



For Immediate Release: *Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP): US Government's Human Rights Report Intentional Omission of the Status of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights as Occupied Territories Deeply Problematic*

Washington, D.C. - April 26, 2018

The U.S. Department of State's [2017 annual human rights report](#) released on Friday, April 20, significantly reduced references to the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights as the occupied territories. **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) objects to this notable change in State Department language and sees the omission of the identification of Occupied Territories in the title of the report as deeply problematic.** CMEP calls upon the State Department to consider all reports of human rights violations in the West Bank, Gaza, and Golan Heights within the context of Israel's ongoing military occupation, as they have done under all previous administrations since 1979.

The State Department has issued an annual report on human rights in every United Nations member state since 1977. These reports have included a section titled "Israel and The Occupied Territories" since 1979. The failure to acknowledge the reality of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights downplays the systemic nature of the human rights violations documented in the 2017 report. These include reports of "politically and religiously motivated killings by nonstate groups and individuals; administrative detention of Palestinians...; and legal requirements and official rhetoric that adversely affected the operating environment for human rights nongovernmental organizations." All of these reported violations stem from the wider unresolved issue of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Despite the critical change in language related to the Occupied Territories, the continued inclusion of the issue of child detentions is an example of why this report remains of import and is valued by CMEP.

CMEP's Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon says, "The U.S. State Department's Human Rights Reports are a critical tool for monitoring violations of human rights in Israel and the occupied territories and around the world. It is critical that rhetoric around historic U.S. foreign policy not be changed to reflect the biases of any given Administration. According to international and U.S. foreign policy, the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza are occupied territories and must continue to be acknowledged as such in the U.S. Human Rights Reports."

East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights have been under Israeli military occupation since the Six Day War in 1967. [CMEP advocates](#) for an end to the Israeli occupation of

East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip in order to promote a solution that advances security and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians.

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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.](#)

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