

Palestinian Authority Becoming More Christian-Friendly?

In the midst of politics, truth twisting and occasional reports of religious persecution, the fact is that religious freedom in the domain of the Palestinian Authority may go unnoticed by the western Christian world except for the efforts of a few.

Although their official religion is Islam, the Palestinian Authority has officially embraced the individual's right to chose one's religion in contrast to what political foes might want the Christian world to believe.

The PA has recently removed religious classification from Palestinian ID Cards and supports Christian efforts led by at least one such evangelical as Terry McIntosh, a minister from Paducah, Kentucky who recently hosted a series of public meetings in Palestine to include the Balata Refugee camp in Nablus. The PA has supported the McIntosh effort for peace and unity through Jesus Christ dating back to the early days of the Oslo Accords and Yasser Arafat.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas recently issued the decision, confirming that religion will not be specified on Palestinian identity cards and passports, so that citizens won't be treated based on their beliefs. The Palestinian Authority Interior Ministry in Ramallah has begun issuing identity cards for citizens that don't specify the bearer's religion. Religion was first included on Palestinian IDs in 1995 at Israel's insistence.

According to Chief Palestinian Negotiator, Dr. Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian Authority will see freedom of expression, accountability, transparency and women's rights in his

lifetime. McIntosh says that his work in country demonstrates the validity of that intent. "Thinking people realize that peace is realized quicker when each man is left to make his own choice about such personal issues as faith without fear of retribution. Both Christian and Islamic extremists will just have to accept the idea or risk jeopardy to themselves."

Deputy Governor Jamal Rjoub publicly addressed the McIntosh team in Jericho and confirmed the need to pray for peace and to respect human rights in spite of any differences in faith.

McIntosh adds, "Another little known fact is that the Arab community is the strongest Christian voice in the Holy Land. Often, spin reports make it appear as though Palestinians are all members of an extreme Islamic sect bent on the destruction of Jews and Christians. The fact is that Christians serve in official positions of the Palestinian Authority. The PA agrees that if one chooses to be a Muslim, or a Christian, let him live in peace with his faith."

McIntosh and his team seeks to bridge the gap of political and religious divides, and calls upon both Palestine and Israel to do right before God. He says, "We believe the problem is spiritual resulting in political turmoil."