

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2018

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to request transparency regarding the timeline and metrics of the Administration's review of U.S. assistance to the West Bank and Gaza, and to urge the immediate release of all assistance that has been on hold since the review began. It is our understanding that all U.S. assistance, including lifesaving humanitarian aid, has been frozen since January 2018.

At the House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee hearing on June 13, 2018, entitled "The Middle East and North Africa: Ensuring Resources Match Objectives," members of our Committee repeatedly inquired as to the status of U.S. assistance to the West Bank and Gaza. Ambassador David Satterfield, testifying in his capacity as Acting Assistant Secretary of State, reported that the National Security Council is leading the interagency review of this assistance and that the State Department could provide no detailed information about benchmarks or timeline during the hearing. Other State Department witnesses have been unable to answer basic questions about the review in other hearings and questions for the record. We are deeply concerned that there seems to be no information available to Members of Congress as to the nature, scope, or duration of this assistance review.

We support the need for oversight of our assistance programs, and we too want to ensure that no U.S. assistance is diverted from its intended purposes, or even worse, inadvertently benefitting the terrorist organization Hamas. However, it is unnecessary to withhold funding while conducting this review. The Administration could implement any potential conclusions of such a review in FY 2019, contingent upon appropriate consultation with Congress.

The humanitarian crisis inside Gaza is getting worse by the day, and Hamas' failure to provide for the most basic needs while directing significant resources to acts of terrorism has only exacerbated the emergency. In fact, the White House Special Representative for

International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt held a March 2018 summit aimed at addressing this very crisis, and he has conducted further meetings in Israel, Jordan, and Egypt on the Gaza crisis in the past two weeks.

Gaza is already suffering a critical food shortage, due in part to the Administration's withholding of \$65 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which distributes life-saving medical and food aid to the people of Gaza. While there are legitimate concerns about UNRWA that need to be addressed, bilateral humanitarian funds are a completely different pot of money, and have no relation to ongoing disputes with the Palestinian Authority or questions about UNRWA. We believe these crucial humanitarian funds must be restored in order to save innocent lives and prevent Hamas from taking advantage of the situation by provoking a dangerous escalation with Israel.

The impact of the U.S. funding freeze could be catastrophic: 140,000 people will cease to receive emergency food and non-food assistance, 42,000 patients will not receive essential health services, 50,000 youths will lack access to life skills development, and 12,250 people will lose paid entrepreneurship opportunities.

These dire humanitarian circumstances already pose a serious risk to our ally Israel's security, and that threat only grows the longer humanitarian assistance remains frozen. Senior Israeli security officials, including Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, have warned that if the humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate, violence could spill over into Israel and cause a conflict. Hamas is already taking advantage of the right of the Palestinian people to peacefully protest by infiltrating demonstrations with violent attempts to breach the Israeli border. Hamas has put the people of Gaza at risk by employing its new tactic of arson kites that have wreaked havoc on Israeli towns by causing dangerous fires.

Furthermore, we have heard from many of our non-governmental organization implementing partners in the West Bank who will be forced to shut down operations in the coming weeks if funding is not released. Many of these programs bring together Palestinians and Israelis for direct people to people engagement, which the United States has long recognized is vital to furthering the goal of peace with two states for two people living side by side.

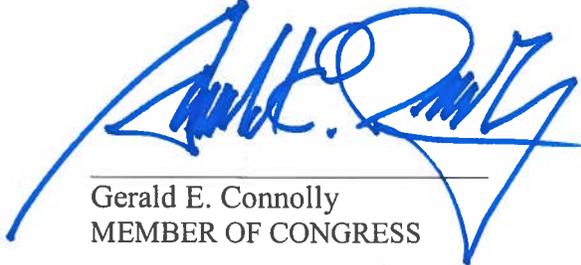
The Committee has previously requested information in writing from the Department of State about the West Bank and Gaza assistance review, and has not received detailed information in response. Therefore, we request an update as to the current status of the review, benchmarks by which the review is being measured, and a timeline for the conclusion of the review. We also urge the immediate release of U.S. bilateral assistance to the West Bank and Gaza.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and your prompt response.

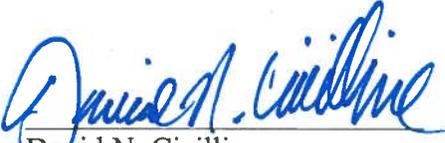
Sincerely,



Ted Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Gerald E. Connolly
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



David N. Cicilline
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Lois Frankel
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Tulsi Gabbard
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



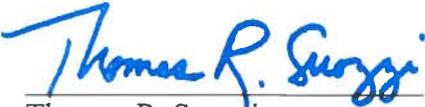
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