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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**CMEP Joins Christian Faith Leaders in Letter to President Biden about Protection of Holy Land
Christians**

September 28, 2023
Washington, D.C.

On September 11, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joined several Christian denominational leaders in a letter to President Biden highlighting “deep concern” for Holy Land Christians before his September 20 [meeting](#) with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. CMEP recognizes the deep roots and significance of Jerusalem and holy sites throughout Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories as sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Tragically, today in the region, all three Abrahamic faith traditions are not given equal access and protection. In light of recent escalating attacks on Palestinian Christian clergy and holy sites under the current Israeli government, CMEP is especially concerned about the sustainability and protection of the historic Christian community.

CMEP [stands for religious freedom for all](#). The current proposal to incorporate the Mount of Olives into a National Park will dispossess Palestinian Christian residents and Middle Eastern churches. This proposal not only represents a direct attack on religious freedom but also forbodes further displacement and expulsion of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem.

Increased incidents against Christians are only one of the realities and consequences of the current extreme government in Israel today. Throughout the year, CMEP has been calling attention to the violence and devastating effects on Palestinians living under occupation in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. It has been challenging to call adequate attention to the treatment of Christians in Jerusalem and Israel when civilians, including women and children, have been killed due to escalating violence and extremism. By mid-August 2023, more than 200 Palestinians and nearly 30 Israelis have

been [killed](#) in the conflict thus far this year. That is the highest number of fatalities in a year since 2005 during the Second Intifada.

Below is the letter signed by Christian denominational and organizational leaders sent to President Biden. A concurrent letter with similar messaging was signed by several additional Christian leaders and sent to President Biden prior to his meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu and can be found [here](#).

President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

September 11, 2023

Dear President Biden:

Subject: Urgent Call regarding Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land

As leaders of Christian communions and agencies in the United States, we write to you with a deep concern for the well-being of our fellow Christians in the Holy Land, and in support of the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem who have spoken publicly on the challenges facing their communities. Ahead of your upcoming meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, we urgently appeal to you to address the escalating violence, incitement, and hate crimes against Palestinian Christians under the new Israeli government.

Palestinian Christians today represent the continuous Christian presence in the Holy Land that dates back two thousand years. They are an essential part of the rich tapestry of religious, cultural, and political life in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. We believe the vitality and flourishing of this community is a critical element in efforts to realize your call for security, freedom, and prosperity, in equal measure, for all the people of the land.

The Holy Land, a place of immense spiritual significance to Christians worldwide, is witnessing an alarming spike in targeted attacks against the indigenous Christian population, especially Christian clergy, but also against churches, cemeteries, and other sacred sites. These acts of hatred, which have increased in frequency over the years, not only inflict harm on innocent individuals and communities but also carry severe ramifications for Israel's international relations and damage its credibility when it purports to be a place of religious tolerance. **We urgently request that you use the influence of your good office to call for swift and decisive action by Israel to hold**

perpetrators of these attacks accountable for their crimes so that this troubling reality might end.

Additionally, we remain deeply concerned about the immediate legal threat facing the Mount of Olives that could strip the area's control away from various Christian denominations, including the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Armenian Patriarchate, the Catholic Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, and the Russian Orthodox Church. The site holds immense spiritual significance for Christians globally, as it is the place where Jesus Christ spent his final days and ascended into heaven.

The proposed inclusion of the Mount of Olives in an Israeli national park could have far-reaching consequences. This move threatens to fundamentally disrupt the delicate religious balance and heritage of Jerusalem and its character as a city of universal significance. It would lead to the displacement of more Palestinians from Jerusalem, a city whose Palestinian population is perpetually under threat of eviction and expulsion, without any recourse. **We recognize that the hearing on this issue has been postponed until the end of the year and call for your intervention to halt any plan that would take control of this sacred Christian site away from its current residents.**

Our affection for and obligation to our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters compels us to act, as does our deep desire to see the Christian heritage in the Holy Land protected. We stand in solidarity with people who experience injustice and are denied their rights. In this case, we join the Church leaders of Jerusalem in their call to preserve and protect our Palestinian Christian siblings who endure daily persecution and discrimination. **We respectfully urge you to raise these pressing issues during your anticipated meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding the rights, safety, and dignity of all Christians in the Holy Land.**

As we advocate for a lasting peace with justice for all the people of the Holy Land, we believe that determined efforts by the Government of Israel must be made to ensure that Jerusalem is allowed to speak in its multiple voices--Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—and that all its residents can flourish, prosper and worship freely without fear of displacement, harassment, or violence. Only through a strong stance against incitement and attacks and through a commitment to fostering a culture of mutuality and respect, can the Holy Land truly reflect its historical role as a place of harmony and coexistence among different religious communities.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. May your upcoming meeting bring about positive changes and contribute to a more peaceful, just, and inclusive Holy Land.

Yours faithfully,

Joyce Ajlouny
General Secretary

American Friends Service Committee

Rev. Eddy Alemán
General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

Rev. Bronwen Boswell
Acting Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon
Executive Director
Churches for Middle East Peace

Stassi Cramm and Scott Murphy
Presidents
Community of Christ

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian
Ecumenical Director and Diocesan Legate
Armenian Church of America (Eastern Diocese)

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Susan Gunn
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Ann Graber Hershberger
Executive Director
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John Hill
Interim General Secretary
General Board of Church and Society

The United Methodist Church
Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie
President and General Secretary
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

Bridget Moix
General Secretary
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Rev. Teresa "Terri" Hord Owens
General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada

Richard L. Santos
President and CEO
Church World Service

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Reverend Elijah R. Zehyoue, Ph.D.
Co-Director Alliance of Baptists

Johnny Zokovitch
Executive Director
Pax Christi USA

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.

Contact Us

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