May 26, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write with urgent concern over the decision by Israel’s High Court to allow the military to evict approximately 1,000 Palestinian people from their homes in the Masafer Yatta region of the occupied West Bank. We ask that the Biden Administration immediately engage with the Israeli government to prevent these evictions and seek a solution that will keep people in their homes and prevent further conflict.

After litigation lasting over two decades, the court has ruled that the residents of eight villages may be forcibly removed and their homes demolished to make space for Israeli military use. We are deeply concerned that this relocation of Palestinian families from homes they have lived on for generations could spark violence, is in direct violation of international humanitarian law, and could further undermine efforts to reach a two-state solution. As supporters of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, we believe such evictions undermine our shared democratic values, imperil Israel's security, and disregard Palestinian human and civil rights.

In the early 1980s, Israel established a firing zone in the area of the West Bank that includes the villages of Masafer Yatta. Over the following decades, residents have been denied building permits, had their agricultural lands confiscated, and lived with the threat and reality of demolitions.\(^1\) Additionally, these communities have experienced intensifying attacks from Israeli settlers in nearby settlement outposts built near and within the firing zone.\(^2\)

We are deeply concerned about what may happen if these evictions move forward. We agree with comments you made last May regarding actions “that in the first instance could spark tension, conflict and war and also ultimately undermine even further the difficult prospects for two states” and that such actions include the “evictions of Palestinians from their homes where they lived for decades and generations.”\(^3\) We are encouraged by statements made by State Department Spokesman Ned Price that reiterate your point with regard to the High Court’s decision on Masafer Yatta, that “it is critical for all sides to refrain from steps that exacerbate tensions and that undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-state solution. This certainly includes evictions.”\(^4\)

---

1 Guardian, “Israeli court paves way for eviction of 1,000 Palestinians from West Bank area,” 5 May 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/05/israeli-court-evict-1000-palestinians-west-bank-area.
Evicting Palestinian people from their homes is inconsistent with international humanitarian law, according to Articles 49 and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and inconsistent with efforts to reach a two-state solution.

We respectfully request that you immediately engage with the Israeli government to prevent these evictions and further military training exercises in the area. We further ask that you encourage the Israeli government to approve master plans for the villages in Masafer Yatta so that these Palestinian communities may build and maintain homes, schools, infrastructure, and sustain their agricultural and pastoral lands. With President Biden visiting Israel in late June, it is critical that the Administration respond quickly to ensure that this momentous trip can deliver concrete steps toward peace.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

Raphael G. Warnock  
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator

Tina Smith  
United States Senator
Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth  
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress

Marie Newman  
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress

Peter Welch  
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Joaquín Castro
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress
Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress
Katherine M. Clark  
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress

David E. Price  
Member of Congress

Mark Takano  
Member of Congress

Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress
Jennifer Wexton  
Member of Congress

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

Katie Porter  
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters  
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress

Al Green  
Member of Congress