



RECOGNISING THE STATE OF PALESTINE AND PREPARING FOR THE DAY AFTER

Report on the visit of the France-Palestine Interparliamentary Friendship Group to Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem

8 to 12 September 2025

A delegation from the France-Palestine Interparliamentary Friendship Group visited Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem between 8 and 12 September 2025. The delegation was led by Ms Gisèle Jourda, chair of the friendship group. She was accompanied by Ms Raymonde Poncet-Monge, deputy chair of the friendship group, Mr Etienne Blanc, who is also chair of the Liaison, Reflection, Vigilance and Solidarity Group with Christians, Minorities in the Middle East and the Kurds, and Mr Pierre Barros and Mr Adel Ziane, group members.

The delegation was joined in Jerusalem by the French Consul General, Mr Nicolas Kassianides. The purpose of the trip was to understand the situation on the ground and meet with representatives of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, United Nations agencies and humanitarian organisations, against the backdrop of the forthcoming United Nations General Assembly meeting, which will address the question of recognising the State of Palestine.

A significant part of the delegation's agenda was also given over to the situation of Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank, whether Palestinian Christians living in Bethlehem, for example, or the reception centres opened in Jerusalem, run by various Christian congregations and providing many basic services to the population.

Amid growing tensions in the run-up to the United Nations General Assembly, the delegation learned from the press that the Israeli government was threatening to close the French consulate in Jerusalem. Such a move would constitute a serious act of hostility,

jeopardising the centuries-old presence of a French consulate in Jerusalem.

The role of the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem

Since 1620 and the arrival in Jerusalem of the first French consul appointed by Louis XIII, France's mission has been to protect Christians in the Holy Land. This unique and longstanding role is enshrined in several international treaties. France not only looks after Latin pilgrims, but also watches over institutions founded by religious communities with French origins, such as schools, colleges, hospitals, hospices, convents, retirement homes, research centres, etc.

In addition, the consulate manages French secondary schools in Jerusalem (264 pupils) and Ramallah (64 pupils), as well as French institutes in West Jerusalem, East Jerusalem, Ramallah and Gaza. It also supports a wide range of cooperation and cultural projects, as well as decentralised cooperation between French and Palestinian cities. It manages French humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territories, which supports the most vulnerable populations by funding projects run by United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations.

Lastly, around 25,000 French nationals registered with the consulate, most of whom have dual French-Israeli nationality, rely on its services for administrative matters. In 2024, the consulate issued 5,000 passports and identity cards and 1,600 civil status documents.

I.- Gaza: putting an end to the massacre

A – A dire humanitarian situation

Humanitarian workers are reporting an unprecedented state of chaos and despair in Gaza. The World Food Programme estimates that one in three people in Gaza have not eaten for several days and that 100,000 women and children are in urgent need of treatment for malnutrition. The number of premature births and miscarriages continues to rise.



Map of Gaza: the coloured areas are those under evacuation orders, covering 86% of the territory (source: PRCS)

Gazans are suffering from shortages of food, electricity and water, as well as a lack of essential public facilities and services. Only 140 trucks are allowed to enter Gaza each day, whereas 600 are needed to meet the basic needs of the population. In addition, certain types of goods are banned from entering Gaza. Some items like balloons and glue sticks for children and tent pegs are classified as dual-use, while others such as chocolate, books and all socio-educational materials for children appear to be banned simply to deprive Gazans of access to these products.

Only 11 of Gaza's 121 desalination plants are operational, and even then at reduced capacity.

Daily life is also affected by evacuation orders and the constant displacement of populations. While Gaza City, with a population of one million, is under attack by the Israeli army, people are being urged to move south. The "humanitarian bubble" in the south, in Al-Mawasi, is already overflowing. Many families are exhausted and unable to cope with further displacement in conditions of total destitution, and have indicated that they will remain in Gaza City. Several humanitarian workers have reported that families in Gaza are now gathering together to die together.

