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Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Calls on US Government to Hold Israel Accountable to US Laws and for the Deaths of American Citizens

February 23, 2024

Washington, D.C.

On Tuesday, Feb. 20, the United States vetoed another United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. It was the third time that the US has vetoed such a resolution (Oct. 18 & Dec. 8) on a ceasefire, in addition to two votes against ceasefire resolutions in the UN General Assembly (Oct. 24 & Dec. 12). According to the United Nations, more than 29,300 Palestinians have been killed, almost 70,000 have been injured, thousands are unaccounted for, three-quarters of the Palestinians in Gaza have been displaced from their homes and communities, and almost all of Gaza's inhabitants are facing food insecurity or famine.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the United States' continued opposition to a ceasefire in Gaza spurns its obligation to prevent genocide. The United States must end its support for Israel's assault on Palestinians immediately and leverage its relationship with Israel to press for a long-term ceasefire, to ensure the provision and delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid, and to work for a just and lasting peace that addresses root causes. The US must also hold Israel accountable to US laws – such as the Leahy amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act and the Arms Export Control Act – that impose restrictions on the use of US military aid. The US sends \$3.8 billion in military aid to Israel annually, and in December alone,

the Biden Administration bypassed Congress twice to approve the sale of \$106 million and \$147.5 million worth of military equipment to Israel.

A ceasefire is only a minimum requirement to end the current escalation. Among the root causes that must be addressed is the 16-year-old blockade of Gaza, which has only intensified in the last four months. Another central issue is Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands – Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Recently, the Biden Administration imposed sanctions on four individual settlers who have perpetrated violence against Palestinians. The UN reports that, so far, there have been 1225 incidents of settler violence this year. Sanctions against those settlers who commit acts of violence against Palestinians are appropriate, but to identify only four is insufficient and ignores the larger illegality of settlements.

Nor has the US fully held Israel accountable for the deaths of American citizens. In the first two months of 2024, two Palestinian-American teenagers were killed – Muhammad Ahmad Khoddour (Feb. 17) and Tawfic Abdel Jabber (Jan. 19), both 17 years old. While the US has called for investigations, including requesting a probe, such calls have not historically resulted in measures to hold Israel accountable. A most visible case was the murder of al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American killed by Israeli troops while reporting in the northern West Bank on May 11, 2022. A year later, the Israeli military “expressed regret” for her death but neither admitted responsibility nor held anyone responsible.

We mourn the staggering loss of life that we continue to witness. We fervently pray and work for an end to the assault on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. We call upon the US government to cease sending additional military to Israel, to support and press for an immediate ceasefire, to ensure the provision and delivery of necessary humanitarian aid, to work for a just and lasting peace that ensures the rights of all involved, and to hold Israel accountable to US laws and for the deaths of American citizens.

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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 and Press Releases:

February 15, 2024: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Executive Director joins 22 church-based denominational leaders in a letter to President Biden.](#) Churches for Middle East

Peace (CMEP) Executive Director Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon joined 22 church-based denominational leaders in a letter to President Biden. Several signatories of the letter were in Washington, DC where they delivered the letter during meetings with staff at the State Department Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and with Ambassador Rashad Hussain, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

February 15, 2024: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Executive Director joins 22 church-based denominational leaders in a letter to President Biden.](#) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Executive Director Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon joined 22 church-based denominational leaders in a letter to President Biden. Several signatories of the letter were in Washington, DC where they delivered the letter during meetings with staff at the State Department Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and with Ambassador Rashad Hussain, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

February 14, 2024: [Christian Leaders Take Public Action on Ash Wednesday to Call for a Ceasefire, a Political Process, and Humanitarian Assistance to Gaza.](#) On Wednesday, February 14 at 11:00 AM in Lafayette Park by the White House, national Christian organizations and peacemakers will launch a weekly Lenten Ceasefire Campaign, starting with a Catholic Mass to be followed by an ecumenical public witness, to call attention to and in mourning for the tens of thousands of lives that have been destroyed in Gaza and Israel since October 7, 2023.

February 7, 2024: [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Demands Action to Protect Christians in the Holy Land.](#) On Saturday, February 3rd, a Christian priest and head of Dormition Abbey, Father Nikodemus Schnabel, was spit on by Israeli settlers while wearing clerical garb and a cross pendant by Zion Gate (or *Bab al-Nabi Daoud*) in the Old City of Jerusalem. CMEP strongly condemns these acts of violence against Christians occurring in the Holy Land.

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

Contact Us

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