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CMEP Statement on Tragic Murders in Itamar (March 14, 2011)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) strongly denounces the tragic and senseless killing of five members of the Fogel family in Itamar, a small Israeli settlement in the northern part of the West Bank near Nablus on March 11. It welcomes the strong condemnation of the attack by the Palestinian Authority.

This killing, which included three young children, is abhorrent, immoral, and as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said, a crime against humanity. CMEP sends our prayers and heartfelt condolences to the family, community, and all those impacted by this violence in the Holy Land.

These terrible murders are all the more devastating because they demonstrate the endemic social corrosion that is a symptomatic of stagnant peace process. Without any evidence of progress toward a negotiated agreement, Palestinians and Israelis alike face a future in limbo, devastating in its uncertainty, volatility, and enduring violence. Such uncertainty only enables extremists on both sides.

CMEP is also deeply troubled by the response of the Israeli government to this tragedy. The Israeli cabinet announced March 12 the building of several hundred new housing units in settlements in response to the murders and to pressure from far-right constituencies. Prime Minister Netanyahu was quoted as saying, "They murder, we build."

Such a sentiment dangerously implies that terror causes settlement construction, but also implicitly the reverse, that settlement construction causes terror. This action will not placate a grieving and angry community and could serve to escalate an already dire situation.

Israeli opposition leader Tzipi Livy, voiced a potent warning, saying, "It is not enough to call for the world to criticize terror. Our ability to gain legitimacy to fight terror depends on our attempts to reach an agreement [with the Palestinians]."

CMEP agrees. It has never been clearer that all of us must work now to find a way to end this conflict that breeds such violence. In a [letter sent to President Obama \(http://www.cmep.org/content/letter-president-obama-un-settlement-veto-and-further-peace-efforts\)](http://www.cmep.org/content/letter-president-obama-un-settlement-veto-and-further-peace-efforts) last week, CMEP called for actions that will hold each side accountable for creating the conditions necessary for negotiations to succeed and address the fear and mistrust that prevents agreement. These actions are today even more urgent.

This tragedy offers a shocking reminder that walls, fences, and border patrols do not ensure safety. Only a just and comprehensive peace can do that.