



WORKING TOGETHER:
Justice Can Prevail. Peace Is
Possible.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Stands in Solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land, Condemning the Egregious Violations of Religious Freedom during Holy Fire Saturday in Jerusalem

This year, for the Christian Holy Fire Saturday, thousands of local and international Christians were denied entry to the Old City of Jerusalem for worship. In comparison to past years, few Palestinians in the occupied West Bank received permits to enter Jerusalem. If permits were granted, they lasted a month but could only be used for a week of that time, requiring further registration to specify which week they would be used for. Rarely did an entire family get permission; if anyone was given a permit, it was usually only one or two women and children who received it, requiring Christian families to worship apart during Holy Week and Easter if the permit was used.

As one of the privileged to be able to attend the Holy Fire Service in Jerusalem on Saturday, April 19, 2025, CMEP's executive director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon said this about her experience: "The glory of participating in the sacred Holy Fire service could not be dimmed by the realities of occupation and oppression. Throughout the more than hour long journey walking in crowds between the New Gate and the Resurrection Church of the Holy Sepulchre, there were at least four checkpoints, each manned by Israeli soldiers or police, many of whom yelled and pushed as if our presence and attempts to

worship were a violation of law and not a sacred right. I experienced harassment, pushing, and shoving by the police firsthand. But what I experienced was mild in comparison to some of the things I witnessed, such as elderly women being shoved without any respect or regard for their humanity. The host of the group I was with, a diplomatic mission present at the invitation of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, His Beatitude Theophilos, said, 'I've never seen the soldiers be so cruel.' And yet I hold onto the truth that the peace of Christ prevails and His love, mercy, and justice will not fail. The light of the world continues to shine in the darkness, as was evidenced by the Holy Fire spreading rapidly across the church, through the streets, to cities throughout Palestine and Israel, and throughout the world. We hold onto the hope that this current reality, for all who suffer - Palestinians in Gaza, all of the occupied, every person experiencing oppression and grief - this is not the end of the story, but light, goodness, peace, and love will prevail. We will continue to work toward that end."

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) stands beside the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and all of the churches in Jerusalem, demanding that religious freedom be protected. We likewise condemn the egregious treatment of Christians and worshipers during Holy Week and the Saturday Holy Fire service in Jerusalem. As the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem [said](#), "These reprehensible actions deprived thousands of believers of their divine right to prayer and worship, and stand in direct contradiction to Jerusalem's eternal vocation as a city of peace for all the children of God."

In solidarity, we call for the Israeli government to ensure that Jerusalem remains a shared city where the children of Abraham and all, Jewish, Christians, and Muslims, might be able to worship freely. We pray alongside our Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land that a just peace will come, injustice will cease, and all war and violence will be brought to an end in Gaza and everywhere. May the love and light of the resurrection prevail, and peace come quickly.

[The Full Press Release of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem can be read below.]



The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, April 20, 2025 Photo credit: Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon.



The diplomatic mission of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate lines up to enter the Old City of Jerusalem, outside the New Gate, to attend the Holy Saturday Holy Fire service. Saturday, April 19, 2025. Jerusalem. Photo credit: Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon.



Waiting at the fourth checkpoint within the Old City of Jerusalem, the diplomatic mission was held back by Israeli soldiers. Only a few of us were allowed to enter. The soldiers were

yelling, and the crowds behind us pushed and shoved, trying desperately to be allowed to enter. Saturday, April 19, 2025, Jerusalem. Photo credit: Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon.

Press Release issued by the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem on the Assaults Against Worshippers During Holy Fire Saturday

Jerusalem, Easter Sunday — April 20, 2025

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem emphatically condemns the egregious violations that desecrated the sanctity of Jerusalem yesterday, particularly in the Old City and around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, during the celebration of the blessed Holy Fire Saturday.

Israeli police forces transformed the sacred city into a militarized zone, erecting barriers, obstructing the faithful from reaching their churches, and perpetrating assaults against scouts and worshippers, both locals and pilgrims from around the world.

These reprehensible actions, which deprived thousands of believers of their divine right to prayer and worship, stand in direct contradiction to Jerusalem’s eternal vocation as a city of peace for all the children of God. As our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, declared: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”(Mark 11:17).

In the midst of this affliction, we lift our hearts to the Risen Lord, imploring His just peace to reign over His Holy Land, for the shadow of injustice to be lifted from His city, and for the machinery of war to fall silent in the afflicted land of Gaza. May the light of the Resurrection shine once more upon all the peoples of our region, bearing witness to the triumph of justice, hope, and freedom.

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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:

[Apr 18, 2025 Humanitarian Snapshot #11](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins 26 humanitarian aid and advocacy groups to shed light on the besieged state of Gaza and the West Bank. No aid has been allowed to enter Gaza in over six weeks. Increased military operations in the West Bank have displaced over 40,000 people, destroyed countless homes and businesses, and disrupted the flow of aid. The UN Secretary General referred to Gaza as an “endless death loop”. Along with a report detailing the conditions in Gaza and the West Bank, this snapshot calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

[Apr 13, 2025 CMEP condemns bombing of Al-Ahli Hospital and demands Protection for the Christian Community and all in Gaza](#)

CMEP condemns in the strongest possible terms the bombing of Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza. Al-Ahli is an Anglican institution and one of the oldest, continuously operating hospitals in Gaza. It is Gaza’s only Christian hospital and its only cancer treatment center. The bombing of the Anglican Al-Ahli Arab Hospital is a violation of the sacredness of life and it is especially abhorrent during this sacred time for Christians.

[Apr 11, 2025: CMEP Executive Director Leads Delegation for High-Level Interfaith and Diplomatic Meetings in Cairo to Address Atrocities in Gaza](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace’s (CMEP) executive director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, led a small interfaith delegation of Christian and Islamic leaders to Egypt between April 5-8, 2025. Meetings in Egypt included conversations with religious and political leaders for the purpose of discussing the role international religious leaders can play in calling for an end to all violence, especially the devastating toll of ongoing bombing and military incursions by the Israeli military in Gaza and the West Bank.

[Apr 11, 2025: CMEP Public Statement on the Killing of 14-Year-Old American Palestinian Amir Rabee in the West Bank](#)

CMEP condemns the tragic killing of 14-year-old American Palestinian Amir Rabee by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank on April 6 and calls for an investigation into his death. The loss of this young life is an unspeakable tragedy and a devastating reminder of the human cost of ongoing violence and occupation. Such actions must never be accepted or normalized. The killing of children must stir moral outrage, not silence.

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

Contact Us

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