





YMCA of missionary activity.

Following the YMCA attack, one Christian leader, an aide to Jerusalem's Latin Patriarch Michel Sabah who asked his name be withheld for fear of Muslim retaliation, called the rampage part of a general trend of Christian persecution in Palestinian areas.

"It's been happening all over the West Bank and Gaza," said the aide.

There have been rampant reports of abuses and persecution in several West Bank towns taken over by the PA.

Anti-Christian riots have been reported in Ramallah, Nazareth and surrounding villages as well as in towns in Gaza, where Christians have been targeted in scores of attacks, some deadly. In Bethlehem, local Christians have long complained of anti-Christian violence. The city's Christian population, once 90 percent, declined drastically since the PA took control in December 1995. Christians now make up less than 25 percent of Bethlehem, according to Israeli surveys.

Christian leaders and residents in Bethlehem told WND they face an atmosphere of regular hostility. They said Palestinian armed groups stir tension by holding militant demonstrations and marches in the streets. They spoke of instances in which Christian shopkeepers' stores were ransacked and Christian homes attacked. One of the most urgent problems involves the unilateral confiscation of Christian property by local Islamists.

"It is a regular phenomenon in Bethlehem," Samir Qumsiyeh, a Bethlehem Christian leader and owner of the Beit Sahour-based private Al-Mahd (Nativity) TV station, told WND. "They go to a poor Christian person with a forged power of attorney document, then they say we have papers proving you're living on our land. If you confront them, many times the Christian is beaten. You can't do anything about it. The Christian loses, and he runs away."

In the Gaza Strip, Christians fare worse under Hamas rule. The Islamist group took over the territory in 2007. About 3,000 Christians live in the Gaza Strip, which has a population of over 1 million.

In December, Christian leaders in Gaza told WND they held only small, quiet Christmas celebrations after local leaders received warnings from Muslim groups against any public display of Christianity during the holiday season. Hamas claimed the Christian celebrations were muted to protest what it said was an Israeli siege of the coastal Gaza Strip.

Since Hamas' rise to power, Christian in Gaza repeatedly have been targeted. Jihadia Salafiya, an Islamist outreach group with a so-called military wing, is suspected of many of the Islamist attacks, such as a May 2007 shooting against a United Nations school in Gaza after it allowed boys and girls to participate in the same sporting event. One person was killed in the attack.

In the case of Ayyad, the bible store owner, [WND quoted witnesses](#) stating he was publicly tortured a few blocks from his store before he was shot to death. The witnesses said they saw three armed men, two of whom were wearing masks, beat Ayyad repeatedly with clubs and the butts of their guns while they accused him of attempting to spread Christianity in Gaza. The witnesses said that after sustaining the beating, Ayyad was shot by all three men.

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**Christians warned: Accept Islamic law**

Sheik Abu Saqer, leader of Jihadia Salafiya, told WND in an exclusive interview after Hamas first seized Gaza that Christians could continue living safely in the Gaza Strip only if they accepted Islamic law, including a ban on alcohol and on women roaming publicly without proper head coverings.

"[Now that Hamas is in power,] the situation has changed 180 degrees in Gaza," said Abu Saqer, speaking from Gaza.

"Jihadia Salafiya and other Islamic movements will ensure Christian schools and institutions show publicly what they are teaching to be sure they are not carrying out missionary activity. No more alcohol on the streets. All women, including non-Muslims, need to understand they must be covered at all times while in public," he said.

"Also the activities of Internet cafes, pool halls and bars must be stopped," said Abu Saqer. "If it goes on, we'll attack these things very harshly."

Abu Saqer accused the leadership of the Gaza Christian community of "proselytizing and trying to convert Muslims with funding from American evangelicals."

"This missionary activity is endangering the entire Christian community in Gaza," he said.

Abu Saqer claimed there was "no need" for the thousands of Christians in Gaza to maintain a large number of institutions in the territory.

He said Hamas "must work to impose an Islamic rule or it will lose the authority it has and the will of the people."




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*Aaron Klein, WorldNetDaily's Jerusalem bureau chief, is known for his regular interviews with Mideast terror leaders and his popular segments on America's top radio programs. His newly released book is "[The Late Great State of Israel: How Enemies Within and Without Threaten the Jewish Nation's Survival.](#)" [Follow Klein on Twitter.](#)*



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