



**The Mossawa Center:
The Advocacy Center for the Arab
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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pope Visit to Nazareth Can Illuminate Reality of Arab-Jewish Relations

HAIFA Thursday, May 14, 2009 – Nazareth, a city in northern Israel whose population is comprised primarily of Palestinian Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, is welcoming Pope Benedict XVI today. Tens of thousands of pilgrims and tourists are expected to congregate at Precipice Mountain where the Pope will lead mass.

This visit to an Arab city within Israel coincides with a new period of stress in relations between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens, exacerbated by recent events, such as the fallout from the War in Gaza and the election of Israel's far right government.. Mossawa Center's director, Jafar Farah comments, "We see the Pope's visit as extremely timely. The attention his visit is drawing from the international community will hopefully provide the peace process the push it needs."

The Pope has been criticised by both Palestinians and Israelis for not going far enough to acknowledge both sides' suffering. The criticism was particularly sharp from Israelis who have perceived the Pope's remarks at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial as 'lukewarm'. In Bethlehem, Monday 13 the Pope endorsed the creation of a Palestinian state, speaking with the separation barrier and a checkpoint as a backdrop which is, "a stark reminder of the stalemate that relations between Israelis and Palestinians seem to have reached", the Pope said

Today's visit to Nazareth will undoubtedly draw attention to the severe socioeconomic gaps between Arab and Jewish towns. Although the city's holy sites attract thousands of tourists, Arab businesses in Nazareth are often short-changed. Buses deposit tourists in the city for a short duration before delivering them to hotels and restaurants in other cities, draining potential revenues away from Nazareth. The Arab local council receives disproportionately low funding in the state development budget relative to its population, as do other Arab municipalities. In the country as a whole, 50 percent of Arab families live below the poverty line, compared to 15

percent of Jewish families. Farah observed, “The Pope’s visit will illuminate the poor socioeconomic condition of the city, and that reality on the ground will not be ignored.”

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The Mossawa Center, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that works to promote equality for the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. Established in 1997, the Mossawa Center strives to improve the social, economic and political status of the Arab citizens of Israel, while preserving their national and cultural rights as Palestinians.