

Join Bicameral Letter to Biden on Israel/Palestine Crisis

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Endorsing organizations: Americans for Peace Now, Jewish Voice for Peace Action, IfNotNow Movement, AJP Action, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Justice Democrats, Peace Action, Working Families Party, Defense for Children International – Palestine, American Friends Service Committee, Center for Jewish Nonviolence, Progressive Democrats of America, US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), Win Without War, Churches For Middle East Peace, Eko, Center for Constitutional Rights, Dream Defenders, Council on American-Islamic Relations, Arab American Institute, Adalah Justice Project, Power Action Fund

Signers: Sen. Sanders, Bush, Carson, Lee [PA], McCollum, Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, Pressley, Tlaib

Dear Colleague,

As violence, turmoil, and threats to democracy have escalated in Israel and Palestine, many of us in Congress have been monitoring the situation closely and expressing our alarm. Following historic protests, the extreme right-wing government of Israel appears no less committed to dismantling the rule of law and any barriers to its power, while continuing to seek the destruction of Palestinian communities. It was heartening to see President Biden state that “They [the Israeli government] cannot continue down this road.” I believe these two threats are deeply connected: as long as the violation of Palestinian rights is permitted, the democratic and human rights of everyone in the region will remain in danger. The longer we wait to take action, the further the reality of a two-state solution – and the closer the reality of an entrenched extremist government and worsening violence in the region.

I hope you will join me and Sen. Bernie Sanders in sending a letter to President Biden and Secretary Blinken urging immediate action to prevent the further loss of life, and a shift in United States policy to address the root causes of this crisis. Our letter surveys the factual record concerning recent violence in the occupied Palestinian West Bank and the egregious actions of the Israeli government, and asks the Biden Administration to ensure that all foreign assistance to Israel is consistent with U.S. law and human rights.

In order to protect the lives and rights of all people and to help achieve a lasting peace, we must treat this crisis as an inflection point, and stand up clearly for our values.

You can sign on to the letter (and view the footnoted version) [via Quill here](#). The deadline is EOD Friday, March 31. For any questions, please contact Rajiv Sicora

Sincerely,

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.

LETTER TEXT:

Dear President Biden and Secretary Blinken,

We write to you with deep concern regarding the rapidly escalating violence in the occupied Palestinian West Bank and the alarming actions of the new extreme right-wing Israeli government. We urge immediate action to prevent the further loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives. At this inflection point, we ask your administration to undertake a shift in U.S. policy in recognition of the worsening violence, further annexation of land, and denial of Palestinian rights. Only by protecting democracy, human rights, and self-determination for all Palestinians and Israelis can we achieve a lasting peace.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government includes far-right, anti-Palestinian individuals and parties. Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir openly encourages and praises violence against Palestinians. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich responded to the recent Israeli settler attacks on the Palestinian town of Huwara in the occupied West Bank by declaring that the whole town should be “wiped out.” Their presence in the government has made this the most far-right, illiberal government in Israel’s history. True to their records, these figures are pushing repressive, anti-democratic policies and escalating violence towards the Palestinian population.

Shocking violence in late February encapsulated the bloody reality in the occupied West Bank. On February 22, a daytime raid by the Israeli army into the crowded Palestinian city of Nablus killed 11 Palestinians, among them a 72 year-old-man and a 16-year-old child. On February 26, a Palestinian gunman shot dead two Israeli settlers outside of Nablus. Subsequently, hundreds of Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian town of Huwara. The settlers, accompanied by the Israeli army, set fire to homes, schools, vehicles, and businesses, killing one Palestinian and injuring over 300 Palestinians. The local Israeli military commander

called the attack a “pogrom.” The attack was not an isolated incident, with the State Department reporting that Israeli settler attacks have expanded in severity and scale. The day after the Huwara attack, an Israeli-American citizen Elan Ganeles was killed by a Palestinian gunman on a highway in the occupied West Bank.

This comes amid an already violent year. Israeli forces and settlers have killed over 85 Palestinians in 2023, including 16 children. At least 14 Israelis have been killed, including two children. The previous year was the deadliest for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank since 2004 and included the Israeli military’s killings of two American citizens, Shireen Abu Akleh and Omar Assad.

This Israeli government's anti-democratic mission to dismantle the rule of law is a threat to Israelis and Palestinians alike. In addition to explicitly hateful, anti-Palestinian policies, this government is attempting to destroy the independent Israeli judiciary. This move would threaten the rights of all citizens of Israel, enable more corruption by Prime Ministers, and open the path towards further annexation of Palestinian lands.

We are deeply concerned by Israeli government moves that demonstrate that illegal de facto and de jure annexation of the occupied West Bank is well underway. For example, on February 12, the Israeli government, over U.S. objections, authorized nine settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank in violation of international law. A little over a week later, following a U.N. Security Council statement criticizing Israeli settlement expansion, the government announced the approval of over 7,000 new settlement homes. Furthermore, Israeli legal experts deem the government’s decision to transfer most governing authority in the occupied West Bank from the military to a civilian minister, Finance Minister Smotrich, to be a form of annexation – a move your administration has warned against.

Many of us have previously written to your administration with deep concern regarding the entrenched Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian Territories, including the occupation and military siege of

Gaza, and the Israeli government's worsening systemic violations of Palestinian human rights. Those concerns have only deepened and grown more urgent under the new Israeli government.

We know your administration has met repeatedly with Israeli officials to reiterate U.S. support for "equal measures of freedom, dignity, security and prosperity" for both Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, these good faith entreaties have had no effect. Furthermore, despite massive street protests and a general strike, the Israeli government has merely delayed its judicial overhaul for a short time, and none of the agreements reached this week will lessen the systemic violence against Palestinians, including annexation of Palestinian land. The Israeli government's actions are in clear violation of international law and commitments made to the U.S.; its agenda will further devastate Palestinian communities and heighten tension with violent consequences for both Palestinians and Israelis. Only clear steps to change political conditions will pave the way for peace.

As such, we call on your administration to promptly:

- Ensure U.S. taxpayer funds do not support projects in illegal settlements;
- Determine whether U.S.-origin defense articles have been used in violation of existing U.S. laws, including for a purpose not authorized by Section 4 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. § 2754) or to commit or support gross violations of human rights by the Israeli government in violation of Section 502B(a)(2) of the Foreign Assistance Act (22 U.S.C. § 2304(a)(2)) and the U.S. "Leahy Laws," Section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act (22 U.S.C. § 2378d and 10 U.S.C. § 362).

Furthermore, we call on your administration to ensure that all future foreign assistance to Israel, including weapons and equipment, is not used in support of gross violations of human rights, including by strengthening end-use monitoring and financial tracking. We ask that you respond with a detailed plan as to how the administration plans to achieve that goal.

Sincerely,

JEWISHINSIDER