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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement on Restrictions to Religious Freedom in Jerusalem

Washington DC, March 30, 2026: Churches for Middle East Peace is deeply concerned by the recent decision by Israeli authorities to bar Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa from presiding over Palm Sunday observances at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of the holiest sites in Christianity. This action was wrong and represented an unacceptable restriction on the free exercise of religion in the Holy City.

While we are relieved that this decision was ultimately reversed following significant public pressure, the incident itself is deeply troubling. It reflects a broader and growing pattern of limitations placed on Christian and Muslim religious leaders and worshippers, particularly in Jerusalem, where access to sacred spaces should be protected and upheld for all.

Restrictions of this kind contribute to the steady loss of religious freedom and undermine the long-standing status quo governing holy sites. They also risk inflaming tensions in a city sacred to Christians, Muslims, and Jews alike.

We affirm that all people, regardless of faith or nationality, must be able to worship freely and safely. Religious leaders must be permitted to carry out their sacred duties without obstruction. We urge Israeli authorities to ensure that such incidents do not happen again and to take meaningful steps to safeguard religious freedom for all communities.

At a time when tensions are already high, protecting access to holy places and respecting the rights of worshippers is not only a legal obligation but a moral imperative.

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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:

[March 19, 2026: Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Statement on Intensifying Violence in the West Bank](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is gravely alarmed by the rapidly escalating violence in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli state-sponsored violence and settler attacks against Palestinian communities are spiraling out of control. As international attention has shifted to the expanding regional war following Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran, extremist settlers have taken advantage of the global distraction to intensify terror against Palestinian civilians. Palestinian villages across the West Bank are facing a wave of attacks, including arson, shootings, and intimidation, which are often carried out in broad daylight and frequently under the watch or protection of Israeli forces.

[March 17, 2026: 60+ National Ecumenical Organizations Urge Congress To Oppose Iran War Funding](#)

CMEP is proud to have joined dozens of other faith-based organizations in signing a letter to Congress urging opposition to additional funding for the war on Iran. Grounded in our commitment to peace, we reject further investment in a dangerous and unauthorized conflict that puts countless lives at risk. Instead, we call on Congress to prioritize diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and policies that uphold human dignity and pursue a just and lasting peace.

[March 6, 2026: Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Statement on Israel's Planned Invasion of Lebanon](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is gravely concerned by Israel's planned ground invasion of Lebanon and the escalating regional war that continues to engulf the Middle East. The ongoing expansion of the U.S.–Israeli war on Iran has set the region on fire. Nowhere is this more evident than in Lebanon. Reports that Israeli troops are amassing at the Lebanese border raise the grave likelihood of a ground invasion. Such an invasion would have catastrophic consequences for a country that has already endured economic collapse, political paralysis, and the trauma of repeated wars. It would not bring peace or security to the people of Lebanon or Israel. Instead, it would entrench political division, fuel radicalization, and result in devastating civilian casualties.

[Feb 28, 2026: Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Issues Statement on Israeli-US Attacks on Iran](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) condemns in the strongest terms the military strikes carried out on Iran by the U.S. and Israel. We urge all parties toward immediate de-escalation to avoid catastrophic loss of life, expanded violence, and war. This is an unnecessary war that will have profound and destabilizing consequences for the entire region and for all who inhabit it. The Middle East has endured decades of armed conflict, occupation, displacement, and political upheaval. Another large-scale war will not bring security or peace; it will deepen instability and compound the suffering of civilians who have already borne far too much.

[Feb 25, 2026: Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Statement on the Killing of Nasrallah Abu Siyam](#)

Nasrallah Abu Siyam is the first Palestinian killed by settlers this year, and at least the sixth American citizen to be killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces or settlers since October 2023. His death underscores a deeply troubling and repeated pattern: the persistent lack of justice in Israeli investigations and court proceedings related to violence against Palestinians, alongside the failure of the United States government to pursue meaningful accountability for the killing of its own citizens abroad.

[Feb 24, 2026: Humanitarian Organizations petition Israeli High Court as closure deadline approaches](#)

Thirty-seven international aid organisations have been ordered by Israeli authorities to cease operations in the occupied Palestinian territory by the end of February under revised Israeli registration rules. With efforts to force closures imminent, a group of leading humanitarian Organizations, including Churches for Middle East Peace, have taken the unprecedented step of jointly petitioning the Israeli High Court to suspend the measures before irreparable harm is done to civilians who rely on their assistance.

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

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