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Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Joins the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in Condemning Events Yesterday That Caused the Deaths of Civilians in Gaza Seeking Aid

March 1, 2024
Washington, D.C.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in condemning the atrocious and despicable events yesterday that caused the deaths and injuries of so many civilians in Gaza seeking aid and humanitarian assistance. We, alongside Christians in the United States and around the world, join the voices of millions of people calling for all violence to be brought to an immediate and complete end and for a comprehensive ceasefire to be reached. In addition, CMEP and our member communions call for immediate and adequate humanitarian assistance to be allowed into Gaza, for hostages to be released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, and for the core causes of the ongoing crisis to be addressed. We pray for the sustainability of our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Holy Land and that all who have suffered and experienced trauma from the atrocities of the October 7th attacks, the violence between warring parties, and the ongoing injustices of decades of occupation might be brought comfort and healing.
In the early morning hours of Thursday, February 29th, according to eye-witness testimonies, Israeli forces in southwest Gaza City opened fire on crowds of civilians seeking to receive sacks of flour to feed their starving families. The ensuing carnage resulted in the death of more than a hundred Gazans, with hundreds more seriously injured. Doctors on the scene and at receiving hospitals reported that most were killed or injured by gunfire, with some becoming victimized after being either trampled by panicked crowds or hit by aid trucks fleeing the horrific scene.

Although government spokesmen initially tried to deny the soldiers’ involvement in this incident, later that day Israel’s Minister of National Security not only praised IDF fighters for acting “excellently,” but also attempted to blame the victims for their own demise, charging that they had sought to harm heavily armed soldiers. He went on to assail the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza, arguing that it should cease.

That stated desire has already become a harsh reality for the half-million remaining in Gaza City, where aid deliveries have nearly halted because of heavy entry restrictions and lack of security escort for the delivery convoys. Humanitarian officials have so often warned of siege-induced famine in north Gaza that foreign governments of goodwill have been forced as a last resort to conduct humanitarian airdrops. Yet these offer only a tiny fraction of the relief that is needed for a remnant civilian population greater than that of Tel Aviv, Israel’s second largest city.

In the aftermath of yesterday’s horrifying events and their cruel context, We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, condemn this wanton attack against innocent civilians and call for the warring parties to reach an immediate and lengthy ceasefire that allows for the speedy disbursement of relief supplies throughout the Gaza strip, and for the enactment of a negotiated release of those held as captives and prisoners.

While expressing these entreaties on behalf of all innocents suffering from the war, we convey our special prayers of support to the Christian communities in Gaza under our pastoral care. These include the more than 800 Christians who have now taken refuge in St. Porphyrios and Holy Family Churches in Gaza City for nearly five months. We likewise extend these same expressions of solidarity to the intrepid staff and volunteers of the Anglican-run Ahli Hospital, and to the patients they serve.

In issuing the above calls, our ultimate hope is that the end of hostilities, the release of captives, and the care of the downtrodden will open a horizon for serious diplomatic discussions that finally lead to a just and lasting peace here in the land where our Lord Jesus Christ first took up his cross on our behalf. May God grant us all his grace as we seek the fulfilment of this hopeful Easter vision.
Recent CMEP Statements and Press Releases:

February 23, 2024: **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Calls on US Government to Hold Israel Accountable to US Laws and for the Deaths of American Citizens.** 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.

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](https://cmep.salsalabs.org/ps_mar124) and [press releases](https://cmep.salsalabs.org/ps_mar124).
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.