June 20, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken                The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of State                                Secretary
U.S. Department of State                           U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2201 C Street, NW                                    301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20520                                Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

We write to strongly support a Priority-2 (P-2) designation under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for certain Palestinians.¹

In the eight months since the horrific October 7 terrorist attack by Hamas and the commencement of Israel’s military response, conditions in the Palestinian territories have greatly deteriorated.² According to reports from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of June 14, 2024, at least 37,266 Palestinians have been killed and 85,102 Palestinians have been injured.³ The United Nations estimates that 1.7 million people have been displaced in Gaza out of a total population of 2.2 million.⁴ And recently the Director of the United Nations World Food Program stated that northern Gaza is experiencing a “full-blown famine” and that the famine is spreading south.⁵

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, many congressional offices have received distressing requests for assistance from constituents desperately seeking to reunite with their loved ones. We appreciate the steps that the Biden Administration has taken to evacuate American citizens from Gaza. However, without pathways for Americans to petition for their relatives in Gaza, countless families with strong ties to our nation remain stranded in life-threatening conditions.

We urge you to consider opening pathways to Palestinian refugees, particularly those with family members in the United States, to seek relief in the United States. Historically, the U.S. has resettled very few Palestinian refugees, including only 56 refugees, or 0.09 percent of the total number of resettled refugees, in fiscal year 2023⁶ and only 16 so far in fiscal year 2024.⁷ Given the dire conditions currently on the ground in Gaza, it is time for this to change. Specifically, we urge you to designate certain categories of Palestinians and their eligible family members, particularly close relatives of American citizens and U.S. lawful permanent residents, for access to the USRAP.

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¹ The USRAP has four categories of individuals who may access it, known as “priorities,” and P-2 is for groups of special concern designated by the Department of State as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement. U.S. Department of State (DOS), About Refugee Admissions, https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/about/.
² OCHA, Reported Impact since 7 October 2023 (June 18, 2024), https://www.ochaopt.org/.
⁴ OCHA, Reported Impact since 7 October 2023 (June 18, 2024), https://www.ochaopt.org/.
The USRAP has long provided a secure pathway to resettle refugees in the United States, with the most rigorous vetting of any traveler coming to the U.S. All individuals who are considered for refugee status in the U.S. must not only demonstrate their eligibility, but also complete a USCIS interview, provide biometric data, and pass both medical exams and strict security screening prior to approval to come to the United States. Moreover, national security and foreign policy experts have long viewed the refugee program as a valuable tool for the United States to decompress conflicts abroad, strengthen regional stability, and set an example for other countries.

We believe the time has come for the United States to lead in this manner and grant a P-2 designation for refugee processing for certain Palestinians who are relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents and are affected by the ongoing violence.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Greg Casar
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
United States Senator

Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress
Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Val Hoyle
Member of Congress

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Mark Kelly
United States Senator

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Andre Carson
Member of Congress

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress
Patty Murray
United States Senator

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress
Tony Cárdenes
Member of Congress

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

Sean Casten
Member of Congress

Joaquín Castro
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress

Valerie P. Foushee
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

Cori Bush
Member of Congress

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

Al Green
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress