



For Immediate Release:

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP): CMEP Meets with Sam Brownback, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom (IRF)

Washington, D.C. - March 12, 2018

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and our member Board denominations thank Ambassador Sam Brownback, Office for International Religious Freedom (IRF), for the opportunity to meet last Wednesday, March 7, 2018. CMEP presented our concerns about the [tax and land confiscation issues](#) under consideration by the Jerusalem municipality and in the Israeli legislature, respectively. The threats to the Status Quo in Jerusalem ultimately led to the closure of the [Church of the Holy Sepulchre](#) in February. CMEP also expressed concerns about President Trump's intent to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. CMEP will continue to meet with U.S. government officials, international embassies, and others to call on the Israeli government to maintain the Status Quo and to protect the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

We are grateful for the attentiveness of Ambassador Brownback and IRF to the intended taxation of churches in Israel and the proposed Israeli legislation around Church-owned land sales/leases. We are appreciative that the Ambassador shares our concerns about religious freedom in Israel and the Middle East. Back and future taxes on properties not related to worship is contrary to the historic Status Quo agreement and will have a devastating impact on churches in the Holy Land and the efficacy of the Christian mission of educating, helping, and healing. We recommend the [committee formed](#) by the Israeli government to discuss taxes resolve the issue expeditiously and remove the Church Lands Bill from consideration entirely.

Ambassador Brownback's commitment to tracking incidents against Christians in the Holy Land by the Office for International Religious Freedom is appreciated and must continue as pressure and derogatory incidents in the region continue to rise, including increased [acts of vandalism](#) and harassment against Christian (and other) religious individuals and communities. CMEP is committed to religious freedom, for all religions, and believes it critical to a sustainable future peace agreement in the Middle East. We promote a shared Jerusalem by Palestinians and Israelis, as well as full access to the Holy Sites of the three religious communities — Jews, Christians, and Muslims — by those who call them holy.

Contact:

Katie McRoberts

katie@cmep.org

Ph. 202-543-1222

Formed in 1984, [Churches for Middle East Peace](#) is a [coalition of 27 national church denominations and organizations](#), including Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions. It works to encourage U.S. government policies that actively promote a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ensuring security, human rights and religious freedom for all people of the region. [Click here to unsubscribe](#).

media@cmep.org | 202-543-1222 | Fax 202-543-5025
110 Maryland Avenue NE | Suite 311 | Washington, DC 20002