This situation also means that UN agencies and NGOs are having to make some very tough

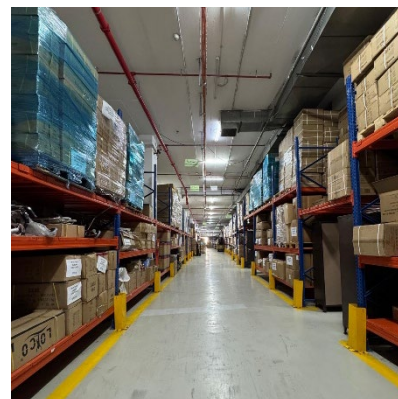
calls, with some choosing to evacuate their staff from areas under evacuation orders and others letting their staff stay, even if it means they risk being bombed.

Denying journalists access to the Gaza Strip is also contrary to all principles of press freedom and demands a strong response from the international community.

B – Letting humanitarian workers do their job

Among the moving testimonies gathered by the delegation during this trip were those of French humanitarian workers who had worked in Gaza as part of NGOs or United Nations agencies. All agree that there are no technical barriers to delivering aid to Gaza, that the famine could be stopped and that hospitals, if allowed to operate, could help the 12,000 Gazans currently awaiting evacuation for medical reasons.

When visiting the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in Ramallah, the delegation toured warehouses brimming with humanitarian aid ready to be delivered to Gaza. Plenty of medical supplies, medicines, clothing, food, toys and children's books have been sitting there for months, sometimes for over a year.



PRCS warehouses in Ramallah

In addition to restrictions on the number of trucks allowed to enter the Strip, humanitarian workers have to contend with countless logistical hurdles. For example, only the World Food Programme is authorised to enter the Gaza Strip from the north, while all other organisations must depart from the Jordanian capital Amman and follow a designated route, which takes almost 15 hours (compared with one hour from the north).

Evacuation orders, which now cover 86% of Gaza's territory, are forcing humanitarian

organisations to close their offices and abandon the warehouses they use for storage.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which has a specific mandate to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, has so far been unable to gain access to the Israeli hostages held by Hamas or to Palestinian prisoners held without trial in Israel.

Lastly, humanitarian workers in Gaza are putting their lives at risk. PRCS teams have lost 55 of their colleagues since the start of the conflict. Eight of them were killed by Israeli soldiers in March 2025 alongside their colleagues from the Civil Defence and UNRWA. They were wearing their uniforms and driving clearly marked ambulances. After recovering their bodies from a mass grave ten days after the attack, the PRCS called for an international investigation conducted by an independent body.

This tragedy highlights the extreme vulnerability of humanitarian workers, who can no longer carry out their work in Gaza, even though international humanitarian law theoretically protects their ability to provide emergency humanitarian aid covering the basic needs of the population, particularly in terms of food and healthcare.

II.- Protecting Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank: a critical and urgent mission

A – In Bethlehem, a Palestinian Christian community bled dry

The combined effect of the wall built around Jerusalem, the encirclement of the main towns in the West Bank and the proliferation of checkpoints means that Palestinian Christians now have extremely limited access to Jerusalem's holy sites. This is particularly true for Palestinian Christians living in Bethlehem, visited by the delegation.

Christians must apply for a permit from the Israeli authorities if they wish to travel to East Jerusalem, the capital of the future State of Palestine. These permits are issued sparingly, even during Christmas and Easter. Furthermore, permits are never granted to all members of the same family.

Since 7 October 2023, the number of tourists and pilgrims visiting Jerusalem and the main Christian cities in the West Bank has plummeted. Those Christian communities that

made their living mainly from religious tourism have lost their source of income. Unemployment now stands at over 40% in Bethlehem, forcing people to emigrate. Around 150 families have left Bethlehem since the start of the war.

Although the delegation did manage to visit the Church of the Nativity, it was disappointed to find that the site was devoid of pilgrims and tourists.



Church of the Nativity, Chapel of the Manger

In this particularly tense environment, decentralised cooperation plays a crucial role in enabling these cities to continue to carry out projects. For example, the city of Bethlehem, which benefits from a host of international partnerships and twinning arrangements, has implemented a project with the city of Grenoble to map urban roads and another to produce a book on Bethlehem's intangible heritage.



