

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 2, 2023

Mr. Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

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

Dear Secretary Blinken and Mr. Sullivan:

We write to express our concern over how little humanitarian aid is reaching innocent Palestinians in Gaza, to stress the pressing need for additional steps to protect innocent civilian lives, and to urge you to do everything possible both to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas and the evacuation of Americans in stuck in Gaza.

The United Nations estimates Gaza needs about 100 aid trucks per day to meet the needs of 2.3 million people,¹ yet according to aid groups, the handful of trucks² that have crossed into Gaza to date are only “a drop in an ocean of needs.”³ Further, according to reports, the aid that has made it to Gaza has faced distribution challenges and may not have reached the hospitals and other destinations where it is badly needed.⁴ A joint statement from international aid and health organizations recently warned that “time is running out before mortality rates could skyrocket due to disease outbreaks and lack of health-care capacity.”⁵

Even before this crisis, the World Food Program estimated 63 percent of people in Gaza were “food insecure.”⁶ Water production is “at 5 percent of normal levels.”⁷ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency’s rapid gender analysis found that “due to food insecurity, women and children, especially pregnant and lactating women, are at risk of under-or-malnutrition. This will negatively affect their immune health, increasing their susceptibility to contracting maternal

¹ Reuters, “Third aid convoy enters Gaza, UN warns fuel about to run out,” Yusri Mohamed and Michelle Nichols, October 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/third-gaza-bound-aid-convoy-enters-rafah-crossing-egypt-sources-2023-10-23/>.

² Reuters, “Third aid convoy enters Gaza, UN warns fuel about to run out,” Yusri Mohamed and Michelle Nichols, October 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/third-gaza-bound-aid-convoy-enters-rafah-crossing-egypt-sources-2023-10-23/>.

³ Tweet by UNRWA, October 21, 2023, <https://twitter.com/UNRWA/status/1715729240434360549>.

⁴ New York Times, “Logistics and security concerns are new hurdles to the delivery of medical supplies in Gaza. Image,” Raja Abdulrahim, October 23, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/10/23/world/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news#israel-gaza-hospital-supplies>.

⁵ World Health Organization, “Joint statement by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO on humanitarian supplies crossing into Gaza,” October 21, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news/item/21-10-2023-joint-statement-by-undp-unfpa-unicef-wfp-and-who-on-humanitarian-supplies-crossing-into-gaza>.

⁶ NBC News, “Gaza strip explained: Who controls it and what to know,” Yasmine Salam, October 8, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/gaza-strip-controls-s-know-rcna119405>.

⁷ New York Times, “First Humanitarian Aid Reaches a Hard-Pressed Gaza,” Thomas Fuller and Vivian Yee, October 21, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/21/world/middleeast/humanitarian-aid-gaza-israel-cairo.html>.

nutrition-related illnesses such as anaemia, preeclampsia, [and] haemorrhage...[which] increases the risk of death for both mothers and babies.”⁸ The United Nations estimates that declining fuel means “a water desalination plant could not function along with bakeries and hospitals.”⁹

We believe that Israel has both a right to defend itself and an obligation under international law to protect civilian lives. As National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has said, there is “a moral and a strategic necessity” to protect Palestinian civilians.¹⁰ We urge you to continue your efforts to ensure that the Israeli government meets these obligations under international law.

We appreciate that the Administration is pressing for the “continued flow of this critical assistance” and the protection of civilians.¹¹ But the fact remains that civilians in Gaza desperately need more humanitarian aid more quickly as this conflict enters its fourth week. Last week, we joined eight of our colleagues in calling for humanitarian pauses to allow full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian assistance to those in need in Gaza.¹² President Biden has now also publicly called for a humanitarian pause in hostilities.¹³

We are encouraged by the news that the Okal family from Medway, Massachusetts, who we shared was stuck in Gaza in our October 17 letter to you, has successfully exited the Gaza Strip into Egypt and are on their way home. We urge you to continue to work through our partners to provide safe passage for Americans trying to leave Gaza, including a family from Plymouth, Massachusetts with three small children whose father “had been waiting in line for bread to feed his family every day until the bombs started narrowing in on his shelter.”¹⁴

