

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 9, 2009

The Honorable President George W. Bush
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

We are writing to express our deep concern for the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip that threatens the lives of countless innocent Palestinians. While we urge your Administration to work to secure a viable ceasefire, it is critical that you also work with Israel to ensure that certain immediate steps are taken to meet humanitarian needs.

Gaza's civilian institutions have been steadily deteriorating during 18 months of closure and are therefore unable to deal with the current situation on the ground. Since the military operations began, limited openings of the crossings have occurred, but have not been sufficient to mitigate serious harm that has been done to Gaza's civilian population and infrastructure.

It was brought to our attention by Gisha - Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, an Israeli human rights organization which monitors the state of Gaza's infrastructure, that at this point one million people in the Gaza Strip are without electricity at any given moment. This is a direct result of restrictions on the entrance of fuel for Gaza's sole power plant and damage caused to electric lines coming directly from Israel and Egypt in the course of the ground operation. In the absence of electricity, infrastructure and daily civilian needs depend on the availability of fuel for generators. This includes Gaza's largest hospital, which for several days in a row has been running completely on generator power. These generators are insufficient to heat wards and operate oxygen machines.

The water and sewage systems in the Gaza Strip are also fully dependent on electricity and fuel for generators in times of power outages. Two thirds of Gaza's water wells have shut down or are only partially operating, leaving up to 800,000 people without clean water. Because sewage can't be treated and pumped properly, it is flooding into heavily populated areas, farmland and the Mediterranean Sea.

In addition to these infrastructure concerns, we are especially troubled by the healthcare situation in Gaza. We welcome the humanitarian corridor initiative announced by Israeli officials to allow for the passage of humanitarian supplies into the Gaza Strip, but it is simply not enough. Civilians in the Gaza Strip do not have access to proper medical treatment and, given the constantly rising number of wounded people, we cannot stress the urgency of this situation enough. The International Committee of the Red Cross and Palestinian Red Crescent Society face severe difficulties in evacuating the wounded and bringing other patients to health care facilities. Each and every case must be pre-coordinated between the Israeli Defense Forces and Palestinian coordinators. This coordination can take an average of 2-8 hours, and has sometimes taken days – far too long for people with severe injuries. And in at least six cases, ambulances were fired on.

Hospitals in Gaza are completely overloaded and are unable to provide adequate care because they lack medicine, supplies, equipment, medical professionals. In addition, hospitals, needing to free up space and resources for the wounded, are forced to send chronically ill patients home where their conditions often worsen.

Before the military operation began, patients in need of medical care that was not available in Gaza were referred to hospitals in Israel, the West Bank, Jordan and Egypt. However, since Israel has almost completely closed the crossings, patients and wounded people can no longer leave Gaza to receive treatment. Without proper care inside the Gaza Strip and no ability to leave, people are simply not able to receive medical attention that they desperately need.

A viable and immediate ceasefire is the only way to ensure the safety and health of the civilian population and we strongly urge your Administration to vigorously pursue that path. However, until a ceasefire is implemented, we would like to recommend a series of immediate steps that should be taken to alleviate this humanitarian crisis:

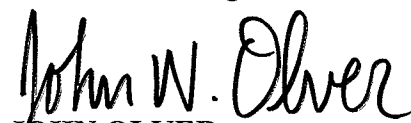
- The humanitarian corridor initiative should allow for patients to be transported out of the Gaza Strip to hospitals that can better meet their needs.
- Medical facilities, including ambulances, must be granted total neutrality and protection in order to evacuate wounded within Gaza.
- Coordination mechanisms vis-à-vis the Israeli Defense Forces should be made more efficient in order to provide for the quick and efficient evacuation and exit of patients, including by allowing for applications made directly by Gaza hospitals, Israeli NGOs and patients themselves.
- Unimpeded access should be given to foreign doctors prepared to enter Gaza to provide expert care.
- Unimpeded entrance should be given for humanitarian goods including fuel, medical supplies and spare parts to fix the electricity grid, water and sewage facilities and other critical infrastructure.
- Nahal Oz, the crossing at which fuel is transferred must remain open as it is the only crossing with the capacity to transfer the quantities of fuel needed in the Gaza Strip.
- Israel must safeguard the ability of technicians to access damaged water, sewage, and electrical infrastructure. It must also safeguard deliveries of fuel to Gaza's power plant and humanitarian institutions.

In addition to robust diplomatic efforts to resolve the current crisis, we implore you to urge the Government of Israel to take the steps we have outlined in order to address the humanitarian needs of the innocent civilian population in Gaza. The suffering simply must not be allowed to continue.

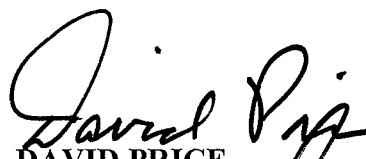
Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



DAVID PRICE
Member of Congress



KEITH ELLISON
Member of Congress

BETTY MCCOLLUM
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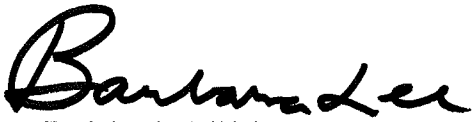
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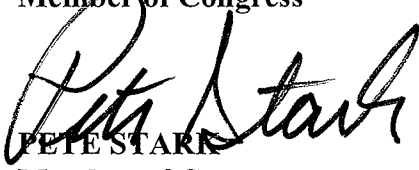
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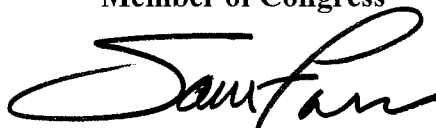
BARBARA LEE
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SAM FARR
Member of Congress

Cc: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
President-elect Barack Obama
Senator Hillary Clinton
Ambassador Sallai Meridor