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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington, D.C. - November 29, 2023

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68 Global and Christian Leaders Call for a Ceasefire and Peace

November 29, 2023

Washington, D.C.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins 68 Bishops and Executive Leaders from churches and denominations from across the world to convey the desperate need for the government of Israel to end the bombing campaign and ground invasion of Gaza immediately. See below for the full-text of both the letter to President Biden and the international letter.

November 29, 2023

Dear President Biden:

We, the board members of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), as U.S. Christian leaders, have joined together with 68 Bishops and Executive Leaders from churches and denominations from across the world to convey the desperate need for the government of Israel to end the bombing campaign and ground invasion of Gaza immediately. The letter stating our shared beliefs is below. We condemn all acts of violence against civilians and grieve with Israelis and Palestinians who have lost loved ones. The temporary pause in fighting and the release of some civilian hostages and prisoners is a welcome first step. However, much more needs to be done to secure a durable

bilateral ceasefire that will end violence by all sides and provide the opportunity for diplomatic, long lasting solutions.

We write as Christian leaders deeply disappointed with the U.S. government's response to the current situation in Gaza and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories to date. We appreciate your role in helping to secure the temporary ceasefire and release of some of the civilian hostages, in addition to the increase in access and delivery of desperately needed humanitarian aid into Gaza. Nonetheless, your Administration's unwillingness to support a lasting ceasefire has directly contributed to the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians in Gaza, many of whom are children. The continued bombing of Gaza has also endangered the lives of Israelis and other civilians throughout the region, as continued violence only increases the likelihood of a regional war. In addition, throughout the Middle East, Arab countries and civilians view the U.S. as culpable alongside Israel for the deaths of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including 6,000 children, in Gaza. Therefore, we urge you to do everything in your power to ensure this temporary pause in fighting leads to a durable bilateral ceasefire.

In addition to ending violence, much more must be done to work toward a just and lasting resolution to the conflict in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. For too long, the United States government has been unwilling to properly acknowledge the root causes of violence, which include the decades-long Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. By overlooking root causes, U.S. foreign policy across many Administrations from both political parties has only exacerbated tensions and encouraged endless cycles of violence. U.S. leadership in the service of justice, human rights, peace, and security for all in the Holy Land is desperately needed. You have a unique opportunity to turn the tide of history and finally demand that the fighting stop and that the parties involved resolve their differences through negotiations and diplomatic means. Please do not miss this opportunity. Millions of lives depend on the U.S., no longer being complicit in an unjust war that has already devastated the lives of thousands of civilians. Our prayers are with you in the days and weeks to come. We ask that God give you wisdom and courage to do all you can to bring an end to the killing and the violence.

Respectfully and with great urgency,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mae Elise Cannon".

Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, on behalf of the board of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)
Executive Director
Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)

November 29, 2023

Lamentations 2:11

“My eyes fail from weeping,

I am in torment within;

my heart is poured out on the ground

because my people are destroyed,

because children and infants faint

in the streets of the city.”

We have watched in horror and sadness at the devastation unfolding in Palestine and Israel since October 7th. As leaders of Christian communities throughout the world, we join in grief for the Israelis and Palestinians who are mourning loved ones who have died. Our faith compels us to speak out. To make clear that we oppose violence, whether directed toward Israelis or Palestinians. Even the loss of one more life is one too many. International humanitarian law must be respected and adhered to by all sides.

We welcome the recent announcement about the release of dozens of hostages and a parallel prisoner exchange, in addition to the desperately needed few days of a cessation of violence. Now is the time to redouble our efforts to insist that a long-standing bilateral ceasefire comes to fruition.

We acknowledge the profound and existential grief experienced as a result of the actions of Hamas on October 7 as a tragedy for Jewish people in Israel and around the world. We weep with those who have loved ones held hostage, and we pray for their immediate release.

Like the author of Lamentations, our broken hearts weep as we hear of Palestinian babies in Gaza dying and of the thousands of children who have lost their lives. More than eleven thousand Palestinians have been killed, tens of thousands have been wounded, and 1.6 million have been displaced from their homes and communities. It is unacceptable that millions of people are in desperate need of clean water, adequate food, fuel for electricity, and urgently needed medical supplies. Without safe drinking water and proper medical supplies, poor hygiene conditions have already led to more preventable deaths, especially among children. We weep with broken hearts as we hear of hospitals, mosques, churches, and schools damaged and destroyed by this war. In Gaza, there is no safe place. There is no refuge. There is no escape.

The escalation of war cannot be adequately understood without acknowledging the conflict's broader backdrop - ongoing Israeli occupation and the disenfranchisement of Palestinians for more than 70 years. Three-quarters of Palestinian residents of Gaza are refugees dating back to 1948. Before 7 October 2023 had already been on track to be the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since the Second Intifada in 2000. Under the current Israeli government, there has been a significant expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank, emboldening Israeli settlers to act with impunity as they attack Palestinians and force them from their homes. Settler violence has

brutally intensified since 7th October, while there has been an increase in abuse, harassment, and discrimination of Palestinian Israeli citizens in Israel. A future where all human dignity in the region is respected looks distant if these realities are not acknowledged.

We stand up ardently against the vitriolic hatred that is being expressed around the world toward Jews, Muslims, and others because of firmly held convictions about the war. We condemn crimes of hate and uphold that all people should be able to live without fear, with security, and with equally protected human rights. We lament how this conflict is straining community cohesion and interreligious efforts.

We write as religious leaders to say enough is enough. We cannot remain silent as generations of families in Gaza are wiped out in an instant. World leaders cannot sit by while Palestinian civilians in Gaza experience such catastrophic destruction and trauma. The relentless and unrestrained bombing campaign with horrific indiscriminate effects and the ground invasion by Israel must end.

We are deeply grieved by the complicity of the United States and several other Western countries in the continued violence through efforts to actively oppose a ceasefire, including by vetoing multiple United Nations Resolutions. Instead, we call on governments worldwide to do everything possible to secure a bilateral ceasefire, one that will stop all violence from Hamas and Israel, allow for the safe release of civilian hostages held in Gaza, and give immediate and adequate access to desperately needed humanitarian aid to be delivered, including through crossings to Israel. Without an agreed upon end to violence from all parties – there is no path forward. We call on all governments to show support for the protection of all human life, advocating for a just and durable resolution to this crisis in which all Israelis and Palestinians might realize a vision of a just peace, illuminating human dignity, advancing security and self-determination for all.

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* Organizations are listed for identification purposes only.

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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:

November 24, 2023: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Welcomes News of Temporary Cessation in Violence and Release of Hostages; Renews Calls for a Permanent Ceasefire and an Enduring Peace. Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) welcomed the recent announcement of the agreement between Prime Minister Netanyahu's government in Israel and Hamas concerning the release of 50 hostages and a parallel prisoner exchange, in addition to the desperately needed few days of cessation of violence. This is a critical step in helping to stop further suffering, but much more must be done.

November 22, 2023: [WHITE HOUSE CANDLELIGHT PRAYER VIGIL](#). We welcome the recent announcement about the release of 50 hostages and a parallel prisoner exchange, in addition to the desperately needed few days cessation of violence. Now is the time to redouble our efforts to insist that a long-standing bilateral ceasefire comes to fruition. The civilian population in Gaza continues to suffer from a desperate need of basic life saving supplies such as water, food, gas, and medical aid. President Biden not only has the responsibility as a world leader, but a moral obligation, to save as many human lives as possible and the only way to do that is to end all violence between Hamas and Israel through a permanent ceasefire. – Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, executive director, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)

November 17, 2023: [CMEP Fears Devastating Impact of Violence on Christians in Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza](#). Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) urgently raises concerns regarding the sustainability of the Christian community in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza in light of Israel’s ongoing military and settler violence. Presently, hundreds of Christians are sheltering in the Holy Family Catholic Church in Gaza City. As the collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza persists, those sheltering are quickly running out of food and other necessities.

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

Contact Us

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