

File No. 100767

Committee Item No. _____

Board Item No. 43

COMMITTEE/BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA PACKET CONTENTS LIST

Committee: NA

Date: _____

Board of Supervisors Meeting

Date: June 15, 2010

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Completed by: Victor Young

Date June 10, 2010

Completed by: _____

Date _____

An asterisked item represents the cover sheet to a document that exceeds 25 pages. The complete document is in the file.

1 [Freedom Flotilla and Gaza Blockade]

2
3 **Resolution joining the global community, including international human rights**
4 **organizations, The Elders, over 50 nations, and thousands of Bay Area residents in**
5 **condemning the Israeli Defense Forces' military attack on the Freedom Flotilla on May**
6 **31, 2010 that resulted in the death of at least nine people, including a United States**
7 **citizen; and urging President Barack Obama and Congress to continue their work**
8 **addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, actively seek an end to the blockade, and**
9 **work towards genuine peace and security for all peoples in the region.**

10
11
12 WHEREAS, San Francisco is the birthplace of the United Nations (UN), an
13 international institution founded on the cooperation of all nations and dedicated toward lasting
14 world peace; and

15
16 WHEREAS, San Francisco's legal status as a City of Refuge is based on the
17 recognition and understanding of our population's unique relationship to international
18 struggles and the overall principle that human life, whether here or abroad, has value and
19 dignity; and,

20
21 WHEREAS, The San Francisco Bay Area is home to many people with ties to Israel
22 and Palestine; and,

23
24 WHEREAS, People have a responsibility to speak out against oppression and
25 historically, the San Francisco Bay Area communities have been at the forefront of speaking

1 freely against injustice, taking part in humanitarian actions, and joining in solidarity with global
2 movements for peace and justice; and,

3 WHEREAS, Since June 2007, the Israeli government, maintaining the need to protect
4 its southern region against rocket attacks from Gaza, instituted a military blockade on
5 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, one of the most densely populated regions in the world; and,

6 WHEREAS, The blockade, carried out by Israel and Egypt, collectively deprives the
7 entire population of Gaza of adequate provisions of food, medicine and medical equipment,
8 fuel, building material, and other supplies necessary for basic necessities and free mobility
9 into and outside of the Gaza Strip; and,

10
11 WHEREAS, According to Amnesty International "rather than targeting armed groups,
12 the blockade mainly hits the most vulnerable, such as children, who make up more than half
13 of the population in Gaza, the elderly, the sick and the Gaza Strip's large refugee population,"
14 and,

15
16 WHEREAS, The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) states that the
17 number of refugees living in abject poverty in the Gaza Strip has tripled since the blockade
18 began; and,

19
20 WHEREAS, The UNRWA further states that these families lack the means to purchase
21 even the most basic items, including soap, school materials, and clean drinking water and,
22 according to the UN, more than 60 percent of households are currently "food insecure;" and,

23
24 WHEREAS, on January 8, 2009, the United Nations Security Council at its 6063rd
25 meeting adopted Resolution 1860, on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File
No. , which is hereby declared to be a part of this resolution as if set forth fully herein,

1 which emphasized "the need to ensure sustained and regular flow of goods and people
2 through the Gaza crossings" and "calls for the unimpeded provision and distribution
3 throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment"
4 and "welcomes the initiatives aimed at creating and opening humanitarian corridors and other
5 mechanisms for the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid;" and,

6 WHEREAS, John Ging, the Director of the UNRWA Operations in Gaza in an interview
7 with Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, called on the international community to take
8 responsibility of the blockade and pursue "practical ways to break the siege" and Director
9 Ging urged the world to send ships to the shores of Gaza, stating "We believe that Israel will
10 not intercept these vessels because the sea is open, and human rights organizations have
11 been successful in similar previous operations proving that breaking the siege of Gaza is
12 possible;" and,

13 WHEREAS, The international human rights community headed by the Free Gaza
14 Movement and The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief
15 (IHH), a Turkish nongovernment organization, organized the Freedom Flotilla consisting of six
16 ships, including the MV *Mavi Marmara*, in an attempt to bring much needed aid to Gaza and
17 provide pressure to break the blockade; and,

18 WHEREAS, The Freedom Flotilla carried approximately 800 international civilians from
19 40 different countries, five of whom were San Francisco Bay Area residents, representing all
20 ages, genders, and religions. Notable people aboard the flotilla included an elected member
21 of the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset Haneen Zoubi; internationally renowned Swedish
22 novelist Henning Mankell; a number of parliamentarians from European and Arab national
23
24
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1 legislatures; Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mairead Corrigan; and former UN Assistant
2 Secretary-General Denis Halliday, who were aboard the MV *Rachel Corrie*; and,

3 WHEREAS, The Freedom Flotilla is the ninth vessel voyage of its kind to make its way
4 to the blockaded Gaza Strip since 2008; and,

