

May 20, 2014 – Activating the FOTONNA Emergency Response Plan – Red Alert!!!

Dear Friends of **Tent of Nations**,

We are writing this letter to call for action against acts of injustice by the Israeli Military towards the Nassar family farm and their **Tent of Nations** Peace Project. This farm (known as Daher's Vineyard) is located just six miles southwest of Bethlehem in the Occupied Territories of Palestine (the West Bank). As you know, this family has registration papers for their 100-acre farm dating back to the Ottoman Empire, and they are now in a situation where the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) brought in bulldozers on May 19, 2014 and destroyed between 1,500 and 2,000 mature, fruit-bearing apricot and apple trees and grape vines, all in the lower valley of the farm. This move was totally unexpected as their latest case for proving ownership has been in the Israeli Military/Civil Courts since February 2013. An appeal was also made on May 5 to protest a warning placed on the land in late April 2014 that declared the land as "State Land" and should be "evacuated". There was no warning ahead of time about the impending destruction, however (as is the usual case), so the Nassars were caught off guard with the wanton destruction that took place. In addition to the destruction of the trees, the terraced land on which the trees were planted was also destroyed, left in a state of rubble that cannot currently be re-planted.



We are appealing to you to contact appropriate congressional committee members, members of Congress, and others you know who may have some influence in this kind of situation; this can include your church leaders as well and an article in your local newspaper would be more than welcome. We are including a short letter and a **timeline of past events** you can use to educate people about the details of this farm's history as well as a sample letter you can use to send out if you want. In particular, we ask that you contact the U.S. Department of

State, the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, the U.S. Ambassador in Tel Aviv, and the Consulate General in Jerusalem and ask them to investigate the circumstances surrounding this travesty.

We urge you to contact the authorities referenced below immediately as well as others you know personally. You have our permission to use information from this letter in your appeals. We also urge you to sign our Petition Letter (which is being emailed to everyone on our FOTONNA email list) and forward it to all of your own personal contacts, urging them to forward it also. We would like to have you act on this information as soon as you can in the hopes that we can prevent any more destruction from taking place on Daher's Vineyard.

Sincerely,

Bill Plitt – Executive Director - on behalf of the FOTONNA Steering Committee

Contact List:

President Barack Obama
<http://www.emailthepresident.com/>
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>

First Lady Michelle Obama
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/first-lady-michelle-obama>

Vice-President Joe Biden
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-biden>

Dr. Jill Biden
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/jill-biden>

Secretary of State - John Kerry
<http://www.state.gov/secretary/>

- Main address:
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520
- Main Switchboard:
202-647-4000
TTY: 1-800-877-8339

Ambassador Samantha Power (United Nations)
www.us.un.state.gov

U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
c/o Colin Eilts
Washington, DC 20520
202-647-4000

The Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC

3514 International Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008
202-364-5500

Ron Dermer - Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.
The Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC
3514 International Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008
202-364-5500

Ambassador of the U.S. to Israel – Tel Aviv
Daniel B. Shapiro – JerusalemACS@state.gov

U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem
Michael Ratney - USConGenJerusalem@state.gov

Timeline of Events

Dear Friends - The last time we called for action on the part of supporters of **Tent of Nations**, you all rallied within hours to write letters of personal concern and support for the Nassar Family. Those letters helped stop what could have been very destructive action on the farm by the Israeli Military. Every comment was deeply appreciated, and we need your support one more time in light of the latest action by the Israeli Military. We will be sending you a Petition Letter to sign and forward, but your own personal note or letter carries much more power. We encourage you to do both!

- In 2009, on two separate occasions, Israeli soldiers forced their way onto the property, conducting searches of family members and internationals and threatening to return with eviction papers. They never followed through on that particular threat.
- In May of 2010, they did issue nine demolition orders to remove buildings, tents, animal sheds and restrooms which they claimed the family had no permission to build. The Nassars went to court to stop the demolitions, and no action was taken on the part of the Military courts.
- In April 2011, a court decision was made, without the family's lawyer present, to follow through on the demolition orders because of a plan to build an Israeli-only road nearby. The lawyer intervened and, to date, no action has taken place.
- On February 14, 2012, as the family was working in the 'Trees of Life' orchard, volunteers found, in three different places (under rocks and tacked onto trees), papers with maps signed by the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria (which is the Israeli Military Government) giving them 45 days to appeal their claim to the land or the land would become State Land. This order covered one-third of the existing 100-acre farm. The family lawyer filed an appeal immediately. Many other Palestinian farmers discovered similar notices under rocks on their land. To date, there has been no decision on the appeal.

- On Monday, May 19, 2012, demolition orders were posted on a portion of the farm in the valley in the same manner as the earlier notices. This time the authorities identified a cistern which has been in use for ten years that was scheduled to be demolished within three days. While the order was contested, the Court ruled in favor of the military, but no action has been taken.
- Other acts of harassment have occurred on a regular basis. On May 5, 2012, civil authorities came and removed the barricade on the road that connects both the farm and the village of Nahalin to Route 60, the main north/south highway in the area. The next day, the bulldozer came and re-barricaded the road, thereby preventing any movement by local residents. Palestinians now, in order to travel between Bethlehem and the Nassar family farm, must travel through the villages of Nahalin and Husan. This is a burdensome detour for them as well as for the 20,000 villagers affected by these new regulations.
- On December 13, 2012, military trucks and large jeeps entered the west side of the village of Nahalin and destroyed olive trees that grow between the village and the settlement of Beitar Elit in the west. Immediately after doing so, they drove to the east side of the village, near Daher's Vineyard (the family property) and uprooted several fruit trees belonging to village farmers in addition to trees on the Vineyard.
- On December 16, 2012, the Nassar family received notice that their appeal to the Military Court had been denied. The Nassars were given 45 days (January 30 deadline) to demolish the structures themselves or reapply for permits which will cost them \$1,500 per structure. Under the 'New Rules' they will also need to submit a zoning plan and sign an agreement that, if the permits are denied, they will pay for the costs of demolishing the structures. The Nassars are trying to determine the intentions of the Israelis in the hope that access to the farm can be preserved. They have reapplied again for permanent registration of their land. As always, the family wishes to proceed calmly, constructively and legally.
- On January 31, 2013, the family lawyer was told the following:
 - The family must reapply for all previous permits (13) including the more recent structures, such as: big tent, cistern near home, a cistern in the valley; and the office trailer. They must do this with the understanding that for those structures denied a permit, the Nassars must demolish them at their own expense.
 - They must submit additional land survey maps: one topographical map which shows the farm location in the region; two technical maps, one at 1/250 scale and the other 1/50,000 scale, which show the new structures and their locations and dimensions.
 - They must submit plans for sources of providing electricity and water to the land from the village and for provisions for gray water and filtration systems.
 - They must apply for approval/signature of the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture, certifying that the land is agricultural land.

