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September 21, 2026

Churches for Middle East Peace Delegation Visits Armenia in Solidarity with Armenian Church and People

September 21, 2026, Washington, D.C.- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) recently led a delegation of Christian executive leaders to Armenia for a solidarity visit focused on the country's Christian heritage, current geopolitical challenges, the situation of displaced Armenians from Artsakh, and the vital role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the spiritual and cultural life of the Armenian people.

The delegation included representatives of CMEP, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC), and the World Council of Churches. The visit provided an opportunity for Christian leaders from across the global Church to listen to Armenian communities, engage with civil society, and deepen relationships with the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The delegation was honored to be hosted at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, in the ancient city of Vagharshapat, as guests of His Holiness Karekin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians. On September 9, the delegation met with His Holiness at the Mother See to discuss the Armenian Church's historic and contemporary role, regional peace and security, and concerns regarding the relationship between the Church and the state. The Mother See has publicly raised concerns regarding governmental measures that it says interfere with the internal life and autonomy of the Church.

"Armenia occupies a unique place in the history of Christianity, and the Armenian Apostolic Church has served the Armenian people through centuries of persecution, displacement, and geopolitical upheaval," said Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, Executive Director of Churches for Middle East Peace. "Our visit was an opportunity to listen, to learn, and to stand in solidarity with Armenian Christians as they navigate profound challenges at home and throughout the region."

Supporting the Independence and Mission of the Armenian Church

During their meeting with His Holiness Karekin II, members of the delegation discussed concerns about recent government actions affecting the Armenian Apostolic Church, including questions surrounding the Church's institutional autonomy and the appropriate boundaries between the state and ecclesial life.

CMEP recognizes the importance of respecting both the constitutional framework of Armenia and the freedom of religious institutions to govern their internal spiritual and ecclesial affairs. The Armenian Apostolic Church has a distinctive constitutional status in Armenia and a historic role in the spiritual life, cultural development, and preservation of Armenian identity. At the same time, Armenia's constitutional framework protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion and establishes a separation between religious organizations and the state.

CMEP believes that the Church must be able to fulfill its spiritual, pastoral, charitable, and educational mission with appropriate independence from political authorities. Recent statements from the Mother See have expressed concern that government involvement in Church affairs, legal proceedings involving clergy, and other administrative measures could impede the Church's autonomy and ministry.

"As Christians committed to religious freedom and the flourishing of Christian communities throughout the Middle East and surrounding regions, we believe that churches must have the freedom to carry out their spiritual mission without undue political interference," said Christopher Huth, Middle East Partnerships Manager at CMEP. "Our solidarity with the Armenian Apostolic Church is rooted not in political partisanship, but in our commitment to religious freedom, the integrity of Christian institutions, and the ability of churches to serve their communities faithfully."

Listening to Displaced Armenians from Artsakh

The delegation also traveled to communities in southern Armenia to meet with Armenian families displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh, following the September 2023 Azerbaijani military operation and the subsequent exodus of the region's ethnic Armenian population.

Members of the delegation heard directly from displaced families about the challenges they continue to face as they rebuild their lives in Armenia, including housing, employment, education, economic security, and questions surrounding their future.

The delegation also met with nongovernmental organizations, human rights lawyers, and other civil society representatives working with displaced Armenians and documenting the ongoing humanitarian and human rights consequences of the conflict.

The 2023 Azerbaijani offensive brought an end to the region's decades-long period of de facto Armenian administration and resulted in the displacement of more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians. International organizations continue to raise concerns about the rights and prospects of displaced Armenians, including questions surrounding safe and dignified return and property rights.

The delegation also heard concerns regarding the security of communities living near Armenia's border with Azerbaijan. Since 2023, Azerbaijani forces continue to control areas of internationally

recognized Armenian territory along the border, while Armenia and Azerbaijan pursue a fragile peace process.

Encountering Armenia's Ancient Christian Heritage

Throughout the visit, the delegation had the opportunity to visit some of Armenia's earliest and most significant Christian sites, encountering firsthand a living Christian heritage that stretches back to the earliest centuries of the Church.

Armenia is traditionally recognized as the first kingdom to adopt Christianity as a state religion, and its monasteries, churches, khachkars, and sacred sites remain an extraordinary testimony to the enduring presence of Christianity in the region.

For CMEP, these sites also underscored the importance of protecting Christian communities and their cultural and religious heritage amid regional conflict and political uncertainty.

