

The City has particular features distinct from the other disputed territories occupied in 1967. It is an emotional and political symbol to Israelis, Palestinians and other Arabs. It has intense religious and historical significance to Jews, Muslims and Christians. This has led Israelis to claim the City in its entirety as their capital, Arabs (Muslim and Christian) to insist with strong feeling that East (Arab) Jerusalem must be returned to Arab rule, and important Christian bodies to call for an international presence. It was in reaction to such deeply held views that the United Nations General Assembly included in its Palestine Partition Plan of 1947, which was the basis for the creation of the State of Israel, provisions for the internationalization of the City as a whole. While this concept of a corpus separatum under the United Nations would no longer seem to be realistic, as it is opposed by both Israelis and Arabs, the purposes it was designed to serve are still important.

I believe that the religious dimension of the City as a centre of the three great monotheistic religions must be fully considered when Jerusalem's future is discussed in negotiations. Canada should support efforts to this end. In doing so we must bear in mind that between 1948 and 1967 when the West Bank was under Arab rule Israelis were denied access to their sacred shrines in East Jerusalem. Since then, in marked contrast and to their credit, the Israeli authorities have sought to be scrupulously fair in permitting access to the Christian and Muslim Holy Places. Nevertheless, while the present situation appears to meet the concerns of the Jewish religious authorities, this is not the case for all Christians and Muslims.

No Muslims I met would accept the status quo in Jerusalem as a satisfactory alternative to a return to Arab sovereignty of their shrines. The importance of the City to Islam as its third holiest site after Mecca and Medina was stressed to me throughout my travels in Arab countries. Concern also was expressed by Christians I met that the law which guarantees free access to the Holy Places is limited to a simple act of the Israeli Knesset which could be altered by a simple majority of that parliament if there should be in future the political will in Israel to do so. They also expressed concern that urban development and demographic changes in East Jerusalem since 1967 are fundamentally altering the City which in their view should be a living centre for all three faiths and their religious communities. The authorities at the Holy See reiterated to me the position taken by the Pope at the United Nations in 1979 that a special statute providing for international guarantees be established to assure that the unique religious character of the City is maintained.

Although the status of Jerusalem may be one of the most difficult problems to resolve in the Arab-Israeli conflict, I am