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**Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Affirms the Statement by Senators Van Hollen, Schatz,
Merkley, and Welch on the Designation of Israel to Visa Waiver Program**

September 27, 2023
Washington, D.C.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) affirms the below statement by Senators Van Hollen, Schatz, Merkley, and Welch. CMEP opposes Israel's admittance into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program given Israel's ongoing discriminatory treatment of Americans of Arab and/or Palestinian descent who try to enter ports of entry that Israel controls. We join members of Congress and civil society leaders who call for continued monitoring to verify that all United States travelers are being treated equally. Should discriminatory behaviors continue, we call on the Biden Administration to revisit Israel's participation in the Visa Waiver Program.

[VAN HOLLEN, SCHATZ, MERKLEY, WELCH RELEASE STATEMENT ON DESIGNATION OF ISRAEL TO VISA WAIVER PROGRAM](#)

Today, U.S. Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), and Peter Welch (D-Vt.) released the following statement regarding U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's nomination and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas's designation of Israel to join the Visa Waiver Program.

"As longtime supporters of the close U.S.-Israel relationship, we support Israel's candidacy to join the Visa Waiver Program, once it meets all of the requirements of the Program required by law – the same standard that we apply to all our other VWP partners. But to date, Israel has failed to meet the 'Blue is Blue' requirement. Adherence to this important American tenet of reciprocity and equal treatment of all U.S. citizens is critical to the integrity of the Visa Waiver Program, and we are deeply concerned with the Administration's decision to move forward in violation of that principle. We will carefully monitor the situation to determine whether Americans continue to face discrimination based on their ethnicity, national origin, or religion. And we will keep pressing for answers as to how the U.S. government will ensure that Israel ultimately comes into full compliance with VWP requirements as well as what mechanisms the U.S. has to monitor the implementation of one system for all U.S. citizen travelers by May 1, 2024."

The U.S. and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in July, setting the conditions for Israel's entry into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program. According to the MOU, Israel is expected to fully implement one system that all U.S. citizen travelers can use for purposes of visa waiver travel by May 1, 2024.

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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