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FRANCISCANS APPEAL TO SECRETARY KERRY TO INVESTIGATE DESTRUCTION ON PALESTINIAN FARM CAUSED BY ISRAELI MILITARY

NEW YORK — June 2, 2014 — The Very Rev. John O’Connor, OFM, leader of the Franciscan friars of Holy Name Province, located on the East Coast, sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry requesting that Secretary Kerry look into the May 19 bulldozing by the Israeli military of more than 1,500 fruit trees on a Palestinian Christian family farm. The Nassar family farm — also known as the Tent of Nations Peace Project — is located near Bethlehem in the West Bank and is recognized around the world as a place dedicated to promoting nonviolence, reconciliation and the common good among Israelis and Palestinians.

During his recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Pope Francis reminded Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli President Shimon Peres, “Christians contribute to the ‘common good’ in their countries and deserve to be treated as ‘full citizens.’” The Franciscans’ letter to the secretary of state expresses that, “(the friars) believe the unwarranted destruction of the trees and the land on the Nassar farm further erodes Israel’s reputation as a democratic society, puts into serious doubt its commitment to peace, and is harmful to the national security interests of both Israel and the United States.”

Over the past seven years, the Franciscan friars of Holy Name Province have supported the Tent of Nations Peace Project. A large number of friars and their lay partners-in-ministry have visited the farm, and a number of ministries have hosted Tent of Nations speakers. The Nassars’ powerful motto, “We Refuse to Be Enemies,” and their witness of active nonviolence in the face of injustice and hardship continues to inspire thousands of people. The Franciscans’ letter to Kerry states:

As followers of St. Francis of Assisi, we have a deep commitment to promoting nonviolence, peace and reconciliation among Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Holy Land. Now, more than ever, in our contemporary world...we need an alternative, nonviolent witness of people like the Nassar family to keep hope of peaceful coexistence alive.

The letter was delivered to Ambassador Martin Indyk, special envoy for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, during a May 29 meeting of 29 religious leaders, sponsored by the Churches for Middle East Peace. The full text of the letter can be viewed on the website of Holy Name Province:

<http://hnp.org/jpic/pdf/Provincial%20Letter%20on%20May%2019%20Illegal%20Actions%20at%20TON.pdf>

The recent letter to the secretary of state is a part of a larger Franciscan Holy Land Peacemaking Campaign to raise awareness and galvanize Catholics to recommit themselves to the cause of a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land: www.hnp.org/jpic/peacemaking.cfm Franciscans also have issued a call inviting all people of good will to join in a minute of silent prayer at noon on Friday, June 6 in solidarity with the upcoming meeting of Pope Francis and Israeli and Palestinian leaders in the Vatican.

About Holy Name Province

Holy Name Province is the largest of seven entities in the United States belonging to the Order of Friars Minor. With ministries in 12 states along the East Coast, its more than 300 Catholic priests and brothers serve in colleges, parishes, urban ministry centers and a wide variety of social ministries, as well as in overseas missions.

The Order, founded in 1209 by St. Francis of Assisi, commemorated its 800th anniversary in 2009. Today, St. Francis, whose feast day is Oct. 4, remains one of the most widely known saints, revered for his affection for nature and care for creation.

Information about Holy Name Province can be found on HNP.org. News about its friars and events can be found on the Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province Facebook page.

Questions and photo requests should be directed to Jocelyn Thomas, HNP director of communications, at 646-473-0265 ext. 321 or 732-829-1513 (mobile) or jthomas@hnp.org.

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