

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1297/02

by Charles Tannock (PPE-DE), John Bowis (PPE-DE), Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE), Timothy Kirkhope (PPE-DE), James Nicholson (PPE-DE), Lennart Sacrédeus (PPE-DE), Theresa Villiers (PPE-DE) and Rainer Wieland (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: The future of the Samaritan community in Israel and the Occupied Territories

The small surviving community of Samaritans based in Holon, Israel and in Kiryat Luza, the Samaritan quarter on Mount Gerizim under the administration of the Palestinian Authority, has recovered from near extinction at the beginning of the last century to number approximately six hundred and fifty at present.

The community maintains the complete heritage of its people's traditional and cultural life; they speak ancient Hebrew and use the ancient Hebrew script and help to preserve a thousands-of-years-old historical and cultural tradition. They have also worked tirelessly to maintain good and constructive relationships with both their Israeli and Palestinian neighbours. Both Israel and the Palestinians have on more than one occasion expressed their commitment to safeguarding the welfare of the Samaritans, with the Palestinians having declared that they consider the Samaritans as an inseparable part of the Palestinian Entity.

Sadly, the life and economic viability of the community in Kiryat Luza has been severely disrupted in recent months following the upsurge of violence in the region, due to the decision of the Israeli government for security reasons to prevent access to the Samaritan's only Holy Centre on Mount Gerizim to Israelis, Palestinians and foreign tourists. The Samaritans themselves have been fired at on several occasions when travelling to Mount Gerizim and passage takes place in conditions of partial security.

It is the intention of the Samaritans to establish Mount Gerazim as a 'Zone of Peace' which can serve as a much-needed model for good intercommunal relations in the region, an idea which has received warm support from the UK Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ben Bradshaw. This, however, would involve the purchase of land (senior representatives of the Palestinian authority have apparently said that they would not prevent local Arabs from selling land to the Samaritans), the development of access roads and the building of a Peace Centre. Money is also needed to build a sewage system and a medical centre. Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority has so far felt it necessary to reject all of the Samaritan applications for regional development on the grounds that it is short of funds, whilst appeals to Israel have met with a strictly limited response.

Does the Commission support the proposal for a 'Zone of Peace' and will it consider providing direct assistance to the Samaritans if only to help ensure the survival of this beleaguered community?

Will it also discuss with Israel the unblocking of the roadblock to Mount Gerizim?