

## Public Statement

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### **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Condemns Death and Killing of World Central Kitchen Aid Workers and those Seeking Aid in Gaza**

On April 1, seven aid workers with World Central Kitchen (WCK) were [killed in an airstrike](#) when their convoy came under fire after leaving a food distribution warehouse in Deir al Balah, Central Gaza. The aid workers included six foreign citizens and a Palestinian. The disaster relief agency, World Central Kitchen, which had recently begun to distribute food in Gaza that was shipped from Cyprus, was founded by Chef José Andrés. WCK had coordinated with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) about their operations and suspended them after the incident. The IDF has admitted its responsibility for the airstrike. Other aid groups have suspended their activities due to the dangerous conditions.

**Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) calls for an international investigation and accountability for the death of the WCK aid workers and calls on international governments to demand international law be applied in the distribution of aid in the Gaza Strip.** This incident is the latest of several in which those distributing, or seeking aid, have been killed as “collateral damage” between warring parties with indiscriminate concern for civilian life and disregard for humanitarian law. A fundamental principle of international humanitarian law is the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid during armed conflict. These deaths are appalling; the international community is rightly reacting with anger and should be similarly outraged by the deaths of so many Palestinians, including aid workers, in Gaza over these months and years due to Israeli military actions and blockade.

On February 29, 2024, the United Nations Relief Chief [said](#), “Life is draining out of Gaza at a terrifying speed,” referring specifically to what became known as the “flour massacre,” an [incident in North Gaza](#) that resulted in at least 117 people killed and more than 700 people injured in the early morning hours as they

sought food from food distribution trucks in North Gaza after being shot at by Israeli soldiers attempting to keep order and the subsequent stampede. Numerous incidents have been reported of people in Gaza, desperately in need of food and basic life services, being shot at while seeking to receive aid. On March 15, 2024, after CNN [reported](#) an attack of shelling that killed 20 people and resulted in 155 injured at a Gaza aid point in Kuwait Square, Israel denied responsibility. Meanwhile, on March 29, the World Bank and United Nations released a [report](#) stating that more than half of Gaza's population is on the brink of famine, with the whole population "experiencing acute food insecurity and malnutrition." Meanwhile, the Israeli government continues to put [restrictions on the aid that is able to enter Gaza](#), which officials around the world have decried as "starving Palestinians."

**CMEP reiterates the need for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to be able to continue to provide human assistance without excessive security restrictions and with adequate funding.** It remains the essential United Nations entity for this work and should not be encumbered. Furthermore, it is urgent that Congress rescind its prohibitions on US funding of UNRWA and that the Administration lift the current suspension of US assistance.

**Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) condemns the Israeli actions that have led to food insecurity, disease, and death in Gaza. CMEP calls for an immediate, permanent, and comprehensive ceasefire.** The average number of people killed every day in Gaza is just under two hundred people a day, with roughly one person dying every eight minutes. As of March 21, at least [31,988](#) Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip since last Oct. 7, the vast majority of whom are women and children. The Gaza Strip has been declared one of the most dangerous places in the world to live, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The World Health Organization (WHO) describes the situation as "[catastrophic](#)," as children are dying from hunger and dehydration.

The United States government has not adequately addressed the limitations on humanitarian assistance and aid entering into Gaza. Airdrops and shipments by sea are among the least efficient mechanisms of developing aid, especially when trucks carrying necessary food and medical supplies are queued up for miles waiting to enter Gaza by land. Air drops can be hazardous or even deadly. For example, [five children](#) in Gaza at the beginning of March were killed when a parachute did not deploy. Others have [lost their lives](#) attempting to retrieve supplies that plunged into the Mediterranean Sea. On March 13, solar panels on the Al Ahli Hospital were damaged in an airdrop.

Even in the midst of famine in Gaza, the United States government under the Biden Administration continues to send more weapons to Israel. Though the United Nations adopted a resolution calling for a [ceasefire](#), the United States and President Biden continue to approve the delivery of additional weapons. **CMEP stands with [global church leaders](#), more than 140 bishops, and others who came together last week during Holy Week and called on all international governments, including the United States, "to halt additional military support and arms to Israel and not be complicit in the ongoing military campaign that is having such devastating effects on civilians in Gaza."**

Gazans are being killed every day by Israeli bombardment. Palestinians in Gaza are facing two options: To die from U.S-funded armaments or to die from famine and starvation. Incidents like the shooting of Palestinians while desperately seeking food or aid workers trying to provide it will keep happening unless we take action. Gazans will keep starving. Death in Gaza will only stop when Israel abides by international law and the international community enforces and applies such law.

We call for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire where all combatants lay down their weapons and Israeli hostages and Palestinian political prisoners held without the due process of law are released. Immediate and adequate humanitarian assistance must be provided for the more than two million Palestinian people in Gaza who have such desperate needs. We support efforts toward a negotiated settlement that addresses the core causes of the current crisis and brings an end to the decades-long violations of the rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with international law, such solutions must advance security and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians.

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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.*

## Contact Us

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