

Bethlehem University is a beacon of hope in the Holy Land

Representatives of the Holy Land's only Catholic university met with a group of ambassadors to the Holy See in Rome to deepen understand the situation of the university, a multicultural and academic reference point in the region. The 3,400 students enrolled have found it increasingly difficult to access the campus since the beginning of the war.

"Bethlehem University is more than just a university. It is a beacon of hope for the Palestinian people and for people of all faiths across the globe who hold the Holy Land and its people dear. It nurtures future leaders who will play a crucial role in rebuilding their communities and fostering peace in the Middle East". This was stated by Lasallian Brother Jack Curran, Vice President for Advancement at the university, during a meeting held on 12 September at the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome bringing together representatives of the only Catholic university in Palestine and ambassadors to the Holy See, focusing on the dramatic reality of the students and their challenges, which have increased significantly since the crisis.

A safe haven from the conflict

Founded in 1973 by the Vatican and the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in response to the plea of the Palestinian people, in these times of war and instability **Bethlehem University "remains an educational lifeline to students and their families"**.

There are 3,400 students enrolled, of whom 800 are first-year students. **About half, says Brother Jack, live in insecurity to get to campus,** and this applies both to those arriving from Hebron, surrounded by checkpoints and settlements, and to those arriving from Jerusalem, connected to Bethlehem by two entrances that are periodically closed.

"For many," in fact, "the university is not only a place of academic growth, but also a safe haven from the conflict that surrounds them, thanks to its unwavering commitment to the pursue of truth, advancing social justice, and promoting peace

and understanding”.

A stimulus to share

Bethlehem University remains a pillar of strength and resilience for Palestinian students in these turbulent times,” remarked Brother Armin Luistro, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, “and **it is imperative that we help amplify their story and support their journey**”.

The meeting highlighted the need for global awareness and support for Bethlehem University, not only as an institution of higher education, but also as a force for peace and progress in a region marked by conflict. Ambassadors were encouraged to share the university’s story in their international networks to enhance its impact on Palestinian students and the global community.

Envisioning a peaceful future

“Education is always a fundamental tool for hope and change and, even more so in times of war, **Bethlehem University offers Palestinian students the opportunity to envision and build a peaceful future, despite the occupation and violence they suffer**,” stressed Brother Hector Hernan Santos Gonzalez, Vice Chancellor of the University.

Nestled in the heart of Bethlehem, just 500 metres from the Church of Nativity, the university serves a diverse student body of Christians and Muslims, “**offering a wide range of academic programmes that promote peace, dialogue and community development**, while preparing students for various professions with proficiency, confidence and character”.

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