

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary  
U.S Department of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

This letter is regarding the concerning reports that access to holy sites in Jerusalem was restricted by the Israeli government as Holy Week began.

On Palm Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2026, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa and a small group of other Catholic clergy were blocked by Israeli Authorities from celebrating the start of Easter Week at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where according to Christian tradition it is believed Jesus was crucified and resurrected. This was the first time in centuries that the Heads of the Church were prevented from celebrating Palm Sunday Mass at the Church. This site holds profound significance not only for Catholics and other Christians—who commemorate the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus—but also for Jews and Muslims, for whom Jerusalem is a sacred and shared spiritual center. The decision to block services drew strong condemnation from many as a violation of religious freedom, including Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni describing it as "an affront not only to believers but to any community that upholds religious freedom".

On March 30<sup>th</sup>, in response to the many concerns raised, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu altered the restrictions to permit access for “representatives of the Churches” to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the remainder of Holy Week.<sup>1</sup> However, other key holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Western Wall, remain closed to worshippers. While security concerns in Jerusalem are real and must be taken seriously, they should be addressed in ways that uphold—not restrict—religious freedom and dignity.

Pope Francis and now Pope Leo have repeatedly expressed concern about preserving access to holy sites and protecting the rights of worshippers, underscoring the importance of maintaining their historic importance and ensuring that sacred spaces remain open and respected. In a moment already marked by tension and conflict, protecting places like this is not just about one faith, but about safeguarding shared symbols of history, humanity, and coexistence for Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike. They become more important than ever in these times. And should serve as a reminder of the shared values of all faiths.

We urge the State Department to ensure the Israeli government closely consults with you as these decisions are made and strongly uphold access to these deeply holy sites during sacred moments.

---

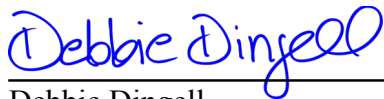
<sup>1</sup> “Joint Press Release: Holy Monday, 30 March 2026.” Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 30 Mar. 2026. Press Release.

In light of these restrictions on religious freedom, we respectfully request a response to the following questions within the next two weeks:

- Did the Israeli government consult with the United States prior to restricting access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other holy sites during religious holidays?
- Has the State Department expressed concerns to Israel regarding potential infringements on religious freedom related to these restrictions?
- Is the State Department taking action to ensure that access to holy sites in Jerusalem is preserved for religious observances?

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



---

Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress



---

Rosa L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress