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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 18, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden,

Thank you for your continued efforts to address the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, your steadfast support of Israel, and your work to provide aid to Palestinians who urgently need humanitarian assistance. The conflict has been largely contained, and Israel has made significant progress in destroying Hamas. In the midst of these successes, however, the humanitarian crisis has worsened, in part due to Hamas intercepting food aid and complicating distribution through its human shield military tactics.

I am particularly concerned about the crisis levels of food insecurity and potential for famine in Gaza. The World Food Programme (WFP) has determined that half of the Gaza's population is struggling with catastrophic hunger and one in three children under the age of two living in northern Gaza are acutely malnourished.¹ WFP's Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau stated that the acute malnutrition and wasting in Gaza is "the worst level of child malnutrition anywhere in the world... If nothing changes a famine is imminent in northern Gaza."² Similarly, Save the Children has stated that, due to the inability to deliver aid safely, all 1.1 million children in Gaza face starvation.³ Many have been forced to "forage for scraps of food left by rats and eating leaves."⁴ Weeks have passed since both these statements, and the humanitarian crisis has only deepened.

¹ *Famine imminent in northern Gaza, new report warns*, WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (Mar. 18, 2024), <https://www.wfp.org/news/famine-imminent-northern-gaza-new-report-warns>.

² *WFP Deputy Chief Warns Security Council of Imminent Famine in Northern Gaza Unless Conditions Change*, WORLD FOOD PROGRAM USA (Feb. 28, 2024), <https://www.wfpusa.org/news-release/wfp-deputy-chief-warns-security-council-of-imminent-famine-in-northern-gaza-unless-conditions-change/>.

³ *Gaza: Families forced to forage for food left by rats as 1.1 million children face starvation*, RELIEFWEB (Feb. 22, 2024), https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-families-forced-forage-food-left-rats-11-million-children-face-starvation?_gl=1*hf6n1p*_ga*MjAzNzE0MzU4OC4xNzAyODkwMTgw*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTcwODY2OTA0MC41LjEuMTcwODY2OTA2Ny4zMy4wLjA.

⁴ *Id.*

Lack of food has already begun to claim lives. Gazan Health Ministry officials reported that, in recent days, over 25 people have died from malnutrition, including a two-month-old infant.⁵ The 5,000 Gazan women giving birth each month suffer from malnutrition, dehydration, and lack of health care, putting both their lives and their children's lives at risk.⁶ New fathers must scour markets to find enough food for their wives to breastfeed and keep their children alive.⁷

Northern Gaza faces the worst levels of food insecurity because aid has not reliably reached the region. Even if Israel approves an aid convoy to head north, convoys receive little security support and cratered roads and ever more desperate crowds of starving Gazans have made the 45-minute trip from Rafah to Gaza City increasingly difficult.⁸

Israel has every right to wage war against Hamas terrorists for their brutal massacre of 1,200 Israeli civilians on October 7. This right to self-defense does not supersede or obviate Israeli humanitarian obligations in Gaza. The vast majority of Gazans did not participate in the October 7 attacks on Israel. They are, like most, seeking a safe, stable livelihood and food for their families. Yet, under current conditions, safety and food are luxuries. More must be done to respond to crisis levels of food insecurity in Gaza.

I am encouraged by your Administration's efforts to airlift in aid and build a temporary sea port to provide additional entry routes for assistance to Gaza. I am confident that your efforts enabled the deliveries of aid through Israel's 96th Gate and ships supported by World Central Kitchen.⁹ I urge you to continue these efforts and build upon the World Central Kitchen's model until the sea port is completed. Even after the sea port is operational in several months, it and other existing aid efforts will likely not meet the totality of humanitarian needs in Gaza.

⁵ Steve Hendrix & Hajar Harb, *16 children have died of malnutrition in aid-starved Gaza, health officials say*, WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 6, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/03/06/gaza-hunger-starvation-malnutrition-aid/>; Menelaos Hadjicostis, *Another top donor says it will resume funding the UN agency for Palestinians as Gaza hunger grows*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Mar. 9, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-gaza-war-news-03-09-2024-6f4514fa1f4ad1f18a9d4331d81f917f>.

