

# Anglican bishop fights Israel's denial of visa

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Suheil Dawani, the Anglican bishop in Jerusalem, has gone to court to seek a renewal of the Israeli residency permit that allows him to live and work in the ancient city. The Israeli government recently declined to renew the permit and ordered Dawani and his family to leave the country.

Dawani was elected head of the Episcopal diocese in 2007. He was able to renew his visa in 2008 and 2009. But he was informed in writing last August by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior that it declined to renew the permit.

According to a news release March 3 from Dawani's office, the letter from the ministry said that "Bishop Suheil acted with the Palestinian Authority in transferring lands owned by Jewish people to the Palestinians and also helped to register lands of Jewish people in the name of the church." Further allegations said that documents were forged by the bishop.

Dawani said he denied all the accusations but received no response from the ministry. A second letter from the bishop requested documents or evidence of the charges, but it also went unanswered. "Bishop Dawani attempted to resolve this with restraint and without causing the government of Israel any embarrassment. The lack of resolution . . . required Bishop Dawani to seek legal counsel," according to the news release.

Previously, all Anglican bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem who have not held Israeli citizenship have been granted residency permits to allow them to live in Jerusalem where the bishop's residence, diocesan offices and cathedral are located.

After the denial last year, a number of religious leaders, including Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, advocated for Dawani with the Israeli government. Diplomatic efforts through British and U.S. offices were unable to learn

the source of the allegations.

Israel's Ministry of the Interior, replying to a question from ENInews, on March 3 said: "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, told ENInews March 2 that the legal issues were "very serious" and would be dealt with in court. The official also said Dawani had been offered a different status, similar to a work permit, but he rejected it. The diocesan news release did not address that point and noted that Dawani "is awaiting a court date to be assigned." —ENInews