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Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Stands in Solidarity with the Churches of the Holy Land as Israeli Municipalities Attempt to Collect Taxes on Church-owned Properties

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) stands in solidarity with the Churches of the Holy Land as they undergo yet another attempt by Israeli municipalities to collect taxes on church-owned properties— a move that threatens the sustainability of the Churches to operate. CMEP recognizes the harm that these legal proceedings could cause to the ever-shrinking Christian community in this land. The *Status Quo* which has ensured religious freedom and harmony in the Holy Land must be protected.

On June 23, 2024, Israeli municipal authorities alerted the Churches of Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv-Jaffa, Nazareth, and Ramallah stating that they were initiating legal procedures against the Churches due to unpaid property taxes. Heads of Churches and Patriarchs representing the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate, the Latin Patriarchate, the Anglican Episcopal Diocese, and the Custos of the Holy Land signed a joint letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu in which they decry these legal procedures as an attack on the Church and the Christian presence in the Holy Land. They urge him, as head of the State, to end these proceedings and restore the arrangements agreed upon by the Churches and Israel.

These legal proceedings upset the historical and legal rights of the Churches and contradict previous agreements between the Churches and Israel. They also violate the sacred *Status Quo* which has existed and been reiterated numerous times in Jerusalem and the Holy Land since the royal decree in the Ottoman Empire in 1757 ensuring that all religions have access to and space to exist peacefully in this sanctified space.

These taxes, if collected, could cause irreparable damage to the Churches, the Christian Community, and the many social services they provide, including but not limited to schools, churches, elderly houses, hospitals, kindergartens, orphanages, and more. If these proceedings are allowed to be pursued, Churches will have to cease the continuation of these social services that they provide to the greater community, regardless of religious affiliation, at little to no cost.

In February 2018, similar proceedings against Churches in Jerusalem caused Christian leaders to close the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in protest for the first time since the founding of the State of Israel. This captured the attention of the worldwide Christian community which put pressure on the municipality to drop the proceedings. Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) wrote to former Secretary of State Pompeo to urge the administration to ensure Israel protects the rights of Christians in the Holy Land. After sufficient pressure, Prime Minister Netanyahu canceled all legal proceedings against the churches. CMEP hopes that a similar and lasting resolution can be found to avert the crisis and protect the presence of Churches in Israel. CMEP urges the U.S. government to exert diplomatic pressure to ensure that the legal, historic, and sacred rights of the Churches of the Holy Land are protected and upheld.

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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:

June 21, 2024: [CMEP affirms The Episcopal Church statement on Layan Nasir and detained Palestinians.](#) The Episcopal Church is one of the founding members of CMEP's 30-plus member communions committed to pursuing an end to the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West

Bank, and the Gaza Strip. As the war on Gaza continues, we must not ignore the ongoing pressures Palestinians continue to face in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territories. CMEP stands with The Episcopal Church in advocating for the release of Layan Nasir, the Palestinian Christian woman who continues to be held unjustly in Israeli prison. We also call for an immediate end to the war on Gaza and for an immediate and sustained ceasefire, full humanitarian access, and the release of all hostages.

June 12, 2024: [CMEP to Hold Special Briefing About the War on Gaza at Westminster Presbyterian Church](#).

Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, the executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), will host a briefing and community conversation in Delaware on Christian responses to current events in Gaza and broader Israel/Palestine. The briefing will follow morning worship and is open to the Westminster community and the general public.

May 28, 2024: [Joint Statement: NGOs demand UN Security Council enforce ICJ orders on Israel's actions in Rafah](#).

The undersigned NGOs urgently call on all permanent and elected members of the UN Security Council to enforce the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) orders regarding Israel's actions in Rafah, Gaza. Immediate action is required to uphold international law and ensure the Government of Israel meets its obligations as mandated by the ICJ.

May 17, 2024: [CMEP Calls on Biden Administration to Advance Efforts Toward Peace](#).

As an organization of Christian denominations and organizations committed to peace, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) calls on President Biden and his administration to do all that he can to advance efforts toward peace instead of war and further militarization that increases violence and causes immeasurable death and destruction. The United States government must do all that is possible to protect and preserve human life, especially innocent civilians, to honor and protect the humanity of all people who are created in the image of God instead of enabling more actions that will inevitably lead to more suffering, inhumanity, and pain.

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

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