I said, all the Christian festivals and activities for the Patriarchs, the Patriarchal Vicars, for the Bishops and Archbishops.

We are the only voice of Christianity, the only TV Station doing the service and here I have to comment on one thing.

I have inched heavy losses in this station and, believe me, if I wanted to deal as a businessman, I can simply say that I had to close this station years and years ago. In fact, due to the occupation, the uprising intifada and the political situation, which are reflecting negatively and very harshly on the economical situation, we cannot cover our expenses and we are falling in losses. Most of them are on my shoulders, but because of the service which I am rendering to the Christian community I am continuing and accepting all the troubles and all the losses.

To be frankly speaking, we received very limited support - from yourself in particular and this I'll appreciate because you are from the few sources that we received some support. From time to time the Patriarch supports as (very limited support I can say and when I mean limited I say it do not cover the real expenses which are inching).

I know it very well: if I'll close the station then there will be no alternatives. I'll sure you, ladies and gentlemen, there will not be alternatives, I know it. So the most difficult decision I could take or think, despite the pressure over myself, is to take the

decision to close the TV station – may God not allow it. I sure you that it will not happen under any circumstances, unless I am not forced to do it, but I hope I'll not to do it. Because we, as Christians here, need this service. All the Patriarchs, all the 13 Heads of the Christian communities or denominations highly appreciate the service we are rendering and we also have many appreciation letters of them – I can give you the copies or you can see on our website www.almahedtv.org .

Daily we are receiving appreciation but regretfully it is restricted to -let me say- moral appreciation. What we need really is financial assistance to continue. Now we are buying a transmitter - with your general support (and here I can say general support your transfer to the manufacturer) – and it must be fixed the new transmitter during this week.

This will give us wider area to reach, an more viewers to reach and more clear picture, so this will make our service more effective and – frankly speaking - this serves the Christian existence in the Holy Land. Because, as I started at the beginning of my speech, we are suffering a lot of problems.

In my archive I have about a 140 cases of land usurp because, as we Christians are a weak minority, a land mafia takes the land of a Christian and he can do nothing. Very regretfully, and with a great hunger I say it, the Palestinian National Authority did not do anything to stop this phenomena.

We have addressed the late president Yasser Arafat many times and it is all documented but nothing was done. I have to say this happens for the first time since we are been ruled by four regimes, the Turks, the British, the Jordanians and the Israelis successively. There was not usurp of lands of Christians and land scissions except under the Palestinian Authority regimen.

And we said it very frankly and clearly to Arafat but - very much regret - issues remained on the paper. So I have just recently addressed a letter to the 13 Heads of the Churches. I told them: when the new Palestinian Leadership takes over, I'll ask you very strongly to address them to stop what is going on because I am a person - I would say and declare very clearly - I will never accept the continuity of the old course how it is going on, regardless the costs. I was very clear about it, even if my life is the cost, I will not accept what is happening now to continue.

Because I have, as I said, more then 140 cases of land usurps and I have also about 100 cases of violations. These violations range from assassination to ravage to physical assault, all type of violations.

I have now the opportunity to let you know about it. I did not decide to bring this to the public so far because I know when I decide to bring it – specially nowadays while we are living without any security – it really represents a very serious risk.

But sooner o later we are waiting the Palestinian Leadership to set in, then we will take action and I will give you copy of the letter which I wrote to the Heads of the Churches, because what is going on is totally unacceptable and whatever I say is documented. I don't deal with rumors or just speeches, I deal with documented materials showing date, time, concerned persons and specifying each event exactly as it happened.

So this is our situation and we fully count on your support - not only for Al-Mahed - support for Christian existence which should continue because here - this city of Bethlehem in which you are is the holiest place in the heart - is where Jesus Christ was born and we must defend and protect our existence.

So I am ready for any questions, if you have anything, and once again I welcome you and thank you for your support to us. God bless you.

(Trascrizione di Nino Olivari)