⁶ Hiba Yazbek & Ameera Harouda, *Thousands of pregnant women in Gaza suffer from malnutrition, health authorities say*, NEW YORK TIMES (Mar. 10, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/10/world/middleeast/gaza-malnutrition-hunger-pregnant-women.html>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Joseph Krauss, *Why isn't desperately needed aid reaching Palestinians in Gaza?*, PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE (Feb. 21, 2024), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/why-isnt-desperately-needed-aid-reaching-palestinians-in-gaza#:~:text=Why%20can't%20organizations%20distribute,to%20flee%20to%20the%20south>.

⁹ Wafaa Shurafa, Samy Magdy, & Menelaos Hadjicostis, *An aid ship is sailing to Gaza, where hundreds of thousands face starvation 5 months into war*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Mar. 12, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-news-03-12-2024-d2ba829df1df1092cf421fc591af9063>; Anushka Patil, *First Ship Carrying Food Aid Arrives in Gaza*, NEW YORK TIMES (Mar. 15, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/15/world/middleeast/gaza-food-aid-ship.html>.

The Palestinian people require increased aid by all possible avenues, but especially by land. Aid delivered by ground transportation is significantly more cost-effective, scalable, and sustainable, and delivery routes already exist.¹⁰ As such, I reiterate my calls¹¹ for you to urge Israel to reopen the Erez border crossing, significantly speed up its inspections for aid entering Gaza, and open additional crossings to increase the rate of aid delivery. In particular, the Erez crossing will allow for aid providers to support those Gazans most isolated and in need—the sick, elderly, disabled, and young who could not leave their homes when Israel ordered an evacuation to the south in late October. In your talks with Israel, I encourage you to focus on the data¹² and setting clear targets for the tonnage of specific types of aid that *must* enter Gaza.

In addition to increasing the volume of aid that can flow into Gaza, specifically northern Gaza, we must also amass sufficient humanitarian resources to meet Palestinians needs, and not just their needs today. Gaza’s heavy reliance on humanitarian aid, even before October 7, amplified by Israel’s destruction of the enclave’s infrastructure, make certain the long-term need for significant quantities of humanitarian aid and strengthened delivery mechanisms.¹³

The United States must lead on these efforts. To that end, I commend your request for billions in humanitarian aid. I was proud to vote for the National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, which included approximately \$1.4 billion to support Palestinians in need. However, other states in the Middle East seeking regional stability need to step up and commit financially to support the Palestinians. Only the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia contributed more than one percent of the \$300 million Flash Appeal requested by the United Nations to provide aid to the Palestinians.¹⁴ I ask that you negotiate commitments for material support from other states in the Middle East as you urge Israel to permit aid to enter at the rate necessary to meet the needs of Palestinians.

¹⁰ Isaac Chotiner, *Why Biden’s Floating Pier Is Unlikely to Meet Gaza’s Needs*, NEW YORKER (Mar. 14, 2024), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-bidens-floating-pier-is-unlikely-to-meet-gazas-needs>.

¹¹ Murphy, Van Hollen, Coons, Merkley, 21 Colleagues Urge Biden Administration to Work with Israel to Take 5 Steps to Get More Humanitarian Aid into Gaza, SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY (February 2, 2024), <https://www.murphy.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/murphy-van-hollen-coons-merkley-21-colleagues-urge-biden-administration-to-work-with-israel-to-take-5-steps-to-get-more-humanitarian-aid-into-gaza>.

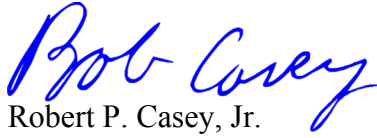
¹² *Gaza Supplies and Dispatch Tracking*, UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (Mar. 18, 2024), <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiZTVkYmEwNmMtZWYxNy00ODhlLWI2ZjctNjIzMzQ5OGQxNzY5IiwidCI6IjI2MmY2YTQxLTIwZTktNDE0MC04ZDNiLWZkZjVlZWNiNDE1NyIsImMiOiI9&pageName=ReportSection3306863add46319dc574>.

¹³ Rachel Wilson, Krystina Shveda, & Alex Newman, *How much aid Gaza needs to survive: A visual guide*, CABLE NEWS NETWORK (Jan. 22, 2024), <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/22/middleeast/gaza-foreign-aid-dg/index.html>.

¹⁴ https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1186/donors?order=total_funding&sort=desc.

Thank you again for your work to address all aspects of the crisis in the Middle East, and thank you for your consideration of my requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Casey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator