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Letter from Christian Leaders to President Biden

November 13, 2023
Washington, D.C.

In a November 9, 2023 letter to President Biden, Churches from Middle East Peace (CMEP) and thirty American Christian leaders called on President Biden and his Administration to support an **immediate ceasefire, de-escalation, and restraint by all involved**. The letter is below.

November 9, 2023

Dear President Biden:

We, the heads of churches, denominations, and church-based organizations in the United States, remain deeply grieved at the now more than month-long violence between Hamas and Israel. We condemn the brutal attacks of Hamas on October 7th that caused the loss of life of nearly 1,400 Israelis and citizens of other nations, and we call for the immediate release of all civilians held hostage. The horrific violence of Hamas does not justify further violence against Palestinian civilians.

We condemn the collective punishment imposed upon the more than 2.2 million Palestinians living in Gaza when, on October 8, the Israeli government [cut off water, gas, and electricity, and all goods and supplies](#) to the territory, putting even more pressure on a community already suffering from a humanitarian crisis more than a decade in the making. We further condemn Israel's large-scale air bombardment and ground invasion that continues to have an indiscriminate and tragically disproportionate impact on civilians. As of November 6, Israel's unrelenting [military assault has killed](#) more than 10 thousand Palestinians in Gaza, including more than four thousand children, and also included the destruction of hospitals, churches, mosques, cultural centers, and other civilian infrastructure throughout Gaza. The lives of all people, be they Israelis or Palestinians, must be protected.

Hamas' actions and the Government of Israel's response in Gaza in no way advance peace. Instead, they have caused loss of life and much harm, grief, and devastation, not only to the individuals affected but also to the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people in seeking an end to the decades-long occupation and the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

We join the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in the call for the international community to **enforce immediate protections** in Gaza for Sanctuaries of Refuge such as hospitals, schools, and houses of worship. As the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports, there are currently no safe places in Gaza, as more than [1.5 million Palestinians](#) have been forcibly displaced from their homes and communities, many of whom are refugees already. We also stand in solidarity with the Jerusalem church leaders, sharing their real concerns, which predate the events of the past month, about the sustainability of Christianity and all faith traditions in the Holy Land.

Strong leadership from the United States is needed at this moment. We call on you, President Biden, and your Administration to support an **immediate ceasefire, de-escalation, and restraint by all involved**. We have made the same requests to Congress. All efforts, including bilateral and multilateral ones, must be made for this war to be brought to a swift end.

We implore your administration not to ignore the growing **catastrophic humanitarian crisis** in Gaza and to demand immediate and adequate access to and provision of humanitarian needs. Much more food, water, medicine, electricity, and fuel supplies than are currently provided must reach all the people of Gaza now.

We further support the **demilitarization of the conflict** rather than supplying additional military aid or arms to Israel at this time. The US already sends \$3.8 billion per year in military assistance to Israel, for which, effectively, the U.S. has not imposed consequences for its gross violations of human rights as required in U.S. laws. Additional military aid will only prolong Israel's offensive, will lead to more Palestinian civilian deaths, and will not likely be subject to any accountability. Please do everything possible to demilitarize the conflict and call for a ceasefire.

We call on you to press all parties to **abide by the Geneva Conventions and customary international law** and for the collective punishment imposed upon the civilians in Gaza to be brought to an end. Atrocities against civilians are never justified. We call for actions to be taken to secure the **immediate release of all civilians being held hostage** and ensure **international protection for all civilians**.

As you focus on Gaza, we also urge your administration to do all it can to **ensure the accountability of settlers** in the West Bank who are using this opportunity to attack Palestinians and illegally confiscate even more Palestinian land through violent means. Numerous Palestinians in the West Bank have been shot since October 7 with weapons issued by the Israeli government.

We urge you to recognize that the **root causes of suffering** must be addressed so that, when this current crisis is over, we do not witness a return to an unsustainable status quo. It is not enough to stop the current fighting.

Peace with justice is the only lasting solution that will protect the long-term security and sustainability of the State of Israel and the self-determination and independence of Palestinians. The United States must demonstrate its commitment to the protection of all human life, advocating for a just and durable resolution to this crisis in which all Israelis and Palestinians might realize a vision of a just peace, illuminating human dignity, advancing security and self-determination for all.

Rev. Eddy Alemán
General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

Joyce Ajlouny
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

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

Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt
President
Unitarian Universalist Association

Rev. Bronwen Boswell
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The Rev. David E. Bennett
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The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
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Father Lawrence Hayes, (OFM)
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President and General Secretary
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Bridget Moix
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Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

Scott Murphy
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Nikki Toyama-Szeto
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Father Thomas Zain
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Rev. Dr. Elijah R. Zehyoue
Co-Director
Alliance of Baptists

Rev. Juan Zuniga, M.M.
Secretary General
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

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.

Recent CMEP Statements and Press Releases:

November 9, 2023: [MEDIA ADVISORY FOR VIRTUAL PRESS BRIEFING: IMPLICATIONS OF ARMING THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT](#)

As casualties mount in Israel-Palestine and the U.S. Congress considers a \$14 billion request for additional weapons for Israel, at least one U.S. official has resigned and leading human rights organizations are calling for a halt to arms transfers into the conflict, at times focused on specific weapons systems. Faith groups are also pressing for a change in the U.S. approach. This press briefing is meant to give interested media an update on findings on how weapons are being used in the conflict and the reasons behind these calls. We anticipate that some groups may have new data to share during this briefing. This briefing is for media only.

November 3, 2023: [Ceasefire Now! Biden Administration's Response Inadequate to Catastrophe in Gaza](#) The devastating October 7 murder of nearly 1,400 Israelis and internationals by Hamas does not justify the [displacement of 1.5 million people](#), more than sixty percent of the population, in Gaza – many of whom are refugees already; the indiscriminate impact upon civilians by large-scale bombing; the destruction of hospitals, churches, cultural centers, and other infrastructure. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the death toll in Gaza as of November 2 is 9,061, more than 60 percent of whom are women and children. The total number of Palestinian children killed totals 3,760. The mass slaughter of civilians by any party to the conflict is unacceptable and must stop. The lives of all people, be they Israelis or Palestinians, must be protected.

November 1, 2023: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Co-Sponsors: Catholic Pray-in at the White House Calls for President Biden to Support Israel-Hamas Ceasefire](#). Washington, DC – On Thursday, November 2 at 12:30 PM, Catholic and other Christian peacemakers will conduct a “pray-in” near Lafayette Park outside the White House to call on President Joe Biden, a Catholic, to abide by Jesus’s way of courageous love and heed Pope Francis’s plea to take the side of peace, and urge all parties to de-escalate hostilities; abide by an immediate ceasefire; and release all hostages.

October 26, 2023: [End the War Now: Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Fears Catastrophic Deaths of Civilians in Gaza](#). The war in Israel and Palestine must be brought to an end. Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) calls for an [immediate ceasefire](#), an end to all violence, and a rapid and substantial increase in the delivery of lifesaving aid to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of people in Gaza. CMEP calls on Hamas to release all hostages and do no harm to those still remaining. CMEP also calls on the international community and the United States to stop supporting further militarization and pursue every alternative means to protect all Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

October 23, 2023: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Affirms the October 21st Statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem](#). CMEP affirms and echoes the call of The Patriarchs and the Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem’s condemnation of the attack against a sacred place at the Orthodox Church compound of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza on the night of October 19, 2023. CMEP furthermore supports their call upon the international community to immediately enforce protections in Gaza for Sanctuaries of Refuge, such as hospitals, schools, and houses of worship.

See all of our [public statements](#) and [press releases](#).

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