March 12, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write to express our deep concern regarding continued U.S. security assistance to Israel despite Israeli restrictions on humanitarian aid, an apparent violation of U.S. law. We demand that you urgently comply with U.S. law and end U.S. support for catastrophic human suffering in Gaza.

On March 2, the United States began its first airdrops of humanitarian aid into Gaza – a risky, expensive, and ineffective method for assisting civilians that is widely considered an option of last resort. On March 7, your administration announced that it would build a floating pier along the Gaza coast to bring aid to the population. Both efforts are the latest implicit recognition of Israel’s severe restrictions on humanitarian access amid extraordinary human suffering. Your administration has now publicly recognized what humanitarian organizations have reported for months: that the government of Israel is obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid to starving Palestinians.

Gaza’s health ministry reports that more than 30,000 Palestinians – at least two-thirds of them women and children – have been killed in Gaza and over 70,000 wounded, with thousands more estimated to be buried under the rubble. Over 90 percent of people in Gaza are acutely food insecure, with a growing number of children dying of starvation and dehydration. Over 75 percent of Gaza’s population is already displaced, and the level of damage to shelter and infrastructure means people increasingly have nowhere safe to go nor reliable provisions if and when they move. As civilians face bombardment, disease, and starvation, lifesaving health care is increasingly inaccessible.

The United States is a leading donor of the humanitarian response in Gaza. Secretary Blinken has called on Israel to “maximize every possible means” to get aid to Gazans, noting that “the situation, as it stands, is simply unacceptable.” And you have rightly said you will accept “no more excuses” for continued obstacles to aid. But since October 7, the government of Israel has failed to facilitate the entry of sufficient humanitarian aid, including through additional border crossings into Gaza and northern Gaza in particular; blocked the entry of many humanitarian aid trucks; denied humanitarian access requests; enforced arbitrary customs restrictions on humanitarian goods; and attacked humanitarian workers and their facilities as well as civilians seeking aid. Longtime U.S. implementing partners around the world have come under attack in Gaza, and lifesaving U.S.-funded humanitarian aid has been blocked from entering Gaza. Just last week, hours after your State of the Union address, an Israeli airstrike on a housing complex hosting displaced people killed a humanitarian aid worker employed by a US-based NGO.
These restrictions are not isolated instances but the policy of the government of Israel: as Prime Minister Netanyahu stated clearly on October 18, “We will not allow humanitarian assistance in the form of food and medicines from our territory to the Gaza Strip.” While Israel has subsequently allowed some aid into Gaza, it remains far from sufficient – a fact that Netanyahu confirmed when he stated in January that Israel was only allowing a "minimum" amount of relief into Gaza. During your own State of the Union address, you implicitly acknowledged that Israel was using humanitarian aid as a bargaining chip. Human Rights Watch and Oxfam have determined that the Israeli government is committing a war crime by using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, the United States continues to provide Israel with unconditional arms transfers and other security assistance. This not only facilitates Israel’s harmful conduct, but also appears to violate Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act (22 U.S.C. § 2378–1), which prohibits the United States from providing security assistance or arms sales to any country when the President is made aware that the government “prohibits or otherwise restricts, directly or indirectly, the transport or delivery of United States humanitarian assistance.”

U.S. weapons, security assistance, and blanket political support have contributed to an unparalleled humanitarian crisis and possible war crimes in Gaza. We demand that you urgently comply with U.S. law, end U.S. support for catastrophic human suffering in Gaza, and use your leverage to protect civilians and ensure the impartial provision of humanitarian assistance.

Signed,

Airwars
American Friends Service Committee
Amnesty International USA
Anera
Arms Control Association
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
Center for International Policy
Charity & Security Network
Demand Progress Education Fund
Foreign Policy for America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Human Rights Watch
Humanity & Inclusion
MADRE
Middle East Democracy Center (MEDC)
MPower Change
Norwegian Refugee Council USA
Oxfam America
PAX
Peace Action
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
Refugees International
U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights Action (USCPR Action)
Win Without War
Zomia Center