

Palestinian inquiry says deposed patriarch not tied to land deal: No evidence to incriminate Irineos I

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In an unusual turn of events, a Palestinian Authority committee of inquiry has cleared Irineos, the deposed Greek Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem, of accusations that he was involved in leasing church property to Jewish investors.

The findings could mean that Irineos will be able to hold on to his job as patriarch despite being disowned in May by leaders of the world's Orthodox churches and deposed by his own bishops over the land scandal even as he protested his innocence.

"Based on the information we obtained, we found no evidence to incriminate Patriarch Irineos I over the deal," the Palestinian investigators said in a report July 4 in the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Quds*. "He did not take part in the transactions at any stage and did not receive any money," it added.

The decision makes Irineos's position even more unclear, since legally the governments of Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority must confirm his dismissal. So far only the government of Jordan has taken this step.

Israel is unlikely to do so, and the Palestinian investigation's findings indicate that it too is likely to continue to recognize him as the Greek Orthodox patriarch of the Holy Land.

Irineos has said he was not involved in the land deal and that his signature had been forged by a former aide who is on the run from the police. He has refused to step down from office even though his bishops have appointed a temporary replacement. Since being deposed, he has remained at his official apartment but has been prevented from entering the patriarchate by the bishops. -*Ecumenical News International*