

Israel revokes Anglican bishop's residency permit

by [Judith Sudilovsky](#)

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Jerusalem, March 2 (ENInews)--Israel has declined to renew a residency permit for the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Suheil Dawani, according to Yusef Daher, executive secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (ICC).

The action took place several weeks ago but the bishop's office was trying to resolve the issue without media attention, Daher said. However, since then efforts to rescind the decision have failed, despite inquiries by Western diplomats and protests to the Israeli Ministry of Interior and the Prime Minister's Office, he said.

The ICC is sponsored by the Jerusalem churches, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and functions as a coordination point for ecumenical action in and for Jerusalem, Palestine and its churches.

Born in Nablus, the bishop, like all West Bank Palestinians, must have a special residency permit to stay in East Jerusalem where St. George Anglican Cathedral and the bishop's offices are located. Jerusalem, which both Israelis and Palestinians claim as their capital, was annexed by Israel and has been under Israeli control since 1967.

"There is a feeling among church leaders that Israel has no respect for Christians or Christian leaders," Daher said in a 1 March phone interview. "There is no respect for the request of the issuing of residency visas and (it seems as if) they are almost doing the contrary."

He said the Israeli Ministry of Interior said it had revoked the residency permit after accusing the bishop of selling property to a Palestinian.

In a written response to a question from ENInews, the Ministry of the Interior responded, "We are talking about a sensitive issue that was presented in front of the

Interior Minister and our detailed answer will be delivered in the court, in the frame of the petition that was served."

An Israeli official, who asked not to be identified, noted that the legal issues involved in the case were "very serious" and would need to go to court, however, he said, he could not elaborate further. "No one is trying to kick (Dawani) out of Jerusalem. He has been offered to be allowed to stay in Jerusalem under a different status, as someone with a work permit, but he rejected that," noted the Israeli official.

Dawani declined to respond to a request from ENInews for a comment.

Church leaders are following the case with concern, Daher said, because many of the bishops, clergy and other religious serving in the various churches of the Holy Land come from abroad, including Arab countries, and must renew Israeli permits every two years in order to remain in Jerusalem and enter Israel in order to reach the West Bank.

The issue of entry visas and residence permits for Catholic clergy has been one of the major issues in negotiations between Israel and the Vatican. The Israel-Holy See Permanent Bilateral Commission was formed following the establishment of official diplomatic ties in 1993.

Daher said that despite Pope Benedict XVI's intervention on behalf of several religious during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2009 there was no response from Israel.

The situation has become more serious over the past few months following the Catholic Synod of Middle East Bishops which took place at the Vatican in October and the issuing of a document that called for international support against what it called the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, he said.

Several key members of the clergy and church personnel have been forced to leave Jerusalem because their permits were not renewed, Daher noted. "The church's role and effectiveness has been (compromised) because there is not enough clergy," said Daher.