

## **Virtual Roundtable on Christian Cultural Heritage in Jerusalem**

On July 22, 2020, PASSIA organized a roundtable discussion on Christian Cultural Heritage in Jerusalem, under the EU-funded “Protection of the Christian and Islamic Cultural Heritage in Jerusalem (Irth)” Project. The main speaker was Dr. Bernard Sabella, Executive Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees. The meeting was held over Zoom due to the Covid-19 situation, with the participation of more than two dozen local and international intellectuals, diplomats and experts.

Dr. Sabella noted that Christianity as a religion is built into the geography and context of Palestine, with the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem as its epicenter. He said that with regard to the cultural aspect of Christianity in the Holy Land, it is the destination of pilgrimage for Christians from all denominations and all parts of the world. Dr. Sabella underlined the need for Palestinian Christians to connect with Christians in the West despite repeated unsuccessful attempts, explaining that Western Christians think that all Palestinians are Muslims and do not realize that the experience of Palestinian Christians is similar to that of the remaining Palestinian population in terms of pain, suffering, anticipation and hope.

Dr. Sabella emphasized that Palestinian Christians have always been part of the Palestinian national narrative, pointing that the dogmatic differences between Christianity and Islam do not negate the oneness of the historical experience. As such, he said that cultural manifestations of the Christian faith have become by extension cultural manifestations of the Palestinian heritage.

Dr. Sabella concluded that the beauty of the Palestinian Christian experience in Jerusalem is that Christians feel that they are in place and part of the place, so when Christmas is celebrated by Muslims and Christians, for example, Christians are reminded that they have a shared experience and cannot be separated from it.

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi emphasized the importance of collecting documents, materials and resources pertaining to the Christian cultural heritage in Jerusalem, and how much the Christian faith in Jerusalem is related, translated and portrayed by the Palestinians in terms of literature, art, novels, books and personalities, etc. He emphasized the strong, deep-rooted presence of Christianity in the culture of Jerusalem and how Christians have been defending the city in many aspects and by a variety of tools. He concluded that Christianity as a faith has always existed in Jerusalem, and that it is important to portray it in order to reach out to the younger generation which seems to be ignorant with regards to who is who in Jerusalem.