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Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP): Nation-State Bill Passed by Knesset Raises Concerns

On Thursday, July 19, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, passed the ["Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People"](#) bill, one of many Basic Laws that collectively serve as Israel's constitution. **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), while reiterating its support for Israel as a democratic state, expresses its gravest concern over the harm that this new Basic Law will inflict upon Israel's cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities, which account for 20% of Israel's population.** This law will have devastating effects on the rights of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Palestinians with resident status living in Jerusalem.

While affirming the historic ties of the Jewish people to the land of Israel and supporting the Jewish people's right of self-determination, CMEP denounces the following sections of the Nation-State Bill as discriminatory and detrimental to a comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians. CMEP stresses the importance of maintaining a distinction between the State of Israel and the Land of Israel, as noted in Section 1, and ardently rejects any interpretations of these clauses that would allow for future revision of Israel's borders to reflect ancient geographic definitions. CMEP finds the demotion of Arabic from official language to a language of "special status" in Section 4 a grave insult to Israelis of Palestinian ancestry, in addition to Druze and other Arabic speaking minority groups. Furthermore, CMEP fears that the adoption of a national policy to promote the "establishment and consolidation" of Jewish settlement as called for in Section 7 will require the Israeli government to enact laws promoting the welfare of the Jewish community in Israel above all other citizens thus mandating a policy of cultural, ethnic, and religious discrimination.

"The passing of the Nation-State bill is a threat to the rights of all minorities living in Israel," says Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, CMEP's executive director. "We stand with the many groups and others who believe this law damages the legitimacy of Israel's democracy. In addition, this law, with its emphasis on promoting Jewish 'communities,' stands to further embolden the expansion of Israeli only settlements both within East Jerusalem and the West Bank. At a time when Palestinian communities like Khan al Ahmar and Susya are living under the constant and imminent shadow of demolition, this law has the potential to hasten their displacement."

The passage of this legislation coincides with increased calls within far-right Israeli circles for the annexation of Area C of the West Bank, the implementation of loyalty tests for Jerusalemite Palestinians, as well as heightened tensions along the Gaza border, the worst since the 2014 war. Within such a context, CMEP views this most recent Basic Law as a rejection of a two-state solution, opening the way to the annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and legal disenfranchisement of Israel's minorities.

CMEP asserts its conviction that only a comprehensive negotiated peace can achieve security for Israelis and sovereignty for Palestinians. CMEP urges both parties to abstain from further violence in the Gaza Strip and calls for the resumption of peace talks to resolve outstanding Final Status Issues. CMEP also calls on the U.S. Department of State to investigate the Nation-State law in its next 2018 Human Rights Report and its 2018 report on International Religious Freedom. The U.S. must call on Israel to embrace

human rights and democratic freedoms for all of its residents living in Israel and the occupied territories.

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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