

Witness in Society: Advocacy and Policy Engagement for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region



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1. INTRODUCTIONS

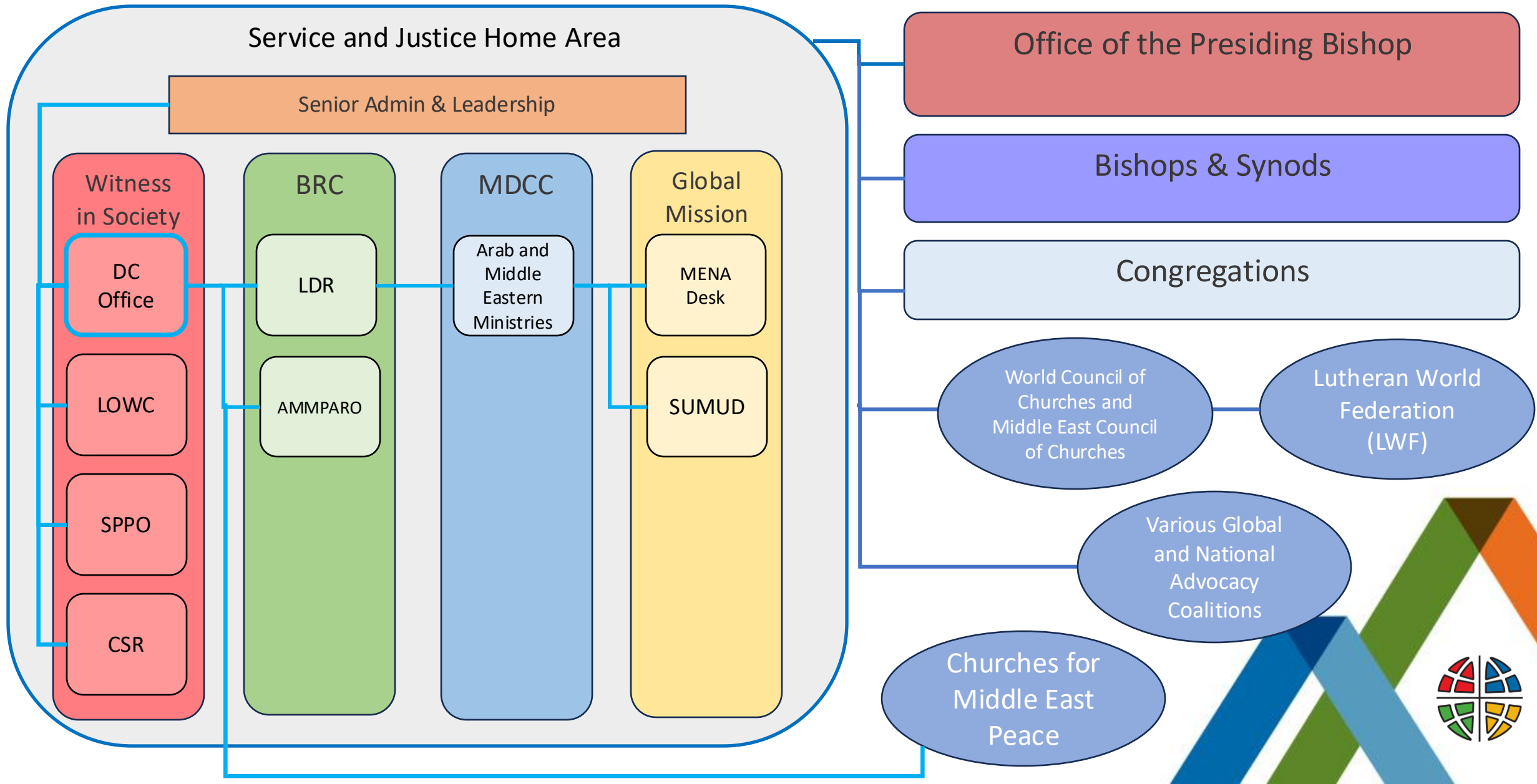
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- 14 years working in the aid and development sector, supporting capacity building for civil society and human rights entities in the MENA region- stabilization support in conflict zones and third-party monitoring of humanitarian aid.
- Congressional and Federal experience: Internship in the Senate; covered Congress as a journalist for Congressional Quarterly, conducted advocacy with Syrian human rights and civil society activists
- Travel and work experience: Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkiye
- Almost 2 years working in the current position with WiS



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2. WiS MENA Advocacy Linkages within the ELCA





3. Advocacy and Current MENA Policy Priorities



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a) Major Geographic Focus

- Palestine
- Israel
- Lebanon
- Iran
- Syria
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Egypt



b) Major Focus of Advocacy in the 119th Congress

- Continued advocacy for specific issues of prime importance to the ELCA, such as the funding of the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in Jerusalem, the support of advocacy for the ELCJHL and the wider Christian community in the Holy Land, and the protection of the Christian community as a whole, in the MENA region.
- Advocating for comprehensive US and International pressure to end the genocide in Gaza, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, and the re-opening of the medical corridor (both ways) between Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian healthcare system in Easter Jerusalem and the West Bank.
- Supporting a comprehensive peace plan that will end the US-Israel Regional War with priority for a comprehensive peace plan between Israel, Palestine and Lebanon to allow for reconstruction, population returns and humanitarian aid to reach these countries, in addition to a clear peace between the US, Israeli and Iran.
- Continue to highlight the existential danger the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza poses both to the Palestinian people and their quest for statehood, and as a direct result, fundamentally threaten what's left of Israel's democratic institutions, and the path to a regional peace. Focus on the prevention of defacto Israeli annexation of the West Bank.
- Advocate for continued positive US engagement for the region through sensible foreign policy, including continued foreign aid assistance, the support for multilateral institutions such as the UN and continued support for policies that center human rights and democratic norms when engaging with States and communities in the region



c) Major Considerations for the MENA portfolio

- The MENA file covers the entire region, but there are priorities based on the ELCA's relationships in the region through the MENA desk, and the juxtaposition of the ELCA's social teachings, memorials and resolutions.
 - Example: 1995 Social Statement "For Peace in God's World"
 - Example: 2005 Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine
 - Example: 2025 "*Towards Ending the Occupation of Palestine*", a Social Policy Resolution CA25.03.13
- The ELCA has engagement with the MENA region on multiple levels throughout the church, which combined, provide a degree of consensus about what are policy priorities in terms of federal advocacy and engagement- WiS MENA attempts to consider and take into consideration as much of these engagements as possible when considering advocacy.
- Specific portions of the MENA region have historically been home to various Christian communities, such are often the focal point for ELCA engagement in partnership with other partner institutions and ecumenical partners, including in Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.



d) We Need You in the Advocacy Fight!

- Advocacy (especially with the federal government) is a marathon, not a sprint, and requires patience, perseverance and repetition.
- The way in which we get results at the federal level is repetition, engagement and nagging
 - Example: The first Senate Joint Resolutions of Disapproval (JRDs) to suspend arms transfers to the Israeli State in 2024 received 19 Yes votes. The 6th JRDs vote last week garnered 40 votes!
- With Congress, sustained pressure and engagement creates a need to respond and consider adjusting a position or altering how a representative votes. That means that emails, phone calls, visits to district/state and DC offices repeatedly, showing up to town hall meetings and getting petitions signed and submitted can create change!!



d) Immediate Advocacy Needs

- There are major issues happening simultaneously, all clamoring for attention in the region. Almost all of these issues are connected and have a major root cause- a lack of a solution to the Israel Palestine conflict and the lack of the provision of an independent Palestinian State.

Immediate needs:

1. Fiscal Year 2027 budget is being decided now- there are numerous pushes to support USG funding to the Augusta Victoria Hospital and the East Jerusalem Hospital Network (EJHN) that underpins the healthcare for all Palestinians in the Holy Land – engage with Congress and request your representative support these funding efforts
2. Multiple countries need humanitarian aid support at a moment when the United States has pulled back from global aid provision. The USG needs to return to providing clear aid support to the region.
3. Without any lack of clarity about the status of the war of choice against Iran, and with no congressional authorization, continued support to get a War Powers Resolution passed to ensure Congress exercises its constitutional right to determine when this country goes to war, is needed.



d) Immediate Advocacy Needs

4. The State of Israel is on a path to destroying the ability for a Palestinian State to exist, in contravention of 33+ years of USG policy to support a two-state solution (at least on paper)- there are congressional legislative actions being offered that would reinforce to requirement that a Palestinian State be allowed to exist, and that Israel's current trajectory will not be supported by the US Government. Congressional members should be pushed to support the following legislative actions:

- a) [H.R. 3565](#) - Block the Bombs Act – Sponsor Rep. Ramirez (D-IL-3) – currently 65 cosponsors
- b) [S.Res.224](#): calling for the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza – Sponsor Sen. Welch with 45 Cosponsors
- c) [H.Res.473](#) calling for the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza – Sponsor Rep. Jayapal with 124 Cosponsors
- d) [S.2672](#) - [SANCTIONS Act](#): Senator Welch reintroduced his SANCTIONS Act that would also codify Biden-era sanctions on settler violence with co-sponsors Van Hollen, Sanders, Durbin, and Merkley. This bill was referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. 4 Cosponsors
- e) [S.2667](#) - [West Bank Violence Act](#): Senator Booker introduced a very similar bill with cosponsors Shaheen, Reed, Coons, Bennet, and Warner. This bill was referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. 40 Cosponsors
- f) Continued Joint Resolutions of Disapproval that would suspend arms shipments to the State of Israel in compliance with US law and international law.
- g) H.Res.1092 - Condemning Israeli settlement expansion, settler violence, and related human rights abuses in the West Bank, and calling for accountability and specific United States policy responses to deter further violations and protect the viability of a negotiated two-State solution





sumud

for Justice in Palestine and Israel



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Steadfastness/صمود/Sumud: ELCA Ministry

Sumud is an initiative informed by our Palestinian Lutheran siblings and in collaboration with ELCA staff and clergy to respond to worsening conditions and realities on the ground in the holy land.

All of us are Sumud, and together we empower our ELCA communities with resources and opportunities to engage in the advocacy, awareness, and accompaniment and to show steadfastness in our solidarity with those facing injustice in the holy land.

Sumud, formerly "Peace not Walls", is a new ministry formed from important input from our Palestinian Lutheran siblings, in collaboration with ELCA staff and clergy.



What Does SUMUD Stand for in the Holy Land?

In alignment with ELCA social teachings and the 2005 Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Palestine and Israel, Sumud stands for:

- All Palestinians and Israelis living in dignity with all their human rights met
- An end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands
- Nonviolent peacebuilding
- Continuation and protection of the indigenous Christian witness in the Holy Land



What does Sumud stand for in the United States?

In alignment with ELCA social teachings and the 2005 Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Palestine and Israel, Sumud stands for:

- ELCA members attaining a holistic and accurate understanding of the Palestine/Israel context
- Using our Christian and American witness to advocate for just peace
- Accompanying and standing in solidarity with our Palestinian Christian siblings and their wider community against the systems of oppression they face in daily life
- Amplifying and listening to voices of our siblings in Christ on the ground and taking their witness seriously





Current Resources and Major Reports

ELCA Resources:

ELCA Social Statements, Teachings and Policy Statements:

[Toward Ending the Occupation of Palestine - ELCA Resources](#)

<https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/crisis-holy-land>

[Peace - ELCA Resources](#) (For Peace In God's World)

[Economic Life](#)

[Church in Society - ELCA Resources](#)

Office of the Presiding Bishop:

[Presiding Bishop Eaton Letter to US President and Congress Regarding Situation in Gaza - ELCA Resources](#) (2025)

[Bishop Eaton Statement on the Attack on Holy Family Church in Gaza](#) (2025)

[North America- Holy Land Solidarity Visit Statement](#) (2025)

[Bishop Eaton Issues Statement on Fatal Shooting of Two Israeli Embassy Staff in Washington, D.C.](#) (2025)

[Bishop Eaton Issues Response in Support of Jerusalem Patriarchs on Gaza](#) (2025)

[Presiding Bishop Eaton Issues Pastoral Message on Syria](#) (2024)

[Letter to President Biden calling for a permanent bilateral ceasefire in Gaza - ELCA Resources](#) (2024)

ELCA Companion Church: [ELCJHL](#)

WiS Action Alerts: <https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/advocacy>

SUMUD Webpage:

https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/sumud?gad_source=1

[Lenten Series Guide 2025 - ELCA Resources](#)

[Sumud in Your ELCA Community](#)



External Resources:

Official Genocide Reports:

[Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds | OHCHR](#)

https://www.btselem.org/publications/202507_our_genocide

<https://www.phr.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Genocide-in-Gaza-PHRI-English.pdf>

[Amnesty concludes Israel is committing genocide in Gaza](#)

Humanitarian and Human Rights Updates:

<https://reliefweb.int/country/pse>

[United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory](#)

[Gaza crisis infographics - United Nations](#)

[Population Movement Monitoring IOM 25](#)

[IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#)

[Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel | Oxfam America | Oxfam](#)

[The Association of International Development Agencies – Aida](#)

[Gisha](#)

[Adalah](#)

Denominational and MISC Resources:

[Churches for Middle East Peace – Justice can prevail. Peace is possible.](#)

[Friends of Sabeel North America \(FOS-NA\) - Sabeel, Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center](#)

[Van Hollen, Merkley Report Following 2025 CODEL to Gaza Border, Israel, West Bank, Jordan, and Egypt](#)





Questions!

