

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2023

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As you and your administration work with Israel and international partners to secure the release of hostages and respond to the terror attack on Israel, we join you in your urgent call for humanitarian assistance for Palestinian civilians in Gaza. We encourage you to work with international partners to achieve expeditious implementation of a plan for sustained humanitarian aid in Gaza. We hope you'll join us in encouraging our ally Israel to take immediate steps to help provide critical humanitarian aid to the innocent civilians in Gaza, including re-opening the Kerem Shalom border crossing to allow life-saving water, food, and fuel to reach vulnerable civilians.

Hamas's October 7th terrorist attacks on Israel were nothing short of horrific. Israel has the right and the obligation to defend its people against these unspeakable horrors, to seek the release of hundreds of innocent hostages, and to ensure Hamas can never carry out a massacre like this again. We also believe that while Israel works to defeat Hamas, Israel must employ all possible measures to protect innocent civilians in Gaza. It is important for Israel to take every step possible to make clear it is defending Israelis against Hamas, not waging war on Palestinians. Eliminating the threat posed by Hamas and protecting civilians are not mutually exclusive aims. Indeed, International Humanitarian Law requires that civilians be protected during armed conflict.

It is hard to overstate the scale of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza. The United Nations estimates 1.6 million Palestinians are internally displaced within the Gaza Strip, a land area comparable to twice the size of the District of Columbia. It is estimated that half of the displaced civilians are in make-shift United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) shelters. It is largely unknown where the remaining displaced civilians are seeking shelter. The United States must urge Israel to work with international relief agencies to facilitate safe and adequate accommodations for displaced individuals, and the United States must make clear that no non-combatant individuals should be compelled to leave Gaza.

This humanitarian crisis will precipitate a significant, and preventable loss of human life if not addressed immediately. More than half of Gaza's hospitals have shut down, desalination plants are struggling to remain operational, and the last operative flour mill has been shut down due to a lack of fuel.

We recognize the urgent need to fulfill your emergency supplemental request for necessary security assistance to help Israel defend itself and humanitarian assistance to civilians impacted

by the war. As we work to secure the needed humanitarian funds in bipartisan legislation, we also expect our international partners to share the responsibility to improve the conditions of life in Gaza.

Moreover, the conflict cannot leave Gaza so destroyed and devastated that there is no possibility for Palestinians to return to their communities and rebuild. We are concerned that increased and prolonged suffering in Gaza is not only intolerable for Palestinian civilians there but will also negatively impact the security of Israeli civilians by exacerbating existing tensions and eroding regional alliances. Professional militaries have a dual responsibility throughout their campaigns to minimize civilian casualties during tactical operations and to sustain living conditions for civilians.

We therefore urge you to communicate to the Israeli government and other relevant parties that the ongoing military operations must provide for:

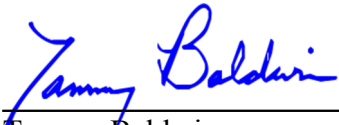
1. The protection of civilians and civilian sites, in coordination with the relevant United Nations organizations.
2. The sustained delivery of the basic essentials of life (including water, food, medical and hygiene supplies and fuel for transportation of such essentials) in quantities sufficient to meet the current need. To do so, the Kerem Shalom border crossing between Israel and Gaza, the main access point for supplies before October 7, must reopen to facilitate the proper inspection and delivery of larger quantities of aid and the reopening of this crossing must become part of the humanitarian support plan.
3. Access to prompt medical attention for sick and wounded civilians, both within Gaza as well as the option to evacuate to a neighboring country.

Through United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and UN vetting and oversight processes, the U.S. must help ensure that the humanitarian aid and protections afforded civilians are not used or exploited by Hamas or other terrorist organizations operating in Gaza.

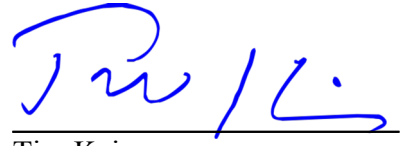
Lastly, there must be hope for the future. We worry the current trajectory of the conflict moves us further away from our shared goals of ending Hamas's threat and removing them from power in Gaza, bringing hostages home, and achieving a sustainable peace in the region through a two-state solution. Mr. President, it is in our national interest that you clearly articulate that vision. To these ends, we urge you to define a U.S. vision for the future of Israel and Palestine as well as the role our country will play in encouraging a peaceful resolution and rebuilding. Part of this vision must not only include two sovereign states for Israelis and Palestinians, but an expectation of equal treatment under law, including a serious effort to address violence committed by a minority of Israeli settlers against Palestinian residents of the West Bank.

This conflict will not be solved by force alone. Preservation of and respect for innocent life is both morally right and the best hope for a long-term strategy to accomplish security, stability, and peace in the region.


Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



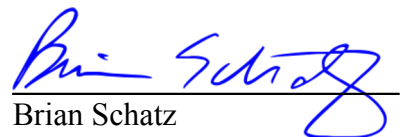
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator