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JERUSALEM CHURCHES PROTEST ISRAELI PROPERTY TAX BILL..... 1

Jerusalem churches protest Israeli property tax bill

Proposed legislation is reportedly aimed at expropriating church property in Jerusalem

Officials from three major Christian churches have condemned proposed Israeli legislation that they say is aimed at expropriating church property in Jerusalem, Israeli media reported Tuesday.

According to Israeli radio, Jerusalem’s Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III, Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Nourhan Manojian, and Custos of the Holy Land Francesco Patton (affiliated with the Catholic Church’s Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem) have sent a joint letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu protesting the draft legislation.

The bill, which was introduced by Rachel Azaria, a member of the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) for the centrist Kulanu Party, would allow properties in Jerusalem that were sold earlier by the Greek Orthodox Church to private developers to be handed over to the state.

“We call upon you, Mr. Prime Minister, to act quickly and decisively to block this bill, whose unilateral promotion will compel the Churches to reciprocate,” the three ecclesiastical officials said in the letter.

“We strongly believe this bill constitutes a systematic and unprecedented attack on the Christians of the Holy Land and violates their most basic rights,” they added.

They go on to describe the bill as “one of the main reasons for the crisis that developed between the Christian community in the Holy Land and the State of Israel last February”.

In February, Israel’s Jerusalem Municipality announced that the city was owed 650 million Israeli shekels (roughly \$186 million) in uncollected taxes on church property.