



**WORKING TOGETHER:**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**CMEP affirms the October 21st statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem.**

October 23, 2023  
Washington, D.C.

**Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) affirms the October 21st statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem.**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) affirms and echoes the call of The Patriarchs and the Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem's condemnation of the attack against a sacred place at the Orthodox Church compound of Saint Porphyrios in Gaza on the night of October 19, 2023. CMEP furthermore supports their call upon the international community to immediately enforce protections in Gaza for Sanctuaries of Refuge, such as hospitals, schools, and houses of worship. For an immediate humanitarian ceasefire so that food, water, and vital medical supplies can safely be delivered to the relief agencies ministering to the hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians in Gaza. And, that all warring parties would de-escalate the violence, and cease indiscriminately targeting civilians on all sides.

See below for the full text of the letter.



## PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

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### **Jerusalem's Christian Spiritual Leaders Host the Archbishop of Canterbury and Collectively Call for Restraint, De-escalation of Violence, and Protection of Civilians**

Jerusalem, October 21, 2023

*"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me." (Matthew 25:35-36)*

We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, having gathered in prayer with Jerusalem's honorable guest, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, join with him in expressing, in the strongest possible terms, our condemnation of the Israeli airstrikes that exploded without warning at the Orthodox Church compound of Saint Porphyrios in Gaza on the night of October 19<sup>th</sup>.

These blasts led to the sudden and catastrophic collapse of two church halls around the scores of refugees, including women and children, sleeping within. Dozens found themselves instantly crushed beneath the rubble. Many were injured—some severely. At last count, eighteen have died, nine of whom were children.

In condemning this attack against a sacred place of refuge, we cannot ignore that this is but the latest instance of innocent civilians being injured or killed as a result of missile strikes against other shelters of last resort. Among these are schools and hospitals where refugees had fled because their homes were demolished in the relentless bombing campaign waged against residential areas in Gaza over the past two weeks.

Despite the devastation wrought upon our own and other social, religious, and humanitarian institutions, we, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches, nevertheless remain fully committed to fulfilling our sacred and moral duty of offering assistance, support, and refuge to those civilians who come to us in such desperate need. Even in the face of ceaseless military demands to evacuate our charitable institutions and houses of worship, we will not abandon this Christian mission, for there is literally no other safe place for these innocents to turn.

As the above passage of Scripture reminds us, our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to minister to the most vulnerable. And we must do so not only in times of peace. The church must especially act as the church in times of war, for that is when human suffering is at its greatest.

Yet we cannot accomplish this mission alone. We therefore call upon the international community to immediately enforce protections in Gaza for Sanctuaries of Refuge, such as hospitals, schools, and houses of worship. And we call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire so that food, water, and vital medical supplies can safely be delivered to the relief agencies ministering to the hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians in Gaza, including those operated by our own churches.

Finally, we call upon all warring parties to de-escalate the violence, cease from indiscriminately targeting civilians on all sides, and operate within the international rules of warfare. Only in this way, we believe, can the groundwork be laid for an eventual diplomatic consideration of longstanding grievances so that a just and lasting peace can finally be achieved throughout our beloved Holy Land—both in our time, and for generations to come.

—The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem

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*Formed in 1984, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is a coalition of more than 30 national church communions and organizations, including Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions that works to encourage US policies that actively promote a comprehensive resolution to conflicts in the Middle East with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. CMEP works to mobilize US Christians to embrace a holistic perspective and to be advocates of equality, human rights, security, and justice for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of the Middle East.*

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**Recent CMEP statements:**

October 20, 2023: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Condemns Attack Against St. Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza](#). CMEP reiterates that even during times of active hostilities, all efforts must be made to protect religious institutions.

October 19, 2023: [CMEP Calls for a Ceasefire and Issues Desperate Plea: President Biden's Humanitarian Relief is Not Getting to People in Gaza](#). While the United Nations reports the convoy includes [ready-to-eat food](#), development experts on the ground in Gaza have communicated to CMEP concerns that at least some of the food in the trucks waiting in convoy in Egypt would need to be cooked, requiring water, gas, and/or electricity to which displaced people in Gaza do not have access. . . . Water is not getting to people in Southern Gaza because there is no electricity to pump water through the system and because there is so much damage to pipelines because of extensive bombing. [Read more](#).

October 19, 2023: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) affirms the October 17th statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem](#), "mourning civilian victims of the massacre in Gaza and extending solidarity to the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem." CMEP issued a statement [expressing sadness and outrage](#) at the bombing of Al Ahli Hospital and agrees this attack is a "profound transgression against the very principles held by humanity." We stand in solidarity with the churches of the Holy Land and the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and call for people to [respond through Prayer, Giving, and Action](#).

October 17, 2023: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Expresses Sadness and Outrage at Bombing of Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza](#). Today, Christians around the world followed the call of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem for a day of prayer and fasting for peace and reconciliation and an end to the war between Israel and Hamas. Even as we pray, we find ourselves confronting immense pain and a devastating death toll after the bombing of Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, an Anglican hospital in Gaza. Al-Ahli Arab Hospital has provided a critical and courageous ministry of health care provision to serve the people of Gaza for many years.

[See the full list of CMEP statements here.](#)

## Contact Us

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