

THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

NOV 20 2023

The Honorable  
Betty McCollum  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ms. McCollum:

I appreciated your November 3 letter sharing your concerns as well as your recommended actions regarding the humanitarian crisis and the need to protect civilians in Gaza. I took your ideas to heart as I engaged partners throughout Middle East and beyond during my most recent travel. Throughout the trip, I made clear that the United States will stand with Israel as it seeks to prevent the horrific terrorist attacks of October 7 from reoccurring. At the same time, I also made clear that much more needs to be done to protect Palestinian civilians and ensure access to sustained humanitarian assistance. While we still face profound challenges, we were able to make tangible progress across several of these key priorities.

Your first recommendation regarding humanitarian pauses and the need for sufficient humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians was at the core of my efforts in the region. In both Israel and Jordan -where I met counterparts from the broader region - we discussed steps to accelerate and expand the sustained delivery of aid, including food, water, medicine, and fuel. Since we brokered an agreement with Israel, Egypt, and UN agencies on a mechanism to enable aid to flow through the Rafah crossing, more than 900 trucks with life-saving assistance have crossed from Egypt into Gaza as a result of our sustained efforts. At the same time, far more is needed, and our focus is on increasing and sustaining the throughput significantly. Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues David Satterfield joined me for my engagements in the region, and he is continuing to work with the parties to implement our action plans.

I also had an opportunity to meet with Commissioner General Lazzarini of the UN Relief and Works Agency, and I spoke with his staff located in Gaza. They are performing extraordinary lifesaving work in the face of extremely difficult conditions, and we discussed how we can expedite efforts to provide them the resources they need to continue to be the primary provider of assistance to Palestinian civilians.

I also agree with your emphasis on the need for humanitarian pauses, including as a means to facilitate greater provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians. I pushed for such pauses in private and in public in Israel and the broader region. Following our discussions last week, the Israeli government announced the start of daily 4-hour pauses as well as the establishment of two humanitarian corridors. We appreciate these steps in the right direction, but much more needs to be done. We are working with our partners to take full advantage of pauses and corridors to enable Palestinian civilians to move to safer locations and receive more aid.

Regarding your second point, the United States has consistently reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself, as enshrined in the UN Charter. I continued to do so at each stop throughout my trip. At the same time, we have always made the point that how it does so matters; it matters to us and to the rest of the world. I have consistently emphasized to Israeli leaders that Israel also must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, which includes taking all feasible precautions to protect civilians from harm and shared steps they can take toward that end. Israel can and should do more to protect civilians. Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people and Palestinian civilians should not suffer the consequences.

Third, I appreciate your focus on the need to prevent extremist settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. Starting well before October 7, we have underscored to our Israeli partners publicly and privately the need to put an end to it, including by holding perpetrators of such violence accountable. Israeli leaders have committed to take the necessary steps to address extremist settler violence, which we are monitoring closely.

Finally, I fully agree that even as we address the current conflict in Gaza, we need to focus on what comes next. Ultimately, the only way to ensure this crisis never happens again is to begin setting the conditions for durable peace and security, and to frame our diplomatic efforts now with that in mind. At the G7 meeting in Tokyo, I laid out publicly basic principles that can guide our work, which include:

- No forcible displacement of Palestinians from Gaza - not now, not after the war.
- No use of Gaza as a platform for terrorism or other violent attacks.
- No reoccupation of Gaza after the conflict ends.
- No attempt to blockade or besiege Gaza. No reduction in the territory of Gaza.
- We must also ensure no terrorist threats can emanate from the West Bank.

We must also work on the affirmative elements to get to a sustained peace. These must include:

- The Palestinian people's voices and aspirations at the center of postcrisis governance in Gaza.
- Palestinian-led governance and Gaza unified with the West Bank.
- A sustained mechanism for reconstruction in Gaza.
- A pathway to Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in states of their own, with equal measures of security, freedom, opportunity, and dignity.

Again, I truly appreciate your constructive input and proposals. I look forward to continuing to partner with you to advance our shared interests and priorities to resolve the current crisis and lay the foundation for lasting peace and security in the region.

Sincerely,

  
Antony J. Blinken