

Israeli President Pledges Jewish State's Commitment to Protecting Freedom of Religion

Just two weeks after the heads of traditional churches in Jerusalem issued a statement condemning racist acts against Christians in Israel, the nation's president hosted these same leaders at his official residence for the traditional New Year's reception.

President Isaac Herzog reaffirmed Israel's commitment to freedom of religion and called for unity among all the "children of Abraham."

"As president of the State of Israel, I wholeheartedly commit to preserving absolute freedom of religion and worship for members of all faiths in this Holy Land," he said.

In an unprecedented statement issued earlier this month, these same leaders said "extremist groups" were attempting to drive the Christian presence from the Holy Land and that they felt betrayed by the Israeli government for failing to protect them.

While the statement was met with outrage by Israel's Foreign Ministry, Herzog sought to reassure the leaders that the diverse Christian community in the Holy Land "is an integral part of the vibrant mosaic that makes up the State of Israel."

In honor of #NewYear2022, delighted to welcome so many Church leaders to the President's Residence in Jerusalem. We miss our Christian friends across the globe and look forward to welcoming you back soon! May we all be blessed with a happy and healthy New Year.

– יצחק הרצוג *Isaac Herzog (@Isaac_Herzog) December 29, 2021*

"I know Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked joins me in assuring you that we will firmly oppose any form of racism, discrimination or extremism, and that we will reject any aggression or threat against communities, their leaders or places of worship," Herzog said.

Shaked was present at the reception as well along with dozens of Christian leaders and Supreme Court Justice George Karra, an Arab-Israeli Christian.

"You have truly enriched our nation and our land, as have our many Christian friends around the world," the president continued.

Theophilos III, patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, said the church leaders "remain grateful for the declared commitment of the Israeli government to uphold a safe and secure home for Christians in the Holy Land and to preserve the Christian communities as an integral part of the tapestry of the modern community."

He said that "fringe radical groups" that perpetrate attacks on Christians do not represent the State of Israel and he called for dialogue in order to quell increasing attacks on Christians.

"In a state committed to the historic rights of the various religious communities, as well as to religious freedom, we cannot but call out the activities in Jerusalem of fringe radical groups who are in no way representative of the State of Israel or the Jewish people," Theophilos said.

"The action of these extremists is a direct assault against our shared values and ideals that we hold as essential for the good order and flourishing of our common life," Theophilos continued. "For we all must work together to curb these

unbridled ambitions of all radicals within our communities for the well-being and safety of all our peoples.” {eoa}

This article originally appeared on All Israel News, .