**All submissions were due by February 24, 2013;
the family was able to meet each of the criteria set out for them.
The courts have not as yet responded to the Nassars appeals
or requests for building permits.**

- In January 2014, three “stop cultivation” orders were found on the land. The Nassars had their lawyers look into the situation, but the courts have not responded to these appeals, either.
- In early May 2014, 1,000 dunums (250 acres) of land bordering the road leading to the farm and south of the nearby village of Nahalin were declared as State Land; this was land owned by other Palestinian farmers. The old blockade to the road leading to the farm was enlarged with additional piles of rubble and boulders, making it even more difficult to walk from the road to the **Tent of Nations Peace Project** site.
- In late April, the Israeli Military authorities placed a warning on the land declaring that the trees were planted on “State Land” and, therefore, constituted a trespass and should be “evacuated”!
- On May 5, 2014, the Nassar family filed an appeal with the Military Court against the order. According to the law, no demolition or evacuation is allowed once an appeal is filed and until a final verdict has been forthcoming.
- On May 19, 2014, the Israeli Military bulldozed between 1,500 and 2,000 mature, fruit-bearing apricot and apple trees and grape vines growing in the lower valley of the farm and destroyed the terraced land that had been cleared for planting. There was no forewarning given, and **this was an illegal act on the part of the IDF.**

As you know, the **Nassar Family Farm/Tent of Nations Peace Project** has a long history of modeling peaceful co-existence with its neighbors through teaching courses and providing workshops and conferences for women and youth. It also provides opportunities for internationals, Israelis and Palestinians to unite in solidarity around a common dream of a just peace. You have been a part of that journey through your support. For some of you, a visit to the farm itself has made it even more personal. In 2013, 7,000 international visitors were welcomed to the land by the Nassar family. Some were volunteers who worked the land and others were volunteers who taught a variety of workshops in the Women’s Education Center in Nahalin or helped with the Summer Youth Camps. Others included church groups, religious leaders from all faiths, and interfaith peace delegations. We are hoping that all of you will take time to stand with the Nassar family and place as much pressure as possible on your church leaders, political representatives, State Department, and even the White House to ensure that no more unwarranted destruction takes.

We will continue to keep you updated on our website at: www.fotonna.org. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or suggestions.

With deep gratitude for your support - Bill Plitt, Executive Director - FOTONNA Steering Committee

Sample appeal letter:

Dear (church/community leader, etc.),

I/we are writing this letter to call for action against acts of injustice by the Israeli Military towards a Palestinian Christian family (the Nassar family) that has registration papers for their 100-acre farm dating back to the Ottoman Empire. The family has been working through the

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Comment [1]: Succinctly state the nature of the crisis here.

Israeli Military/Civil Courts and the Israeli Supreme Court since 1991 to defend their rights to the land on a vineyard just six miles southwest of Bethlehem in the Occupied Territories of Palestine (the West Bank). A Peace Project was established on the land in 2001 called **Tent of Nations**. Thousands of international visitors have visited the farm, worked as volunteers, held workshops and conferences in the facilities there, worked in the Summer Youth Camps, and have taught in the Women's Education Center they established in the nearby village of Nahalin.

On May 19, 2014, the Israeli Military took unwarranted and illegal action and destroyed between 1,500 and 2,000 mature, fruit-bearing apricot and apple trees and grape vines growing in the lower valley of the farm. We are appealing to you to contact appropriate congressional committees and members of Congress regarding this issue. In addition, we ask that you contact the White House, the State Department, the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, our Ambassador in Tel Aviv, and the Consulate General in East Jerusalem (see the attached contact list).

In the past, (December 2012), Israeli Military/Civil Courts threatened to demolish 13 structures on the land (pens for animals, tents for volunteers, compost toilets, etc.) and denied the family's appeal against these 13 demolitions. By appealing these orders through the family lawyers, however, the deadline for action was moved to February 24, 2013. At the same time, the family also requested (again) that the land be re-registered in their name (having all the papers legally required to prove ownership). The family provided all additional information requested by the Military Court by that date, and they submitted and paid for requests for building permits for the existing 13 structures placed under the demolishing orders.

In late April 2014, the Israeli Military placed a warning on the land declaring that the trees were planted on "State Land" and, therefore, constituted a trespass and should be "evacuated"! The family filed an appeal on May 5; they were waiting for a court decision on these issues, and that is what makes the destruction of these trees illegal.

We would like you to inquire about this issue and why this vendetta against the Daher's Vineyard is taking place. Israel needs to be held accountable for its actions against a family that lives by the motto 'We Refuse to be Enemies' and that believes in non-violence as a solution to the problems there.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at

Regards,

(individual or organization)