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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CMEP Fears Devastating Impact of Violence on Christians in Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza

November 17, 2023

Washington, D.C.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) urgently raises concerns regarding the sustainability of the Christian community in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza in light of Israel's ongoing military and settler violence. Before October 7, the Christian community in Gaza included less than 1,000 people from several denominations, including Orthodox, Latin Catholic, Episcopalian, and Protestant traditions. Israel's continued ground invasion of Gaza and relentless bombing campaign has indiscriminate effects and threatens to completely eradicate the Christian community in Gaza. The bombing of [**St. Porphyrius Orthodox Church**](#), for example, killed 18 Christians and left many more injured.

Presently, hundreds of Christians are sheltering in the Holy Family Catholic Church in Gaza City. As the collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza persists, those sheltering are quickly running out of food and other necessities. Despite being a short distance from a Jordanian run field hospital, Israel's ground invasion makes it impossible for the safe transport of much needed supplies. Facing the prospect of imminent death and unable to offer any measure of safety, reports from Gaza indicate parents are baptizing their children as what could be one final act. No one is safe.

As children are baptized, even elderly Gazans are victims. We grieve the killing of [Elham Farah](#), an 84-year-old Christian woman who was shot in the leg by the Israeli army after leaving the Holy Family Church. As Elham lay wounded on the ground, she reached by phone family and neighbors who desperately tried to get her medical attention. The ongoing bombing and threats of shooting made it impossible for help to arrive. Elham, a retired music teacher who was a pillar of her community, spent her last hours in pain and died alone. This is just one story of many.

No place is safe from the ongoing Israeli military offensive. Vital Christian institutions are under threat and unable to carry out their mission. The Al Ahli Anglican Hospital, one of the last functional hospitals in Gaza City, was surrounded on November 16th by Israeli tanks. Bombings in the surrounding area greatly impacted the ability of [medical professionals](#) in the hospital to offer services to patients requiring immediate care. The Orthodox Cultural Center, a newly built multi-million dollar facility bringing together Gazans from across religious communities was also destroyed.

The continued collective punishment through the shutting off water and electricity alongside the severe limitation on gas and humanitarian aid only compounds the problem. Because of gas shortages, communications have completely shut down. Those outside of Gaza, including Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank, do not know if their loved ones or colleagues are alive. For more than ten days Dar Al Kalima staff in the West Bank were unaware of the safety of the director of their Gaza location. While the director is alive, three artists affiliated with their program, in addition to others, have been killed.

Christians are not only under threat in Gaza, but in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territories as well. Over the past 24 hours, Israeli settlers have threatened to take over up to [as much as a quarter of the Armenian Quarter](#) in the Old City of Jerusalem. In a statement (full text below) the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem shared they are “under possibly the greatest existential threat of [their] 16th-century history. This existential threat fully extends to all the Christian communities of Jerusalem.” Israeli settlers emboldened by the government are directly threatening the livelihood and safety of Palestinians in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank, including Christians.

The bombing of Gaza must stop. The United States must do everything in its power to protect Christians and innocent civilians in Gaza, including calling for an end to all violence. A bilateral ceasefire, negotiating for a release of hostages, securing immediate and adequate humanitarian assistance in Gaza, and addressing core causes is the only way forward that will allow for the protection of Christians and all people in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel. Right now, the United States government has a critical role to play in ensuring Christianity does not disappear in the land where it began.

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CHANCELLERY
ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF
JERUSALEM

Թուակալան:
Date: 16 November, 2023

URGENT COMMUNIQUE

ATTENTION ALL: The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is under possibly the greatest existential threat of its 16-century history. This existential-territorial threat fully extends to all the Christian communities of Jerusalem.

The Armenian Patriarchate has recently cancelled a contract tainted with false representation, undue influence, and unlawful benefits.

Instead of providing a lawful response to the cancellation, the developers attempting to build on the Cow's Garden have completely disregarded the legal posture of the Patriarchate toward this issue, and instead have elected for provocation, aggression, and other harassing, incendiary tactics including destruction of property, the hiring of heavily armed provocateurs, and other instigation.

In recent days, the vast destruction and removal of asphalt on the grounds of the Armenian Quarter has been done without the presentation of permits from the municipality by neither the developer nor the police. Despite this fact, the police have chosen in the last few days to demand that all members of the Armenian Community vacate the premises.

We plead with the entirety of the Christian communities of Jerusalem to stand with the Armenian Patriarchate in these unprecedented times as this is another clear step taken toward the endangerment of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.



DIVAN OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE

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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.

Recent CMEP Statements:

November 13, 2023: [CMEP affirms the November 10th statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem](#). Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) affirms the November 10th statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, which suggests “foregoing any unnecessarily festive activities” this year as Christians around the world stand in solidarity with those in the Holy Land. We are “standing in support of those continuing to suffer” as we continue to call for a ceasefire to allow immediate and adequate assistance to the citizens of Gaza.

November 13, 2023: [Letter from Church-Based Leaders to President Biden](#). In a November 9, 2023 letter to President Biden, Churches from Middle East Peace (CMEP) and thirty American Church-based leaders called on President Biden and his Administration to support an immediate ceasefire, de-escalation, and restraint by all involved.

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.

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

Contact Us

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