

APR 21 2010



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

APR 14 2010

Dear Mr. Dingell:

Thank you for your January 21 letter to President Obama regarding the situation in Gaza. We have been asked to respond on the President's behalf.

We share your deep concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Secretary Clinton recently noted, "the people of Gaza deserve hope for a better future, and making sure that they have that hope is in both the interests of the Israelis and the Palestinians." In that spirit, we continue to address Gaza access issues with the Government of Israel at the highest levels to increase both the quantity and scope of goods entering Gaza.

As you do, we recognize Israel's legitimate security needs, but nonetheless continue to urge the Israeli government to liberalize access, in coordination with Quartet Representative Tony Blair and leading donors. Unfortunately, Hamas has been an increasing obstacle to international efforts to provide assistance to Gaza; Hamas' stranglehold on life in Gaza, rocket attacks into Israel including five within the last month, and the continued captivity of Israeli Defense Forces Corporal Gilad Shalit only heighten Israel's security concerns.

U.S. policy is to encourage the greater flow of goods into Gaza, consistent with Israeli security requirements and appropriate end-use verification to ensure that the people of Gaza benefit, and not Hamas. Positive developments in the last quarter of 2009 and in early 2010 indicate our engagement has made a difference. Israel has roughly doubled the list of allowable items into Gaza since October to include glass and plastic for greenhouse construction. Israel has allowed into Gaza all of the remaining materiel necessary to complete the first phase of the World Bank's North Gaza Emergency Sanitation Treatment (NGEST) project, including cement. Israeli officials continue discussions with the UN to provide approvals for pilot water and sanitation projects and housing reconstruction and repair. Exports have also been allowed out of Gaza recently, including shipments of strawberries and carnations sent to markets in the European Union.

The Honorable
John D. Dingell,
House of Representatives.

Additionally, we coordinate regularly with Israeli officials regarding the movement of people into and out of Gaza. Since July 2008, our Consulate General in Jerusalem has escorted over 80 students and scholars traveling to the United States. The Government of Israel also regularly approves permits for humanitarian cases to depart Gaza, including hundreds of medical cases each month.

More needs to be done, particularly in recovery and basic infrastructure. We continue to explore ways to address Gaza's needs and to improve the flow of goods and people into and out of Gaza. Ultimately, the best way to guarantee the security and well-being of both Palestinians and Israelis is through genuine Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli peace, which we are doing all we can to achieve.

We hope this information is useful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard R. Verma".

Richard R. Verma
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs