The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land was created to inform and educate the general public about the plight of Christians in the Holy Land, where inadequate housing, high unemployment and greatly reduced educational opportunities are causing widespread suffering and a mass exodus of the indigenous Christian population. By increasing awareness of the complex human rights issues involving Christians in this part of the world, the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land seeks to establish equality of opportunity for this unrepresented minority group and safeguard their right to remain in their homeland.

Caught in the middle of an intense religious and ethnic power struggle, Christians in the Holy Land are the forgotten victims in the current political crisis in the Middle East. As a minority population in the Holy Land, Christians in Jerusalem and other Holy Land cities are often among the first to suffer when conflicts between Palestinian and Israeli interests bring new hardships to the area.

Specific Human rights issues concerning Christian Palestinians include:

- **Unemployment**: Frequent disruptions of the local economy due to religious and ethnic conflicts have taken their toll. A recent study indicates that 30 percent of all Christians living in the Holy Land (Israel, West Bank and Gaza) are unemployed. Unemployment in the area is exacerbated by the on-going closure of the West Bank and Gaza to principal Israeli cities where the majority of Palestinians had been employed. The average annual income ranges from $4,000 - $6,000.

- **Education**: The vast majority of Christians cannot afford the cost of higher education. The closures of territories due to the long-standing ethnic conflicts in the Holy Land completely disrupt the educational system for Christians and Muslims. During the closures, children and teachers may not be permitted to attend school for extended periods,
and university students are also prohibited from pursuing their studies at schools outside the closure area.

- **Housing:** The current shortage of subsidized housing is a major factor in the ongoing exodus of Christians, for whom rent costs, even for the inferior living arrangements, are prohibitively high.

- **Medical Care:** Decreased income and high unemployment have left a great many Christians unable to afford even basic medical care for themselves and their children.

To stem the tide of emigration and protect the rights of the minority Christian population, the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is appealing for support that will enable the organization to provide humanitarian aid to Christian Palestinians.

As the Christian minority strains to survive in the volatile political situation of the Middle East, the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land uses every available resource to address their basic needs while undertaking a communications campaign to tell the story of their ongoing dilemma. By informing the general public of the present crisis situation for Christians in the Holy Land, the organization intends to secure the humanitarian aid and financial support necessary to guarantee Christians equal opportunity in their homeland.

During the past 800 years, the Franciscan Custody has ministered to the Christians and maintained the Holy Sites and Shrines in what is now the state of Israel. Because of their long-standing presence in the region, the Franciscans are extremely knowledgeable concerning the plight of the local Christian community. In order to help a Christian population that receives little foreign aid and is without an organization to voice its concerns on a worldwide scale, the Christian churches of Jerusalem - including Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Presbyterians - have come together with the Franciscans to formally express support for the goals of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. Created in July 1994 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land was established to inform and to educate as many Christians in the United States, not only about the plight of Christian Palestinians living in the Holy Land, but also of the on-going emigration from the region.

**For more information, please contact:**

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The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL) is a worldwide ecumenical organization that seeks to keep a Christian presence in the Holy Land by providing education, employment and housing. The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.