"The Armenian Christian witness is not simply a matter of history," said Rev. Dr. Cannon. "It is a living tradition. The Church continues to worship, serve, educate, preserve culture, and accompany a people who have experienced extraordinary suffering and displacement. We were deeply honored to witness that faith firsthand."

Deepening CMEP's Engagement with Armenia

The visit represents an important step in CMEP's continued engagement with Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Church. CMEP established its Armenian Advisory Council in 2025 to strengthen relationships among Armenian Christian communities in the United States, Armenia, and the wider Middle East, while elevating issues related to Armenian Christian heritage, religious freedom, and the protection of vulnerable Christian communities.

CMEP remains committed to accompanying the Armenian people and the Armenian Apostolic Church as they navigate the complex challenges facing Armenia and the wider South Caucasus.

"As a Christian organization committed to peace in the Middle East and the protection of Christian communities, CMEP believes that Armenia and its ancient Christian witness have an important place in the broader story of global Christianity," said Huth. "We look forward to deepening our relationships with Armenian churches, civil society, and communities and to continuing to learn from and stand alongside our Armenian Christian partners."

Churches for Middle East Peace stands in solidarity with the Armenian people and the Armenian Apostolic Church and looks forward to strengthening its partnerships and advocacy on behalf of Christian communities in Armenia and the Middle East.



Members of the CMEP delegation, together with His Holiness, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II (center).



Members of the CMEP delegation, together with displaced families from Nagorno Karabagh (Artsakh) in Goris, Southern Armenia.



Members of the CMEP delegation at an Armenian School learning about educational programs in the country.

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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:

Sep 17, 2026: [Churches for Middle East Peace Delegation Travels to Egypt, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine for Regional Peace, Interfaith, and Christian Community Engagement](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) recently completed a regional delegation to Egypt, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine, bringing together senior CMEP leadership and Christian partners for a series of meetings with government officials, religious leaders, humanitarian organizations, civil society partners, and communities directly affected by the ongoing crises in the Holy Land. The delegation included Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, Executive Director of CMEP, and Christopher Huth, Middle East Partnerships Manager. In Jerusalem, they were joined by His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian of the Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Excellency Vicki Downey of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Aug 24, 2026: [CMEP Elevates the “Jerusalem Voice for Justice” Appeal For Gaza, the West Bank, and the Christian presence in their land](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) elevates and stands in solidarity with the appeal issued today by A Jerusalem Voice for Justice, “For Gaza, the West Bank, and the Christian presence in their land.” We join this ecumenical Christian witness in refusing to allow the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to become normalized or forgotten. The appeal’s call for the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, an end to violence and displacement, and equality and dignity for all reflects our conviction that a just and lasting peace must include the rights and voices of Palestinians, including the historic Christian community whose presence is an integral part of the land’s past, present, and future.

Aug 11, 2026: [CMEP Expresses Support for the Armenian Apostolic Church](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) affirms the vital role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the spiritual, cultural, and historical life of the Armenian people and in the wider Christian family. We are deeply concerned about undue interference in the internal affairs of the Church and urge respect for its independence and sacred mission.

Jul 14, 2026: Churches for Middle East Peace Welcomes The Rev. Dr. Stephen Murray as Chief Development Officer

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is pleased to announce that The Rev. Dr. Stephen Murray has joined the organization as its new Chief Development Officer. Rev. Dr. Murray brings decades of leadership in philanthropy, theological education, ministry, and ecumenical engagement. He joins CMEP from Georgetown University, where he served as Senior Director of Development for Family Philanthropy and taught in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. Throughout his career, he has held leadership positions at institutions including Ecumenical Theological Seminary, the Congregational Library and Archives, Barrytown College, Harvard University, and Yale University, while also serving congregations across several Christian traditions.

Jul 7, 2026: Religious Leader Overcomes Personal Setbacks to Complete IRONMAN Competitions in Support of Peace in the Middle East

After over a year of determination, setbacks, and perseverance, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon's journey to complete a full IRONMAN has become a powerful testament to the hope that peace is possible. Inspired by CMEP's mission and fueled by a commitment to justice in the Middle East, Rev. Dr. Mae has continued training despite significant health challenges that forced her to postpone her original goal. As she prepares to compete in the Ohio Half IRONMAN in July 2026 and the full IRONMAN Maryland in September 2026, every mile she completes raises awareness and support for CMEP's work to advocate, educate, and elevate voices for peace. Join Mae on the final stretch of this remarkable journey and help turn perseverance into lasting change.

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