

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 1, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
United States Secretary of State  
The State Department  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write regarding the recent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, and the need to use all diplomatic tools to support a durable end to hostilities in Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank. We welcome your commitment to work with the international community to provide rapid humanitarian assistance and to marshal international donor support to meet urgent humanitarian and reconstruction needs in Gaza.

As you well know, there was a humanitarian crisis in Gaza before the fighting began, and these recent hostilities have significantly aggravated the dire humanitarian emergency on the ground. According to recent reports, the fighting has damaged 17 hospitals and clinics in Gaza, wrecked the only coronavirus test laboratory, sent fetid wastewater into its streets, broke water pipes serving at least 800,000 people, disconnected a desalination plant that provides fresh water to 250,000 people, damaged or closed dozens of schools affecting some 600,000 students, cut off electricity, and forced 91,000 Gazans to flee their homes. More than 71,200 civilians sought protection inside of UNRWA's schools during the conflict.

We must address this humanitarian emergency while supporting a durable ceasefire and a return to international diplomacy. To that end, we request that you take four immediate steps:

1. **Support Emergency Relief:** Press all sides to allow for unfettered emergency relief distribution, emergency repairs to essential infrastructure, and for families to receive food and water, access to medical care, and attend to other emergency needs. Announce new bilateral funding for humanitarian and development assistance to address urgent needs, including access to safe water and wastewater treatment, and encourage other donors, including Israel, the EU and GCC countries, to do so as well.
2. **Support Humanitarian Access:** Ensure the opening of the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings, so that critical humanitarian personnel, including trauma coordinators and security advisors, can enter and that emergency relief items, including fuel and building materials, can be brought in to address the growing needs of the civilian population. The U.S. should also work to ease on an emergency basis, and ultimately lift, the harsh restrictions on freedom of movement that block Gazans from accessing critical health care, visiting family members, and accepting educational and other opportunities outside the Gaza Strip.

3. Robustly Fund Humanitarian Efforts, including fully funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency: UNRWA is the largest humanitarian actor on the ground and together with other US and international NGOs is providing critical health and other services to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Gaza and the West Bank. We request that you restore funding for UNRWA to the previous annual funding levels of \$360 million and robustly support forthcoming emergency appeals, following all applicable US laws and vetting standards for recipients and implementing organizations.
4. Restore the U.S. Diplomatic Presence on the Ground: A number of key posts, including U.S. Ambassador, Consul General, and USAID Chief of Mission remain empty, or duties are being covered by “acting” officials. These posts are critical to our diplomatic engagement with both Israel and the Palestinians and to managing U.S. humanitarian and development assistance programs and should be filled with permanent appointments as soon as possible.

The United States has a critical role to play in meeting urgent humanitarian needs, coordinating with our allies and the international community, and supporting and working with the parties to recognize and protect the human rights and dignity of all Israelis and Palestinians. In order for this ceasefire to be durable and avoid a renewal of the cycle of violence, it is critical that we improve the dire conditions in Gaza that only contribute to despair and further fuel extremism. We strongly urge you to step up the United States’ diplomatic engagement to lead the international community and meet this moment.

Sincerely,



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Chris Van Hollen  
U.S. Senator



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Tim Kaine  
U.S. Senator



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Chris Murphy  
U.S. Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
U.S. Senator



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Patrick Leahy  
U.S. Senator



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Brian Schatz  
U.S. Senator



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Bernard Sanders  
U.S. Senator



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Edward J. Markey  
U.S. Senator



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Sherrod Brown  
U.S. Senator



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Jack Reed  
U.S. Senator



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Sheldon Whitehouse  
U.S. Senator



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Margaret Wood Hassan  
U.S. Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
U.S. Senator



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Raphael Warnock  
U.S. Senator

/s/

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Martin Heinrich  
U.S. Senator



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Patty Murray  
U.S. Senator



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Jeanne Shaheen  
U.S. Senator