



**WORKING TOGETHER:**  
Justice Can Prevail. Peace Is  
Possible.

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Washington, D.C. - June 5, 2026**

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### **CMEP is deeply alarmed by the recent arrest and detention of four Palestinian university students by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank**

June 5, 2026, Washington D.C. - Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is deeply alarmed by the recent arrest and detention of four Palestinian university students by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, including Birzeit University student Natalie Abu Diya, a Palestinian Christian and member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala.

According to local reports, Israeli forces raided homes in Birzeit and Beitunia before detaining students Natalie Abu Diya, Joulan Abu Awwad, Sama Safi, and Laila Khalil. These arrests are part of a broader and deeply troubling pattern of arbitrary detention and escalating military raids throughout the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Prisoner Society reports that these arrests bring the number of Palestinian women currently held in Israeli prisons to 89. Female detainees continue to face harsh and degrading conditions, including hunger, medical neglect, solitary confinement, repeated assaults, humiliating searches, and overcrowded cells that force many to sleep on the floor.

CMEP joins the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan](#) and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and Bishop Dr. Imad Haddad in calling for the immediate release of Natalie Abu Diya and all those detained without charge or trial. As Bishop Haddad stated, "Palestinian civilians, including women and children, suffer deep injustice in Israeli military detention and are often held for months or years with no explanation.

Natalie's arrest is especially painful for Christian communities in Palestine and around the world. A graduate of Talitha Kumi Lutheran School and a Media and Journalism student at Birzeit University, Natalie was taken at gunpoint from her student apartment, while her family was

initially left without information regarding her whereabouts. No family should endure such fear and uncertainty.

CMEP is also concerned for Sama Safi, who is an American citizen. The United States government has both a responsibility and an obligation to ensure the safety, legal protections, and human rights of its citizens abroad. At a minimum, U.S. officials must seek immediate information regarding her whereabouts, condition, and legal status, while actively working to ensure that her rights are protected and that she is afforded due process. The arbitrary detention of a U.S. citizen by Israeli forces demands urgent attention and action from the U.S. government.

These arrests highlight the ongoing use of Israel's system of administrative detention, which permits the imprisonment of Palestinians in the occupied territories without formal charge or trial for renewable periods of detention. This unequal legal system continues to be carried out with near total impunity and has devastated countless Palestinian families and communities.

The scale of these arrests is staggering. According to Palestinian prisoner advocacy organizations, Israeli forces have arrested more than 23,000 Palestinians in the West Bank since October 2023, averaging approximately 40 to 45 arrests every day.

The targeting of university students, journalists, youth leaders, and civilians through military raids and arbitrary detention undermines fundamental human rights, including the rights to education, due process, freedom of expression, and personal dignity.

CMEP calls on the United States government, international institutions, churches, and human rights organizations to urgently advocate for:

- The immediate release of detainees held without charge or trial;
- Protection of Palestinian students and civilians living under occupation;
- Transparency regarding the whereabouts and legal status of detainees;
- Independent monitoring of detention conditions;
- An end to the discriminatory system of administrative detention and military rule imposed on Palestinians in the occupied territories.

We stand in solidarity with the families of those detained, with Palestinian Christian communities, and with all who seek justice, dignity, 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.*

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Recent CMEP Statements and Press Releases:

**[April 27, 2026: Joint Freedom Day Statement Calls for Global Solidarity, Truth-Telling, Unity, and Justice Across Continents](#)**

On Freedom Day in South Africa, commemorating the end of apartheid and the birth of a democratic nation, a coalition of Christian leaders and institutions issued a joint statement linking the legacy of South Africa's liberation struggle to urgent global calls for justice Palestine and Israel. The statement was released by the Reformed Church in America (RCA), Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC), together with our ecumenical partners, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

**[Apr 24, 2026: CMEP Statement on the 111th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide](#)**

On this solemn 111th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins with communities around the world in remembrance of the 1.5 million Armenians who were systematically killed and displaced beginning in 1915. We honor the memory of those who perished, stand with their descendants, and reaffirm our commitment to truth, justice, and the dignity of all people.

**[Apr 13, 2026: Statement from Churches for Middle East Peace on the Interconnectedness of Violence](#)**

At Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), we recognize that the violence unfolding across the Middle East is not isolated from the rest of the world. The grief, fear, and trauma felt in Gaza and the West Bank, Israel, Lebanon, Iran, and across the region are also experienced by diaspora communities around the globe, including here in the United States. Many Americans have family members, loved ones, and deep ties to the Middle East. As they watch tragedy and destruction unfold from afar, they too suffer.

**[Apr 7, 2026: Statement from Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) on President Trump's Threats to Iran](#)**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) expresses alarm and condemnation of recent statements by President Trump threatening catastrophic violence against Iran, including rhetoric suggesting that "a whole civilization will die tonight." Such language, evoking the destruction of an entire people, stands in direct opposition to the core tenets of the Christian faith, which call us to uphold the sanctity of life, pursue peace, and recognize the inherent dignity of every human being.

**[Apr 3, 2026: Statement of Support from Churches for Middle East Peace for the 2026 Easter Message of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem](#)**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) expresses its appreciation and solidarity with the

Easter Message of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem (2026), issued by the historic Christian leadership of the Holy Land. In a time marked by devastating violence, regional instability, and profound human suffering, we are grateful for the moral clarity, spiritual depth, and pastoral care embodied in this message. The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches offer a powerful witness rooted in the hope of the Resurrection, proclaiming that even amid destruction and despair, death does not have the final word.

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

## Contact Us

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