

How Catholic priest Father Raymond De Souza described the status of Christians in the Palestinian-controlled territory of Gaza in 2008:

“There is no free press in Gaza. Outside reporters, whether Israeli or foreign, cannot move about freely and pursue such stories. Foreign reporters in particular need extensive handlers, as they do not know the local language, the local geography or the local leaders. It is much easier to stay in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and rewrite press statements about the visit of the latest foreign dignitary.

Even if the reporters came, what would they be told? It is well known that Christian Palestinians who have been subject to firebombings, seizures of homes and businesses, assaults and death threats still tell foreign visitors that they have excellent relations with their Muslim neighbours. After the foreigners go home, these Christians must remain, and are loath to give any reason for jihadist extremists to think that they are stirring up trouble”.

(National Post, 19 February 2008)

‘Gaza's Christians fear for their lives’

Khaled Abu Toameh

Jerusalem Post, 18 June 2007

Christians living in Gaza City on Monday appealed to the international community to protect them against increased attacks by Muslim extremists. Many Christians said they were prepared to leave the Gaza Strip as soon as the border crossings are reopened.

The appeal came following a series of attacks on a Christian school and church in Gaza City over the past few days.

Father Manuel Musalam, leader of the small Latin community in the Gaza Strip, said masked gunmen torched and looted the Rosary Sisters School and the Latin Church.

"The masked gunmen used rocket-propelled grenades to storm the main entrances of the school and church," he said. "Then they destroyed almost everything inside, including the Cross, the Holy Book, computers and other equipment."

Musalam expressed outrage over the burning of copies of the Bible, noting that the gunmen destroyed all the Crosses inside the church and school. "Those who did these awful things have no respect for Christian-Muslim relations," he said.

He estimated damages at more than \$500,000. "Those who see the destruction will realize how bad this attack was," he said. "Christians have been living in peace and security with Muslims for many years, but those who attacked us are trying to sabotage this relationship."

He said Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas phoned him on Sunday night to express his strong condemnation for the attack. "President Abbas promised that he would do his utmost to prevent such attacks on Christians here," he said.

Fatah officials blamed Hamas militiamen for the attack on the church and school. However, Islam Shahwan, spokesman for Hamas's Executive Force in the Gaza Strip, denied responsibility.

He nevertheless admitted that a large group of Hamas militiamen had been near the area during the attack. "We have instructed all our men to withdraw from the area," he said. "We will punish anyone who targets churches and public institutions."