The delegation and key members of Bethlehem City Council

In partnership with the city of Paris, Bethlehem ran an awareness campaign on sustainable mobility, renovated Manger Square, and modernised street signs to direct tourists to the main points of interest and indicate the distances to reach them.

B – Restoring Christian religious institutions' ability to freely pursue their activities

France plays a unique role in the Holy Land. This role is enshrined in several international treaties and involves protecting a wide range of religious institutions and Christian communities. Around 30 communities have been placed under the protection of the French Republic in the Holy Land, including the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, the White Fathers and religious orders such as the Dominicans, Cistercians, Carmelites and Benedictines.

The institutions managed by these communities are therefore also under French protection, including schools, colleges, hospitals, hospices, retirement homes, convents and research centres. Through the many partnerships forged with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Greek Catholic and Maronite bishoprics, around a hundred religious institutions have a close relationship with the French Consulate General in Jerusalem.



The French delegation and Consul General in Jerusalem, pictured with His Eminence Cardinal Pizzaballa (centre)

During the various field visits and an audience with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Eminence Cardinal Pizzaballa, the delegation was able to discuss all the difficulties faced by religious communities living in the Holy Land.

In addition to the impact of declining tourist numbers in Jerusalem, these communities also suffer humiliation and violence that interferes with their mission to provide assistance to all those who need it, without discrimination. Members of the clergy are regularly insulted and/or spat on by Jewish extremists (often young people), even though this is a criminal offence under Israeli law. Many people have

also described how clergy are humiliated when going through checkpoints (searches and harassment), as well as the difficulties they face in having to answer questions from Israeli police officers in Hebrew after spending five years in the West Bank, which is an Arabic-speaking area.

Christian schools are also subject to inspections by Israeli Ministry of Education officials, who can enter classrooms at any time to check that the teaching provided complies with Israeli expectations. Officials may search children's bags and inspect their tablets. After several requests by the Israeli authorities to modify the content of textbooks purchased by schools from the Palestinian Authority, several schools have given up and now use British textbooks. These are less likely to be challenged, but they are causing a decline in French language teaching in these areas.

Lastly, the delegation visited several facilities, including hospitals, nurseries and orphanages. The situation facing these congregations appears to be precarious everywhere, either because donations from pilgrims have dried up or because the Israeli government is threatening to impose heavy local taxes on them.

III.- Restoring dignity to the Palestinian people and ensuring compliance with international law

A – Meetings with the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organisation

From left to right: Mr Pierre Barros, Ms Gisèle Jourda,



Mr Mohammed Mustapha, Mr Adel Ziane, Ms Raymonde Poncet-Monge and Mr Etienne Blanc

As the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, was travelling abroad, Prime Minister Mohammed Mustapha welcomed the delegation.

He praised France's commitment to recognising the State of Palestine and expressed his sincere gratitude to France and the French people for their long-standing commitment to complying with international law and the Palestinians' right to a viable state, living side by side and in peace with the State of Israel.

The Prime Minister also emphasised the role of the French Senate as a stable partner that transcends political changes and thanked the delegation for its courage in travelling to the region amid heightened diplomatic tensions and local instability.

Looking beyond the momentum created by France to garner broad international support for the recognition of a State of Palestine, the Prime Minister stressed the need to think about the post-recognition phase so that countries' declarations are not just empty promises. In his view, the New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, adopted on France's initiative on 29 July 2025 and now endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, lays a credible foundation for preparing for the future.

Among the priorities listed in the declaration are the need to recognise the Gaza Strip as an integral part of the future State of Palestine, to put an end to settlement activity in contravention of international law, and to allow the Palestinian Authority to receive all its tax revenues, currently withheld by Israel to the tune of nearly €2 billion.

Alongside these priorities, the declaration calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages, a renewed condemnation by the President of the Palestinian Authority of the 7 October attack and of Hamas, and a demand for Hamas's demilitarisation and exclusion from Palestinian governance. In addition, the President of the Palestinian Authority has committed to implementing a comprehensive programme of reforms, notably organising local elections (including in Gaza and East Jerusalem), giving the Palestinian Authority full security control and drafting a temporary constitution for the State of Palestine.

