



December 10, 2024

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
Vatican City

Your Holiness,

The International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) writes to you in a spirit of respect and understanding, acknowledging the deep commitment to interfaith dialogue that you have championed throughout your papacy.

We understand that the presentation of baby Jesus in a creche atop a keffiyeh is intended to express solidarity with the Palestinian people and their suffering, and we share your anguish with the suffering of innocent Palestinian civilians. Nonetheless, we feel compelled to express concern regarding the inclusion of a symbol strongly tied to Palestinian nationalism.

The keffiyeh, though a symbol of Palestinian identity for many, is now closely associated with political movements strongly hostile to Israel, including some that have employed violence against Israel and her supporters. It has increasingly become a symbol of escalating expressions of antisemitism targeting Jews throughout the world, worn by many non-Palestinians in anti-Israel rallies. The inclusion of the keffiyeh, and the claim that Jesus would be a Palestinian (and implicitly not a Jew), runs the risk of denying the Jewish origins of Jesus, an ancient anti-Jewish canard. It is a transparent attempt to erase the fact that Jesus was a Jew, reared in the Jewish community and shaped by Jewish religion and culture.

We believe that the keffiyeh's inclusion in a religious context, specifically in the nativity scene, politicizes a sacred Christian tradition that should transcend national and political boundaries. The religious message of the nativity is overshadowed by a partisan narrative that risks alienating those outside the Palestinian cause, particularly Jewish communities. Furthermore, the focus on Palestinian suffering is not presented within a broader context that acknowledges the complexities of the conflict, including the suffering of Israeli civilians.

The Jewish community deeply values the Church's commitment to promoting peace and healing, especially in the Middle East, where all too many suffer from the tragic consequences of conflict. However, we humbly suggest that religious symbols should remain focused on their spiritual purpose and the life of Jesus taught by the Church: to inspire love, peace, and reconciliation for all people, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, or political views.

**Anti-Defamation League ♦ American Jewish Committee ♦ B'nai B'rith International ♦ Central Conference of American Rabbis
Israeli Jewish Council for Interreligious Relations ♦ Orthodox Union ♦ Rabbinical Assembly
Rabbinical Council of America ♦ Union for Reform Judaism ♦ United Synagogues of America ♦ World Jewish Congress**

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We know that your intentions are to bring healing and comfort to those who suffer.

We thank you for your attention to our concerns and for your continued leadership in fostering peace and mutual understanding. We remain committed to continuing our interfaith work with the Vatican and believe that we can continue to build bridges between our communities.

With deepest respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Dratch', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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