

Resource Page: Hamas and Israel War, October 2023

Description and Issues

On Saturday morning, October 7, 2023, Hamas commenced brutal attacks against Israel, firing thousands of rockets into Southern Israel and militants crossing into Israel on the ground and by air. These horrific attacks included the murder and kidnapping of civilians, including children. Israel began bombing Gaza and moving against the Hamas fighters entering Southern Israel. As of Thursday, October 12, the death toll stands at almost 3,000 people, with thousands more injured and more than 300,000 internally displaced Palestinians inside Gaza, according to the United Nations. The 16-year ongoing blockade of Gaza closed the territory off by land and sea. This past week, the Israeli government extended the siege and exercised collective punishment by cutting off electricity, food, water, and fuel in Gaza, where more than 2.2 million people live, over half of whom are under the age of 18. With hundreds of thousands of Israeli reservists massing at the border with Gaza, fears are now of a full-scale ground invasion.

CMEP calls on all parties to cease violence immediately and to use peaceful means to pursue desired outcomes. Hamas must cease its violence, the targeting of civilians and release all hostages immediately. Israel should cease its bombing campaign on Gaza – the civilian death toll is unacceptable—and lift the recently imposed heightened blockade of water, food, fuel, and other resources Gazans require to run their hospitals and feed themselves.

Israel's response to Hamas's attack quickly crossed the line into collective punishment. Hamas is not equivalent to Palestinians in Gaza nor to all Palestinians. The indiscriminate bombing and withholding of critical resources like water, food, and fuel from civilians in Gaza are a form of collective punishment that is immoral and illegal by international law.

The Israeli bombing and blockade of Gaza have devastated the enclave and exacerbated humanitarian conditions, causing the forced displacement of more than half the population. The violence has caused loss of life, grief, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure and stopped the flow of resources needed for life. These developments have and will continue to devastate the health and well-being of millions of people. Even before the war, Gaza faced widespread food insecurity and poverty. Now, with the complete siege Israel has imposed, the humanitarian situation is an even more devastating crisis.

Until the violence stops, infrastructure is restored, and resources can flow where they are most needed, many of these devastating realities will go unaddressed. But even after the war ends, rebuilding and addressing the humanitarian crisis will only be the beginning of what must be addressed.

The longstanding Israeli siege of Gaza has created a dire humanitarian and human rights catastrophe in Gaza. This policy of closure hems 2.3 million Palestinians into Gaza, making it one of the most densely populated territories in the world. Making the situation worse, Israel has not allowed sufficient import of basic goods like food and water or sufficient mobility for work. The results are a strangled economy, chronic humanitarian needs, food insecurity, and ongoing desperation.

Summary of Key Events (timeline)

- October 7, 2023: Hamas launched a devastating series of attacks against Israel, launching thousands of rockets into southern Israel and staging ground attacks against Israeli military facilities and villages near Gaza, slaughtering civilians and taking an estimated 100 hostages back into Gaza.
- October 7, 2023: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised “mighty vengeance” for Israel following Hamas’ attack.¹ Israel commenced air strikes against hundreds of targets in Gaza. Air strikes continued in the following days.
- October 7, 2023: Members of Congress and President Biden widely denounced Hamas and declared their unequivocal support for Israel. Biden: “Israel has the right to defend itself and its people - full stop.”² The United States moved US naval assets to the eastern Mediterranean in support of Israel and deterrence against regional actors that might consider expanding the war on new fronts.
- October 10, 2023: Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant and Energy Minister Israel Katz vowed to cut off “electricity, food [and] fuel” and water to Gaza.³ Israel took measures to impose a complete lockdown on Gaza and cut off food, water, and electricity to Gaza.
- October 11, 2023: Hezbollah exchanged rocket fire with Israel along Israel’s northern border, further igniting fears of an expanded regional war.
- October 17, 2023: The Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza City was struck by an explosion that killed hundreds of people. Investigations as to the source of the explosion are ongoing.
- October 18, 2023: United States President Biden visited Israel and strongly supported Israel’s measures in Gaza.

CMEP Links

October 19, 2023: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) affirms the October 17th statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, “mourning civilian victims of the massacre in Gaza and extending solidarity to the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.” CMEP expressed [sadness and outrage](#) at the bombing of Al Ahli Hospital and agrees this attack is a “profound transgression against the very principles held by humanity.” We stand in solidarity with the churches of the Holy Land and the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and call for people to [respond through Prayer, Giving, and Action](#).

October 17, 2023: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Expresses Sadness and Outrage at Bombing of Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza. Today, Christians around the world followed the call of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem for a day of prayer and fasting for peace and reconciliation and an end to the war between Israel and Hamas. Even as we pray,

¹ “Israel’s Netanyahu vows ‘mighty vengeance’ against Hamas.” *Reuters*, 7 Oct. 2023. [Link](#).

² Rod, Marc. “U.S. officials, lawmakers, across political spectrum offer support for Israel [...]” *Jewish Insider*, 7 Oct 2023. [Link](#).

³ Eglash, Ruth Marks. “After securing the border, Israel’s military turns to destroying terrorist infrastructure in Gaza.” *Jewish Insider*, 10 Oct. 2023. [Link](#).

we find ourselves confronting immense pain and a devastating death toll after the bombing of Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, an Anglican hospital in Gaza. Al-Ahli Arab Hospital has provided a critical and courageous ministry of health care provision to serve the people of Gaza for many years.

October 13, 2023: CMEP Joins United Nations in Call Not to Ignore Gazans “Dying at the World’s Watch.” CMEP and our member communions call for the world not to ignore the catastrophic crisis happening in Gaza.

October 13, 2023: CMEP Affirms Statement from Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem.

October 12, 2023: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joined 26 other Church-based denominations and organizations in a letter to Congress to call for a ceasefire, restraint by all sides, protection of civilians, and release of hostages.

October 9, 2023: CMEP Implores Restraint, De-escalation of Conflict, Humanitarian Access, and Addressing Core Issues of Conflict Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) continues to grieve the devastating loss of life in Israel/Palestine. As the numbers of those killed and injured climb, we ask people of faith to remain committed to praying and working toward an immediate end to the violence. Yet, cessation of conflict will not automatically bring justice. Without attention to the core systemic issues of the war and the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory, there will be no real peace. At a time when the rush by governments will be for more military responses, CMEP prays for the de-escalation of violence to prevail. We urge an escalation of diplomatic efforts by the United States, through the United Nations, and other regional bodies. Too many people are already grieving the loss of loved ones.

October 7, 2023: CMEP Condemns All Acts of Violence, Calls for Prayer, and Implores Global Leaders to Address Core Issues of the War between Hamas and Israel: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is deeply grieved by the news coming out of Israel and Gaza today. CMEP condemns all acts of violence against civilians that have occurred in the past twenty-four hours, as fighting has escalated between Hamas and Israel. As of late Saturday (EDT), reports indicated that hundreds have been killed and thousands wounded, both Israelis and Palestinians. CMEP mourns with the victims of the violence and their families.

Previous [statements](https://cmep.org/press/public-statements/) from CMEP about Gaza and other issues can be found here:

CMEP’s Issue Page about Gaza
<https://cmep.org/issues/resources-on-gaza/>

Additional Resources

[Harvard Divinity School Panel Provides 'Theological Perspective' on War in Israel and Palestine](#), The Harvard Crimson, October 19, 2023

[Morning Prayers at Harvard Memorial Church 2023-2024](#), Prayer from Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, Harvard Memorial Church, October 18, 2023

[In the Mideast, Evangelical Leaders Need to Stand with People, Not States](#), by Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, Religion News Service (RNS), October 17, 2023

[Politics365 Podcast with Mae Elise Cannon](#), Los Angeles, CA, Interview with Mae Elise Cannon, Politics365.com Podcast, October 12, 2023

[Christian Leaders Condemn Violence Yet Urge Justice for Palestine](#), Sojourners, October 11, 2023

[What Christian Peace Building Looks Like In Israel And Palestine](#). Sojourners, Oct. 10, 2023.