In parallel with this approach, the Prime Minister emphasised the pressing need to resume negotiations for a peace agreement, with the United States' involvement. Recognising the State of Palestine should not be seen as a hostile act, but as a step towards negotiating peace.



The French delegation with Mr Abou Holi

In Ramallah, the French delegation also visited the Jalazone camp, which is home to Palestinian families who fled their land in 1948. What was at first an area covered with tents has now become a full-blown town covering 25 hectares, where 17,000 people live. The delegation saw first-hand the massive scale of international aid needed to provide essential public services in the refugee camps, including water, sanitation, electricity, schools and hospitals. The Senate delegation visited several facilities funded by a partnership with Morlaix Communauté, a French local government grouping in Brittany. These included the new wastewater treatment network, whose main source of funding is the French Development Agency, the reception centre for people with disabilities, and the project to build a water tower inside the camp.

In the subsequent meeting with Mr Abou Holi, head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's refugee department, the discussion focused on rising poverty and unemployment since the 7 October 2023 attacks and the need to strengthen international aid to address shortages of goods and healthcare in these camps.

B – Ending settlement activity in Jerusalem and the West Bank

In accordance with the governing parties' coalition agreement, the Israeli government is implementing a policy aimed at expanding Israel's presence in "all parts of the Land of Israel", including Jerusalem and the West Bank.

However, Israeli settlements are contrary to international humanitarian law as established by the Geneva Conventions and have been the subject of several United Nations resolutions demanding that Israel end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.



Field visit to East Jerusalem, where new settlements are being developed

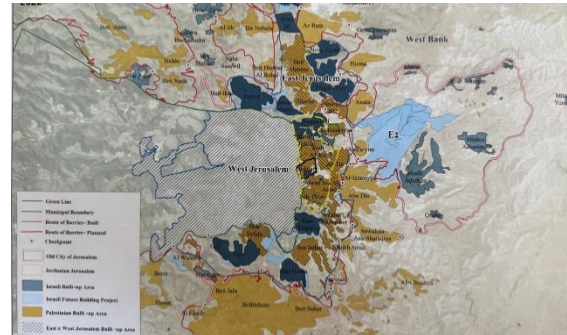
The pace of settlement activity continues to accelerate on the ground. Since the construction of the wall around the city of Jerusalem in the early 2000s, territorial continuity has been broken between the capital of the future State of Palestine and the adjacent West Bank. As the Senate delegation witnessed when it visited Ramallah and Bethlehem, Palestinian towns are surrounded by walls and numerous checkpoints, which have doubled in number since 7 October 2023 to more than 1,200. Land is being seized throughout the West Bank to build new settlements.

This strategy is supplemented by the development of “outposts” consisting of small groups of armed Israeli civilians who settle deep within Palestinian territory. Over the past three years, 70 such structures, also known as “farms”, have been created, more than in all previous years combined. These land grabs have often led to violent clashes, in which at least 30 Palestinians have reportedly been killed over the past three years.

Of all the controversial projects, the E1 settlement, recently approved by the Israeli government, has prompted the strongest response from the international community. This project, conceived in the 1990s but never implemented until now, is set to cover an area of 12 km² near the Maale Adumim settlement, which is already home to 40,000 settlers to the east of Jerusalem.

The E1 settlement would link Maale Adumim to Jerusalem, creating a “belt” of settlements around East Jerusalem, thereby severing its connection with the rest of the West Bank. It would also gradually cut the West Bank in two, making it impossible to travel between the north and south of the territory.

A recurring concern raised by those who met with the delegation was the prospect of an outright annexation of the Palestinian territories by the Israeli government.



Map of the E1 settlement project. The blue areas are Israeli settlements; the yellow areas are towns populated by Palestinians.

C – Allowing Palestinians to live with dignity

In addition to the fragmentation of Palestinian territory, which significantly hinders mobility and economic development in the West Bank, Palestinians are being hit hard by policies aimed at stifling them economically and restricting many aspects of their daily lives. All those who spoke with the delegation, from institutional representatives to civil society groups to Christian and Muslim Palestinians, identified the ultimate goal of this strategy as seizing land and replacing the local population with Israeli settlers.

