



Provincial Office

**Franciscan Friars
Holy Name Province**
129 West 31st Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001-3403

May 22, 2014

Secretary of State John Kerry
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I'm writing to you on behalf of the Franciscan ministries of Holy Name Province to express that we are very disturbed and alarmed by the actions taken by the Israeli Military Courts against the Nassar family and their **Tent of Nations** Peace Project.

On May 19, 2014, the Israeli Military brought in bulldozers and, unannounced, illegally destroyed between 1,500 and 2,000 mature, fruit-bearing apricot and apple trees and grape vines in the lower valley on the land and reduced their terraced land to rubble. We would like you to look into this situation as soon as possible and help us prevent any additional destructive action on the part of the Israeli Military from taking place. This family lives by the motto "We Refuse to be Enemies" and is committed to solving issues in a non-violent manner.

The Nassar family farm and its Tent of Nations Peace Project provide a vision and compelling example of peaceful co-existence with neighbors and a commitment to a path of non-violence. Each year, thousands of people from around the world as well as Palestinians and Israelis visit the Tent of Nations and unite in solidarity to recommit themselves to the universal values of human dignity, justice, common good and to building bridges of mutual understanding, reconciliation and peace.

Over the past seven years, a large number of Holy Name Province Franciscan friars and our lay partners in ministry have visited the Tent of Nations site. Hundreds more Franciscan-hearted people have heard and been touched by the witness of Daoud Nassar and his family. Many of them have contributed to planting the trees on the Nassar's farm as a sign of their personal investment in the vision of justice, peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land and as an expression of their deep love and concern for the wellbeing of the Christians, Jews and Muslims that inhabit this land.

The unwarranted destruction of the fruit trees in the Tent of Nations Peace Project and the bulldozing of the terraced land is particularly appalling given the time proximity to Pope Francis' pilgrimage to the Holy Land, your determined leadership in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for peace, as well as the efforts of the prominent American Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders in support of your efforts:
www.usccb.org/news/2014/14-086.cfm.

As followers of Saint Francis of Assisi, we have a deep commitment to promoting non-violence, peace and reconciliation between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Holy Land. Now, more than ever, in our contemporary world challenged by strife and division, we need an alternative, non-violent witness of

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people like the Nassar family to keep hope of peaceful co-existence alive, planting and cultivating that prophetic vision in tangible ways such as Tent of Nations Peace Project.

We believe that the unwarranted destruction of the trees and the land on the Nassar farm land further erodes Israel's reputation as a democratic society, puts in serious doubt its commitment to peace, and is harmful to the national security interests of both Israel and the United States. The Nassars' 22-year struggle to defend their land must come to an end in a just and legal manner and we urge you to use your influence to ensure that justice does prevail in this case.

Franciscans of Holy Name Province unite with the Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East in supporting your commitment to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land. We will continue to mobilize public support for your peacemaking efforts among the thousands of people whom we minister to in our churches, universities and outreach ministries.

I look forward to hearing from you in response to our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John O'Connor", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Very Rev. John O'Connor, OFM
Provincial Minister, Holy Name Province

cc: U.S. Ambassador to Israel – Tel Aviv, Daniel B. Shapiro
U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem, Michael Ratney
Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Ron Dermer

