


Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Stands in Solidarity with the Churches of the Holy Land as Israeli Municipalities Attempt to Collect Taxes on Church-owned Properties

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CHURCHES FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) stands in solidarity with the Churches of the Holy Land as they undergo yet another attempt by Israeli municipalities to collect taxes on church-owned properties— a move that threatens the sustainability of the Churches to operate. CMEP recognizes the harm that these legal proceedings could cause to the ever-shrinking Christian community in this land. The Status Quo which has ensured religious freedom and harmony in the Holy Land must be protected. On June 23, 2024, Israeli municipal authorities alerted the Churches of Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv-Jaffa, Nazareth, and Ramallah stating that they were initiating legal procedures against the Churches due to unpaid property taxes. Heads of Churches and Patriarchs representing the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate, the Latin Patriarchate, the Anglican Episcopal Diocese, and the Custos of the Holy Land signed a joint letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu in which they decry these legal procedures as an attack on the Church and the Christian presence in the Holy Land. They urge him, as head of the State, to end these proceedings and restore the arrangements agreed upon by the Churches and Israel.

These legal proceedings upset the historical and legal rights of the Churches and contradict previous agreements between the Churches and Israel. They also violate the sacred Status Quo which has existed and been reiterated numerous times in Jerusalem and the Holy Land since the royal decree in the Ottoman Empire in 1757

ensuring that all religions have access to and space to exist peacefully in this sanctified space.

These taxes, if collected, could cause irreparable damage to the Churches, the Christian Community, and the many social services they provide, including but not limited to schools, churches, elderly houses, hospitals, kindergartens, orphanages, and more. If these proceedings are allowed to be pursued, Churches will have to cease the continuation of these social services that they provide to the greater community, regardless of religious affiliation, at little to no cost.

In February 2018, similar proceedings against Churches in Jerusalem caused Christian leaders to close the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in protest for the first time since the founding of the State of Israel. This captured the attention of the worldwide Christian community which put pressure on the municipality to drop the proceedings. Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) wrote to former Secretary of State Pompeo to urge the administration to ensure Israel protects the rights of Christians in the Holy Land. After sufficient pressure, Prime Minister Netanyahu canceled all legal proceedings against the churches. CMEP hopes that a similar and lasting resolution can be found to avert the crisis and protect the presence of Churches in Israel. CMEP urges the U.S. government to exert diplomatic pressure to ensure that the legal, historic, and sacred rights of the Churches of the Holy Land are protected and upheld.