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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Welcomes News of Temporary Cessation in Violence and Release of Hostages; Renews Calls for a Permanent Ceasefire and an Enduring Peace

November 24, 2023, 10:00 am Eastern
Washington, D.C.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) welcomed the recent announcement of the agreement between Prime Minister Netanyahu's government in Israel and Hamas concerning the release of 50 hostages and a parallel prisoner exchange, in addition to the desperately needed few days of cessation of violence. This is a critical step in helping to stop further suffering, but much more must be done.

We celebrate the return home of released hostages and the expected release of prisoners to their families and continue to call for the freeing of all hostages. The hostages and prisoners are said to all be women and children. Children should never pay the price of war.

A temporary cessation of violence is necessary in the moment, but remains not enough. CMEP continues to condemn all violence against civilians and abhors the number of mass casualties being reported as a result of the bombing campaigns on Gaza. The [latest statistics of deaths](#) from Gaza reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on November 22 reported that more than 14,500 Palestinians have been killed, including 6,000 Palestinian children and 4,000 women. These numbers are appalling. Each number is a human being. The killing must be stopped!

To prevent the further loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives, diplomatic efforts must be redoubled to bring to fruition a durable end to hostilities. The civilian population in Gaza continues to suffer from a desperate need for basic life-saving supplies such as water, food, fuel, and medical aid, in addition to the effects of a 16-year blockade that intensified in the last several weeks. Resuming bombing after a few days of a pause in violence will only cause greater trauma, displacement, and death for the people of Gaza. In addition to endangering the lives of remaining hostages, the continued bombing of Gaza will not lead to security and human rights for all in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. A permanent ceasefire is critically

needed at this moment. We call on Congress and the Biden Administration to commit to using the full force of U.S. diplomatic power to work with all parties to do so.

A long-lasting bilateral ceasefire must also be followed by concrete actions from the United States government to address the core issues underlying the current violence. These include the Israeli military occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, the blockade of Gaza, and an acknowledgment of the rights of Palestinian refugees. A failure to do so in a meaningful way will only lead to more suffering and violence. Without addressing the core issues, a durable and lasting just peace will remain elusive, and the cycles of war and violence will continue.

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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 22, 2023: [WHITE HOUSE CANDLELIGHT PRAYER VIGIL](#). We welcome the recent announcement about the release of 50 hostages and a parallel prisoner exchange, in addition to the desperately needed few days cessation of violence. Now is the time to redouble our efforts to insist that a long-standing bilateral ceasefire comes to fruition. The civilian population in Gaza continues to suffer from a desperate need of basic life saving supplies such as water, food, gas, and medical aid. President Biden not only has the responsibility as a world leader, but a moral obligation, to save as many human lives as possible and the only way to do that is to end all violence between Hamas and Israel through a permanent ceasefire. – Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, executive director, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)

November 17, 2023: [CMEP Fears Devastating Impact of Violence on Christians in Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza](#). 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. 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.

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.

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

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