

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 1, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is dire and the civilian suffering is at an unacceptable and staggering level. Ninety-three percent of Palestinians in Gaza are facing crisis levels of hunger. Eighty-five percent of the population is displaced. Seventy percent of those killed are women and children.

While the scale of the crisis is massive, the humanitarian assistance that is entering Gaza is just a fraction of what is needed to save lives. Since aid operations resumed on October 21, delivery of lifesaving assistance to Gaza continues to be hampered, despite no evidence of Hamas theft or diversion of humanitarian assistance provided via the United Nations or international non-governmental organizations (INGOs).

The United Nations system in Gaza, including the more than 13,000 employees of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), plays an indispensable role in providing lifesaving aid to people in need. The allegations that twelve UNRWA employees may have been involved in the October 7th terrorist attack on Israel are extremely troubling, and we welcome the announcement that those individuals were immediately terminated. Moving forward, there must be a swift and thorough investigation to ensure accountability so that the resumption of U.S. assistance through UNRWA, when appropriate, remains possible.

In order to significantly increase the amount of assistance entering Gaza, we ask your administration to work with Israeli officials to take the following urgent steps:

First, repair and open a third border crossing at Erez to provide additional aid to north Gaza. Planned missions by humanitarian actors to reach north Gaza from the south have repeatedly not been allowed to proceed by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) due to cited security concerns, leaving hundreds of thousands living there stranded without enough food, water, and medical supplies and equipment.

Second, streamline the convoluted inspections process for aid entering via the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border crossings, and issue a pre-approved list of items for entry. During a visit to the Rafah crossing earlier this month, Senators Van Hollen and Merkley saw firsthand hundreds of trucks lined up on the side of the road, waiting in the cumbersome screening and approval process that can take more than two weeks to complete, as well as an entire warehouse full of

items rejected by Israeli authorities – including water testing equipment, medical kits for delivering babies, oxygen tanks, and tents – despite those same items having received Israeli pre-clearance prior to reaching the inspection point.

Third, establish a clear, enforceable deconfliction process inside Gaza to ensure humanitarian organizations can operate safely. Hundreds of health and humanitarian workers have died in Gaza, including humanitarian aid workers who have been killed in areas deemed “safe zones” by the IDF. Israeli authorities should establish a direct line of contact for the humanitarian community to the IDF, as well as hold regular meetings to review incidents and make improvements.

Fourth, increase capacity for processing humanitarian aid and restart the import of commercial goods via the border crossing at Kerem Shalom. Before October 7th, hundreds of trucks filled with commercial goods crossed through Kerem Shalom into Gaza every day. The current humanitarian trucking operation can help reduce the suffering, but it cannot substitute for a functioning commercial sector.

Fifth, open additional supply routes for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. Every option must be explored to increase the amount of humanitarian and commercial goods going in, including via Jordan, the West Bank, Ashdod, and maritime routes. As conditions permit, we encourage you to sustain and expand current U.S. military support of humanitarian assistance efforts, where feasible.

Finally, humanitarian organizations are limited in their reach by the ongoing conflict. The largest daily amount of humanitarian aid entered Gaza on November 28th, during the seven-day humanitarian pause. Additional and longer humanitarian pauses are needed to enable a surge of assistance to enter Gaza and the safe movement of goods and people within Gaza. A humanitarian pause will also allow people to safely return to their homes in north Gaza.

These steps will not solve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, but taken together, they will alleviate the suffering for millions of people.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



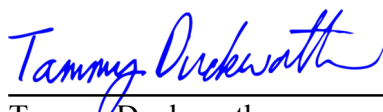
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



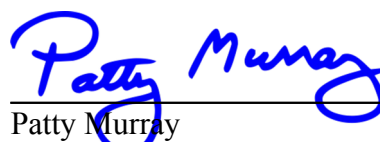
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



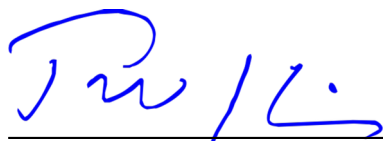
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



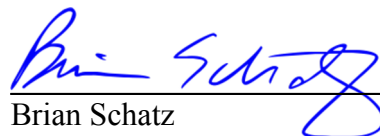
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



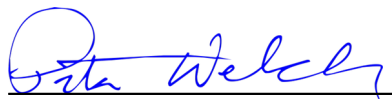
Patty Murray
United States Senator



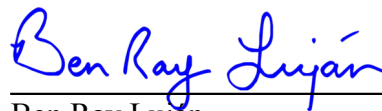
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



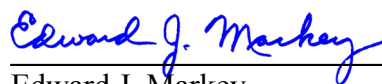
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



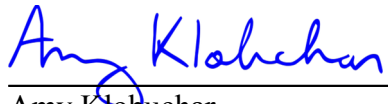
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



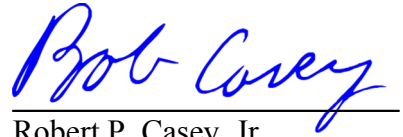
Jack Reed
United States Senator



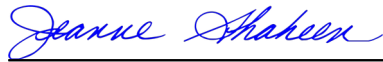
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator