



# Cremisan

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*"You are stronger with your guns, but you are not the strongest when it comes to humanity." Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah*

The Cremisan valley is located in Beit Jala, northwest of Bethlehem; and for long generations, its fertile, well-cultivated groves have belonged to Beit Jala residents. Within the Cremisan valley lie two Salesian orders: a Monastery, built in the nineteenth century, which runs the famous Cremisan Cellars winery and a Convent which

runs both a kindergarten and a school that offer education for more than 450 students, Muslims and Christians alike, and teach the values of just peace and co-existence; as well as multiple private homes and properties.

Surrounded today by two Israeli settlements, Gilo and Har Gilo, the Cremisan valley has not been exempted from the effects of the Israeli policy of settlement expansion and linkage. In 2006, the Israeli commander issued a military order seizing land in Cremisan for the purposes of building a part of the Annexation Wall in the area. The two religious orders and Beit Jala residents proceeded to fight this decision at Israeli courts. Ever since, and throughout the course of litigation, the Israeli army has suggested several different routes for the Annexation Wall, all of them in complete disregard of the

most basic interests and rights of the Beit Jala community and the religious orders, essentially reflecting one thing: the annexation policy – under the pretext of 'security' – will prevail.

Today, nine years later, Beit Jala residents find their city about to be completely strangulated. With the Israeli supreme court decision of July 2015 that gave the Israeli army the green light to build the Annexation Wall on their land, failed political and diplomatic efforts to stop the Israeli plans, and suppression of the civil and popular resistance of Beit Jala residents, 3,500 *dunums* (350 hectares) of land are at risk of being isolated from the city and fifty-eight Palestinian Christian families are about to lose land that supplies their livelihood to accommodate the snake-like route of the Annexation Wall.

*Cremisan Valley. Photo courtesy of VisitPalestine.com.*



The fact that the families who are about to lose their lands are Christian should not raise more alarm for the Cremisan case than for any other case where the Annexation Wall is built. The Annexation Wall is wrong for Cremisan, as it is wrong everywhere else where it is implemented. This is precisely what the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in its advisory opinion in 2004: according to the principles of international law, the Annexation Wall is illegal and must be dismantled. However, what is also at stake in Cremisan is the continued presence of Palestinian Christians in their homeland. Especially at a time when the world is concerned about the persecution of Middle Eastern Christians, we need to ask ourselves: Is dispossession and the stealing of one's land and main source for earning a livelihood not a very obvious form of persecution? The case has been brought up before the UN Human Rights Council several times and Cremisan has been visited by key governmental figures as well as diplomatic and church missions from all over the world, all expressing their 'concern'- if making a statement at all. Now, is it not baffling to see the international community condemn persecution and take strong positions against terror in every other part of the world while turning a blind eye to the brutal Israeli occupation and daily oppression of Palestinians - a silence which further contributes to solidify the impunity of Israel?

In a nutshell, one can fairly conclude that the Cremisan case is all about the Israeli intent of linking two (illegal!) settlements at the expense of Palestinian landowners and their base of existence in the area. Time and again, it does not serve, but rather remains a failure from a security perspective as the building of walls can by no means bring peace and security to the occupying power, Israel; it can only generate more misery, violence, and hatred.

*The Society of St. Yves - Catholic Center for Human Right is working under the patronage of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem. Founded in 1991 by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, His Beatitude Emeritus Michel Sabbah, to help "the poor and the oppressed" according to the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, it was named after Saint Yves, the patron Saint of lawyers, known as "Advocate of the Poor".*

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*Cremisan Report: <http://www.saintyves.org/downloads/reports/20150902063619.pdf>. For info contact advocacy@saintyves.org.*