Hamas’s brutal terrorist attack on October 7 killed at least 1,400 people, and reports indicate the terrorist group continues to hold more than 200 hostages, including Americans.¹⁵ Devastatingly, Massachusetts constituents have lost family members in these terrible attacks.¹⁶ While we

⁸ United Nations Relief and Works Agency, “Rapid Gender Analysis: Gendered Impacts of the October 2023 Escalation in Gaza,” October 23, 2023, p. 7, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/rapid_gender_analysis_23_october_2023_updated.pdf.

⁹ Reuters, “Third aid convoy enters Gaza, UN warns fuel about to run out,” Yusri Mohamed and Michelle Nichols, October 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/third-gaza-bound-aid-convoy-enters-rafah-crossing-egypt-sources-2023-10-23/>.

¹⁰ Le Monde, “US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan: ‘Protecting civilians in Gaza is a moral and strategic necessity,’” Piotr Smolar, October 31, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/31/us-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-protecting-civilians-in-gaza-is-a-moral-and-strategic-necessity_6216263_4.html.

¹¹ New York Times, “U.S. Advises Israel to Delay Gaza Invasion, Officials Say,” Edward Wong, Eric Schmitt, Michael D. Shear, and Ronen Bergman, October 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/22/us/politics/us-hostages-israel-gaza.html>.

¹² Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, “Warren, Senators Call for Humanitarian Pauses and Hostage Releases in Israel-Hamas War, Echoing United States Resolution at United Nations,” press release, October 27, 2023, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-senators-call-for-humanitarian-pauses-and-hostage-releases-in-israel-hamas-war-echoing-united-states-resolution-at-united-nations>.

¹³ AP, “Biden calls for humanitarian ‘pause’ in Israel-Hamas war,” Chris Megerian & Aamer Madhani, November 1, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-biden-ceasefire-422ed95081e5fe224dd9f0ed7920c4e8>.

¹⁴ WBZ News, “Plymouth family with three small children desperate to return home from Gaza,” Tiffany Chan, October 20, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/hazem-shafai-plymouth-family-trapped-gaza/>.

¹⁵ New York Times, “Israel’s Attackers Took Over 200 Hostages. Here’s What to Know About Them,” Cassandra Vinograd and Isabel Kershner, October 31, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/israel-hostages-hamas-explained.html>.

¹⁶ WBUR, “Needham man mourns the loss of two relatives taken hostage and killed by Hamas,” Amy Sokolow and Katie Cole, October 23, 2023, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2023/10/23/needham-family-members-hostages-hamas->

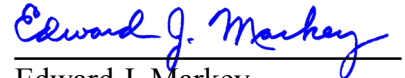
appreciate that freeing these hostages has been a top priority for this Administration,¹⁷ we are concerned that only a handful have been released to date and we fear that without more progress, additional lives will be lost.¹⁸ The United States must continue to prioritize the safe release of hostages.

We urge you to continue to do everything in your power to provide relief to civilians, including humanitarian pauses in the warfare.¹⁹ We request the State Department provide our offices a briefing as soon as possible on its ongoing efforts to supply aid and ensure the safe exit of hostages and reunification with their families.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

israel.

¹⁷ The Hill, “ Hamas releases 2 more hostages amid intense negotiations,” Laura Kelly, October 23, 2023, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/4271038-hamas-releases-2-hostages-negotiations-israel-gaza/>.

¹⁸ New York Times, “ Israel’s Attackers Took Over 200 Hostages. Here’s What to Know About Them,” Cassandra Vinograd and Isabel Kershner, October 31, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/israel-hostages-hamas-explained.html>.

¹⁹ Washington Post, “ U.S., in policy switch, urges humanitarian pauses in Gaza,” Karen DeYoung and Claire Parker, October 28, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/10/27/gaza-israel-humanitarian-pause/>.