On the economic front, most of the permits previously granted to Palestinians to work in Israel have been revoked since 7 October 2023. The workforce has been replaced by Asian workers and unemployment rates are skyrocketing in the Palestinian territories. Travel to Jerusalem is extremely limited and permit holders who arrive late at the checkpoint when returning to their home towns in the evening have their permits permanently revoked.

At the same time, access to essential public services is being hampered. Power cuts are a daily occurrence and the Israeli government controls most of the water resources in West Bank towns. In Bethlehem, each resident receives just 40 to 45 litres of water per day; the World Health Organisation recommends 165 litres per person per day. Captured water resources are redirected to the settlements, which receive 250 litres of water per person per day. The construction of wells is banned in West Bank towns, as is the search for new water

sources. Water cuts, described as “collective punitive measures” without any specific justification being given, are frequent and force Palestinians to install tanks on the roofs of their homes to ensure access to a minimum amount of water.

During its visit to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), the delegation was able to see first-hand the efforts its employees put into keeping hospitals and ambulance services running. To overcome the challenge posed by the large number of checkpoints, which prevent ambulances from moving freely, the PRCS is working with the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs to set up health centres before checkpoints.

Despite real-time location tracking of all ambulances and the sharing of this information with the Israeli authorities, passage permits often arrive late, forcing ambulances to respond to emergencies within very tight time constraints. Ambulances are routinely subjected to checks, which often escalate to aggression, violence or even gunfire from Israeli soldiers.

In their quest to regain the right to live with dignity, Palestinian Muslims should also be allowed to return to the holy sites in Jerusalem, in particular the Haram al-Sharif, which includes the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Under the *Status Quo* governing different religions’ access to holy sites in Jerusalem, the Jordanian Waqf administers the Haram al-Sharif. However, Israeli authorities have been gradually challenging this agreement since 2003. The site is now only accessible for four hours a day, compared with eight hours previously, and Palestinian Muslims from the West Bank can only visit during Ramadan, and even then only the elderly and women. Furthermore, as the delegation witnessed, Israeli settlers regularly access the Esplanade and pray conspicuously on the outskirts of the Dome of the Rock, in violation of the Status Quo, which allows visitors of all religions to visit the site, but only Muslims to worship on the Esplanade.

Lastly, the 360,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem live in a state of considerable legal and civic precariousness. Most of them do not have passports and only have “permanent resident” status, which can be revoked if they stop living in Jerusalem, even for a short period (as happens with students living abroad, for

example). They only have the right to vote in local elections, in which they generally do not participate, and cannot vote in national elections. In 2024, 180 Palestinian families in Jerusalem also had their homes demolished by the Israeli authorities for not having the proper permits. These demolitions have also affected projects funded by France (such as a social centre funded by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs) or those carried out as part of decentralised cooperation.

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During this unusually intense mission, the Senators assessed the consequences of an Israeli policy designed not only to eradicate Hamas, but also to assert control over the entire Palestinian territory of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, while pushing out the people who live there.

This harsh strategy, which began well before the 7 October 2023 terrorist attack, makes creating a viable Palestinian state increasingly difficult, despite the imminent prospect of its recognition by the United Nations General Assembly. It is in total violation of international law and a serious obstacle to the resumption of the peace process, which must lead to the coexistence of two states.

The delegation hoped that its visit would demonstrate its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its determination to work with the rest of the international community to ensure compliance with international law, secure a ceasefire and the release of the hostages, and resume negotiations for a just and lasting peace in the region.

Recognition of the State of Palestine by the United Nations General Assembly at the end of September 2025 must be the first step in this process. The France-Palestine friendship group will continue its efforts to ensure that this declaration is followed by concrete action and that a glimmer of hope can once again shine in the sky over Jerusalem.

Looking ahead to the post-recognition phase, to ensure a return to the path of peace, the friendship group will also work to support the political transition to parliamentary democracy, with parliamentary elections as a goal once humanitarian and security conditions permit.

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Delegation Members



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