



For Immediate Release: *Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP): Participating in Non-violent Border Demonstrations is Not an Act of Terrorism*

Washington, D.C. - April 4, 2018

The Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) use of live fire to suppress unarmed civilian demonstrators along the Gaza border on Friday, March 30 and over the weekend, constitutes unwarranted and excessive use of military force condemnable under international law. **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) denounces the violence, which resulted in 18 fatalities and more than 1,400 casualties, at least 750 of which were from live fire. We fully affirm the right of the Palestinian people to engage in nonviolent resistance.**

The participation of 30,000 Palestinians in demonstrations along the Gaza fence in observance of "Land Day," was a nonviolent act of political protest commemorating the death of six Palestinians during the general strike of 1976. The event's endorsement by all major political parties in Gaza--including Hamas--does not delegitimize the peaceful actions of the demonstrators nor justify the classification of the protest area as a "combat zone." While the assembly of tens of thousands of civilians along the border fence and attempts of a few isolated individuals to breach the fence are legitimate causes for security concerns, resorting to live fire against unarmed demonstrators is a negligent and inexcusable response that failed to distinguish between those who came to protest peacefully and those with more malicious intentions.

Maha Mehanna, a human rights activist in Gaza affiliated with Other Voice and Friendship Across Borders, writes that demonstrators, **"...came to show the world that Gazans 'deserve to live.' We will continue to camp here and come daily until someone looks at us and there is a solution to our difficult, miserable, and unbearable reality."**

The Gaza Strip is home to two million Palestinians, seventy percent of whom are the descendants of refugees displaced in 1948. The current humanitarian crisis in Gaza is among the worst in the world with 80 percent of the population living below the poverty line. Since the 2014 war, the average Gazan receives as little as four hours of electricity per day. CMEP calls on Israel to cease its violent response to protests at the border and to take the humanitarian and developmental needs of Gaza, in addition to the human rights concerns of its residents, into account as it addresses its own security concerns.

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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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