
Interview: Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij

'Iraq will not fire first; why can't the U.S. try diplomacy?'

Fiorella Operto, EIR's correspondent in Rome, conducted the following interview with Mayor Elias Freij of Bethlehem on Nov. 2. Operto's questions were submitted to Mayor Freij in writing.

EIR: Can you please brief us on your recent tour in Italy?

Freij: I was invited by the Pio Manzù International Research Center to participate in the conference held in Rimini and the subject was "Eye of the Needle."

It was a very good opportunity to participate in this conference.

On Sunday, Oct. 14, 1990 I had a meeting with Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti.

I spoke in the conference on Monday Oct. 15. Also I gave many interviews to the press, radio and television.

On Wednesday, Oct. 17, I spoke in the City Hall of the Municipality of Rome. His Worship the Mayor of Rome was the first speaker.

While in Rome, I had meetings in the Foreign Office.

EIR: How do you see the current situation in the Occupied Territories?

Freij: The current situation in the Occupied Territories is very tense, critical, and dangerous. The closure of the Territories, forbidding Arab people to go to Arab East Jerusalem, was a very serious warning. There are no prospects for a genuine peace settlement in the foreseeable future. However, the Palestinian Arabs are willing to negotiate a comprehensive peace settlement with Israel, based on [U.N.] Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. As Palestinians, we aspire to live with the Israelis as good neighbors, free neighbors, and equal neighbors.

EIR: Day by day, we see that the will to peacefully solve the Gulf crisis is sabotaged by forces who are interested in a war. How do you see the situation? Is a war inevitable?

Freij: Unfortunately, the situation in the Gulf area is worsening. There are several forces which are trying to sabotage peace efforts. I believe that war is inevitable. It might start any day after the American congressional elections are over on Nov. 6.

War will have devastating results on this region in particular and the whole world in general. War cannot resolve disputes of this nature. Political negotiations are the best way to resolve the Gulf crisis.

EIR: If the United States and the oil multinationals come, through a war, to control the access to the Gulf oil, Europe will be damaged the most. Already, Eastern Europe has suffered from the last two and half months of increases in oil prices. How could Europe intervene to stop the mechanism of war?

Freij: The poor countries in the world and especially East European countries will suffer most. The U.S. and multinational oil companies will dominate the production and sales of oil. But the standard of living and education in poor countries will worsen.

Europe can prevent the outbreak of war. The speech of the French President [François Mitterrand] in the U.N. last month contained some grains of hope.

The Soviet Union is adopting a wise and realistic policy. The policies of the United Kingdom are most unhelpful. Without European support, the U.S.A. cannot start war. *Iraq* will not fire the first bullet. Why cannot the Americans try diplomacy?

EIR: Don't you agree that economic cooperation and aid to uplift the well-being of all the peoples of the area is the best key to peace? Don't you think that we must apply to the Middle East situation the mandate of Pope Paul VI, "The new name for peace is development"?

Freij: I agree with the full contents of this paragraph as written by you.

EIR: Can you comment on the situation of the forces in Israel and in the Occupied Territories, who are in favor of a Palestinian state?

Freij: The forces or groups in Israel that support a Palestinian state are insignificant. Amongst the Palestinian people there is overwhelming policy in support of establishing a Palestinian state in accordance with [United Nations] Security Council Resolution 242.