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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Washington, D.C. - February 23, 2023**

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#### **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Condemns Increasing Violence and Calls on the United States and Israel to Address Core Issues of Settlements and State Violence**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) condemns the alarming increase in violence against Palestinians in the West Bank by Israeli authorities and settlers. Every day brings news of new violations, killings, and provocations. Core issues—Israeli settlement activities, lack of accountability for settler and state violence, and provocations at Al-Aqsa Mosque—must be solved for cycles of violence to end. CMEP calls on the United States to do everything in its power to intervene to stop violence from both sides.

On Sunday, February 12, the Israeli cabinet moved to legitimize nine illegal Israeli outposts in the West Bank. These outposts are considered illegal by the international community, international law, and by Israel itself. Finance Minister Betzalel Smotrich, a settler himself, also announced on the same day that plans were moving forward to build 10,000 new residential units in existing settlements, the largest single expansion in years.

In the past, these kinds of settlement developments have occasionally been challenged by the Supreme Court of Israel, but the new government is advancing laws that would severely curtail needed judicial oversight of Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). The massive protests taking place in Israel right now are in opposition to this move to reduce judicial oversight. These cabinet actions are a natural outcome of the radical position the new government expressed late last year to [“promote and develop the settlement of all parts of the Land of Israel — in the Galilee, the Negev, the Golan and Judea and Samaria.”](#) This settlement action demonstrates that the new Israeli government is not merely radical in its rhetoric but also in its policies on core issues that fuel violence.

Wednesday, February 22, brought headlines of further violence. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) [made an incursion into Nablus](#), killing 11 people and wounding more than 100 others. Settler groups entered

and openly prayed at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. [Settlers cut down olive trees](#) owned by Palestinian farmers south of Nablus.

CMEP's executive director Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, said, "I am horrified by the latest flood of violence, the killings, the raids, the provocations. Tensions are overflowing. Families are grieving. People are scared and angry. When will the current US administration wake up and truly engage? We must act to end violence on both sides by addressing the core issues that fuel the conflict."

[Israel agreed to reduce its raids in West Bank cities](#) last weekend in a negotiation to prevent a UN binding resolution calling for a halt to settlement activities. The raid into Nablus on Wednesday violates the spirit of that agreement.

On February 14, the U.S. State Department [joined with the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, Italy, and the U.K.](#) to express they "strongly oppose" Israel's settlement expansions, stating that they "only serve to exacerbate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians."

CMEP calls on the United States to follow up on their statement with action. Words are not enough. The United States government and the Biden Administration should take a clear and explicit position that settlements are inconsistent with international law and that the United States will distinguish between settlements and Israel proper in its dealings with Israel. Furthermore, Congress must ensure that no U.S. aid to Israel is used to annex Palestinian land, forcibly remove Palestinians from their land, or demolish Palestinian structures. Only when these and other core issues are addressed can the cycle of violence end.

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*Formed in 1984, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is a coalition of more than 30 national church communions and organizations, including Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions that works to encourage US policies that actively promote a comprehensive resolution to conflicts in the Middle East with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. CMEP works to mobilize US Christians to embrace a holistic perspective and to be advocates of equality, human rights, security, and justice for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of the Middle East.*

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