

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 14, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our deep concern over the ongoing crisis in southern Israel and Gaza. We fear that the status quo, with its constant threat of a new eruption of terror and violence, can too easily derail progress toward achieving an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement in 2008.

So far this year, nearly one thousand rockets have been fired by Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups from the Gaza Strip into Israel – intentionally aimed at residential communities in southern Israel such as Sderot, and reaching as far as the city of Ashkelon. We strongly condemn these attacks and support Israel's right to self defense.

We recognize, too, that many Palestinian civilians and children have been killed and wounded in Israel's military operations in Gaza targeted at Hamas and other militant groups. In addition, the blockade of Gaza imposed by Israel in order to put pressure on Hamas is exacerbating an already grave humanitarian situation. In this climate, popular support for Hamas remains strong while the credibility of the current Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is weakened.

We are concerned that unless something changes, progress toward an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement will continually be hampered by the violence in southern Israel and Gaza. We believe that for the peace process to be viable, solutions must be found to stabilize the Gaza situation, preserve the achievements made in peace talks, and maintain forward momentum. Without such solutions, popular support for the peace process among both Israelis and Palestinians will suffer, and moderate Palestinian leadership in the West Bank, led by President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, will be threatened.

Without doubt, any solution to the crisis in southern Israel and Gaza must include unequivocal international condemnation of the rocket attacks, including from Arab states. We support and encourage your efforts to reach such an international consensus through the appropriate forums.

Furthermore, any solution must end the Gaza blockade in a secure and timely manner, including the possible re-opening of the Egypt-Gaza border crossing under Palestinian Authority control. Any solution will need to address the smuggling of weapons and materials into Gaza. We urge you to work actively with Egypt, Israel, and, where appropriate, the international community, to find solutions to this border challenge that address Israel's security needs, provide relief to the people of Gaza, and create a climate more conducive to a successful peace process.

Finally, we believe that any solution to the current situation should include exploration of a potential ceasefire, mediated most likely by third parties or even by President Abbas. Recent polling data suggests strong support for such measures among Israelis. In fact, a poll conducted by Tel Aviv University and the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* in February 2008 found that 64% of Israelis support efforts to achieve an Israel-Hamas ceasefire.

We are not arguing for direct engagement with Hamas by Israel or the U.S. Hamas is a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization sworn to Israel's destruction. Moreover, such engagement could undermine Palestinian moderates. We also recognize the difficulties of reaching and sustaining a ceasefire, and the need to guard against a ceasefire becoming simply an opportunity for Hamas to rearm. For this reason, a ceasefire cannot be an end in itself. Rather, a ceasefire has the potential to halt the rocket attacks on Israeli civilians and prevent the need for further Israeli military operations in Gaza for the immediate term. It can then create the space necessary to help keep the peace negotiations on track, to enable the return of kidnapped Israeli soldier Cpl. Gilad Shalit, to address the smuggling of weapons into Gaza, and to facilitate improvements in the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

We strongly support Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts and believe their success is deeply connected to the national security interests of the United States. As you continue your critically important efforts to achieve progress in implementing the Roadmap, including issues such as access, security, movement, and economic development in the West Bank, we urge you to consider the recommendations outlined in this letter. We look forward to working with you in your efforts to bring stability and peace to the Middle East.

Sincerely,

David Price

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