



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

July 13, 2023

The Honorable
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Van Hollen:

Thank you for your May 24 letter to Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas raising concerns about the extension of reciprocal privileges to U.S. citizens traveling to Israel in the event that Israel is designated as a program country in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

Israel does not currently meet all the statutory and policy requirements for designation as a VWP country. As mentioned in your letter, the Administration strongly supports Israel's candidacy in the VWP once it meets all requirements, including extending reciprocal privileges to all U.S. citizens and nationals - including Palestinian Americans and Americans on the Palestinian Authority (PA) population registry traveling to and through Israel. If Israel meets the reciprocity requirement as well as the other program requirements, Israel's designation as a participating country in the VWP would be beneficial for the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship, including for U.S. and Israeli citizens.

Engagements with the Government of Israel (GOI) are ongoing. We have been very clear with the GOI that initial and continuing designation as a participating country in the VWP requires Israel to grant reciprocal privileges to all U.S. citizens and nationals – including Palestinian Americans on the PA population registry – traveling to and through Israel for short term stays for business or tourism for up to 90 days. Reciprocity is a core VWP

requirement that all program countries must meet. We expect Israel to adjust its travel policies consistent with this requirement in order to qualify for the program.

Regarding compliance mechanisms on reciprocity, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Department of State (DOS), conducts formal reviews of countries participating in the VWP at least once every two years. The results of these reviews are provided to certain Congressional Committees, as required by law. In addition, DHS conducts continuous monitoring of program countries between the formal review cycles to ensure compliance with VWP requirements. If a program country fails to address identified compliance deficiencies, DHS may take a number of steps in response, up to and including suspension or termination of the participating country in the program.

We hope this information is helpful to you. We also hope the briefing provided on June 15 to you, Senators Merkley and Welch, and the staff of several of the co-signers of this letter met your needs. The co-signers of your letter will receive separate, identical responses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Naz Durakoğlu". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'N' and 'D'.

Naz Durakoğlu
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Legislative Affairs