



الرحمة هي روح عيد الميلاد
Mercy is the Spirit of Christmas

The Speech Of

MS. VERA BABOUN, MAYOR OF BETHLEHEM

**On the occasion of the Lighting of th
Christmas Tree of Bethlehem Nativity Square**

Saturday - December 3rd, 2016



Your Excellency Prime Minister Dr. Rami Al-Hamdallah most respectful

Your excellences and your grace most respectful

Your Eminences, clergymen and sisters, most respectful

Honored Ambassadors and Consuls most respectful

Mayors and councilors most respectful

Chiefs of Security Agencies most respectful

Dear guests with preserving titles

On your behalf, I welcome His Excellency the Prime Minister Dr. Rami Al-Hamdallah, all the citizens of Bethlehem, those coming from different parts of the country, and all visitors and pilgrims from the various parts of the world. I would also like to welcome Mr. Guido Montanari, Deputy Mayor of Turin and the accompanying delegation present with us today. In addition to the delegations from Malta and Spain.

By the birth of baby Jesus in this humble grotto of Bethlehem, and as His Holiness Pope Francis refers to, God's mercy for humanity is manifested. This mercy is able to "convert barren lands into gardens, and infuse life into dead bones".

Based on that, the motto that we have chosen this year is: "Mercy is the Spirit of Christmas". We need mercy to renew ourselves and overwhelm the world with serenity and peace, and thus become life makers.

Let us think of children who are victims of wars, homeless families and wrecked homelands, due to wars and conflicts. Let us make life to those who lost its meaning, let us stop war and give peace, rebuild destroyed homelands, and then, we prove the meaning of faith and hope, where true mercy lays.



Dear Guests,

His Holiness Pope Francis says that children are diagnostic marks for the work of adults in the world. If a child is hungry it is because an adult didn't offer food for him, if a child died on the beach it is because an adult didn't save him. Also if a child laughs it is an adult who placed the smile on his face, if a child lived his childhood peacefully it is because an adult who provided it for him.

So let us make a better future for our children, the men of the future, so they will be leaders who build courageously and not destroy.

In Palestine, the land of heavenly messages, it is through the pervaded past of our fathers and ancestors that we continue to build, with strength, determination and constancy, in order to make a life where our children and youth would survive a better future. Thus, what humanistic inheritance are we transmitting to them? Let us pass to them what they deserve: hope, serenity and peace, so that they continue the journey.

Let 2017 witness the end of occupation in Palestine, for what this year unfolds of unique symbolism recalling 100 years of Balfour declaration, 70 years for the decision of the partition of Palestine, 30 years for the first Palestinian Intifada, and 10 years for the Palestinian internal division. Yes, it is time for the world to stand together in unity to end the suffering of our Palestinian people, whose identity resides in the sustainability of their existence as people and land.

As Palestinians, it is our right to determine our destiny, and this destiny by itself is Palestine; our soil, our land, our nation and our illustrious history.

Therefore, peace cannot prevail in the world unless Palestine lives it, as in Palestine the message of peace started. So, let us grant to this land the peace it deserves. This year, the Christmas Tree was decorated with a golden colour symbolizing the message of Bethlehem and Palestine. This message was scripted with letters of gold in history and the whole humanity, and will never rust. Such is our case engraved with letters of gold, it shines as gold, and will never rust.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our brothers and sisters in many parts in the Arab World live extremely difficult conditions. Their homes were destructed due to war, the families were, and still are, displaced. Today, in Christmas time, we address them using the same words the angels uttered when Jesus Christ was born: "Do not be afraid". With faith and courageous actions you shall rebuild what the war destroyed. You shall return to your homelands. With the power of your youth you shall build the future. And, from Palestine we ask the infant of the grotto to grant serenity and peace for you and your families.

At the end, I would like to especially thank His Excellency President of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) for his continuous support to the city of Bethlehem.

I as well thank His Excellency Prime Minister Dr. Rami Al-Hamdallah who strives to support Bethlehem especially in Christmas celebrations.

I also thank all those who contributed in organizing and sponsoring this celebration, especially: the State of Palestine, Bank of Palestine, Paltel Group, the Jerusalem District Electricity Company, and Bethlehem Development Foundation for supporting the celebrations for this year. I also thank the Bethlehem Scout Groups who teamed to play the Palestinian National Anthem and for their essential role in these celebrations.

Special thanks to Representative of the Republic of Malta in Palestine, Mr. Robin Gauci, for his efforts to make the participation of the Maltese Nun's Choir possible this evening. I would also like to thank Bethlehem Destination Christmas for bringing here the Orchestra of Oslo.

Last but not least, I want to give thank s to the Police Department and the National Security Agencies for their important role in organizing these celebrations, and for Palestine TV for organizing the live broadcast of our event tonight.

My special thanks go to my colleagues, City council members, municipal staff and Peace Centre who connected the day with the night to prepare for these celebrations.

Merry Christmas to all.

Vera Baboun
Mayor of Bethlehem

