

Christianity under siege in the Holy Land



Disturbing reports continue to come from the Holy Land, in the same locations where Christ walked and preached two millennia ago, citing the stepped up persecution against Christians – an ominous development amid years of a dramatically shrinking of the ancient Christian communities there.

Incidents of vandalism against Churches in the West Bank and intimidation of Palestinian Christians by Muslim extremists are now, unfortunately, common place.

For instance, Christian residents in the West Bank village of Jifna, outside Ramallah, were terrorized by armed militiamen late last month following a minor traffic accident involving a Christian woman.

Up to 30 armed militants, reportedly from a nearby refugee camp, later showed up in the village, causing damages and threatening local Christians. Police from the Palestinian Authority, which were immediately called, showed up three hours later.

Just as ominously, allegations have surfaced stating that Christians in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority are now required to pay what's known as "jizyah" – in order to enjoy a semblance of security. The latter is a highly discriminatory tax historically levied against non-Muslims permanently residing in

Muslim lands, as prescribed by Islamic law.

In a related development, a joint Muslim-Christian council in Jerusalem recently published a study showing that the native Christian population in the Palestinian areas comprises only 1 percent of the general population.

Tens of thousands of Christians have abandoned their native lands to emigrate to other countries around the world, particularly in the West.

Fueling this distressing trend are instances of confiscation of Christians' lands, and even the harassment of young Christian women.

As such, the native Christian community in the West Bank today numbers only 45,000 — with only 4,000 Palestinian Christians left in Jerusalem and 1,000 in the Gaza Strip.