5 WHEREAS, The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) operating from warships and attack
6 helicopters in the vicinity forcibly boarded the Freedom Flotilla in international waters on May
7 31, 2010, resulting in the loss of at least nine lives and injuries to over 50 other civilians; and,

8 WHEREAS, International law prohibits the interdiction of vessels in international waters
9 and a violation of this may be considered an act of war; and,

10 WHEREAS, On Friday, June 4, 2010, *The Guardian* (UK) reported nine Turkish men
11 aboard the MV *Mavi Marmara* were shot a total of 30 times and five were killed by gunshot
12 wounds to the head, according to Dr. Haluk Ince the vice-chairman of the Turkish Council of
13 Forensic Medicine, which carried out the autopsies for the Turkish Ministry of Justice, and
14 among those killed was a 19 year old United States citizen;" and,

15 WHEREAS, Members of the Freedom Flotilla included five San Francisco Bay Area
16 activists, Iara Lee, a filmmaker from San Francisco; Katherine Ellipt Sheetz, a registered
17 nurse from Richmond; Gene St. Onge, a civil engineer, and Janet Kobren, a retired school
18 teacher, both of Oakland; and Paul Larudee of Richmond, co-founder of the Free Palestine
19 Movement who told the *Associated Press* that he was beaten six times by the Israeli Defense
20 Forces, receiving multiple bruises and a black eye; and,

21 WHEREAS, The Elders, a group started in 2007 by Nelson Mandela including six
22 Nobel peace prize winners, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, former Finnish
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1 President Martti Ahtisaari, former US President Jimmy Carter, detained Burmese leader Aung
 2 San Suu Kyi, and former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, released a statement condemning the
 3 attacks as "completely inexcusable" further stating, "this tragic incident should draw the
 4 world's attention to the terrible suffering of Gaza's 1.5 million people, half of whom are
 5 children under the age of 18," and describing the treatment of the people of Gaza as "one of
 6 the world's greatest human rights violations" and that the blockade is not only "illegal, it is
 7 counterproductive" because it empowers extremists in the Palestinian territories; and,

8
 9 WHEREAS, In a statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council, on
 10 file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. ¹⁰⁰⁷⁶⁷, which is hereby declared to be a
 11 part of this resolution as if set forth fully herein, released after the attack on the Freedom
 12 Flotilla, he "stresses that the situation in Gaza is not sustainable... In that context, it reiterates
 13 its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and stressed the need for sustained
 14 and regular flow of goods and people to Gaza as well as unimpeded provision and distribution
 15 of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza;" and,

16
 17 WHEREAS, The Israeli government has attempted to control the information about the
 18 IDF attack on the Freedom Flotilla in such a way that a thorough and accurate accounting is
 19 extremely difficult; and,

20
 21 WHEREAS, The IDF's claims that they were the victims of an attack even though it
 22 was the IDF who forcibly boarded the Flotilla ships from attack helicopters and warships in
 23 international waters at 4:30 a.m.; and,

24
 25 WHEREAS, The United Nations Security Council has also referenced the IDF's
 handling of the media surrounding the event as follows: "Given that those who had been on-

1 board the ships were now in Israeli custody, including reporters who were travelling with the
2 convoy, and had had their transmission equipment confiscated by the boarding Israeli forces,
3 further information from the organizers of the convoy had been minimal since this morning.
4 We have no independent information on what transpired;" and,

5 WHEREAS, As reported on *Democracy Now* on June 4, 2010, the Israel Defense
6 Forces issued a press release two days after the assault saying that approximately forty flotilla
7 passengers "are mercenaries belonging to the Al Qaeda terror organization;" and,

8 WHEREAS, Despite inquiries by independent journalist Max Blumenthal and other
9 press colleagues to the Israeli military press office to substantiate these claims, no evidence
10 was provided to back up these statements and the IDF has since modified their original
11 headline "Attackers of the IDF Soldiers Found to be Al Qaeda Mercenaries" to "Attackers of
12 the IDF Soldiers Found Without Identification Papers;" and,

13 WHEREAS, United States Senator Dianne Feinstein, Chair of the Senate Intelligence
14 Committee, has called for an impartial inquiry on the Israeli raid on the Freedom Flotilla and
15 the easing of the Gaza blockade; and,

16 WHEREAS, At least 50 countries have officially condemned or protested Israel's
17 actions against the Freedom Flotilla; several countries, including South Africa, Ecuador,
18 Nicaragua, and Turkey, have recalled their Ambassadors in protest; and international
19 organizations, including the UN Human Rights Commission and the European Union, have
20 condemned Israel's attack; and,
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1 WHEREAS, On June 7, 2010, Egypt announced that it would leave its border with
2 Gaza open for humanitarian aid and restricted travel, thus ending Egypt's part in the blockade
3 of Gaza; and

4 WHEREAS, 50 members of Congress have signed a letter authored by Congressman
5 Keith Ellison, on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. ¹⁰⁰⁷⁶⁷, which is hereby
6 declared to be a part of this resolution as if set forth fully herein, to President Obama
7 expressing concern about the conditions in Gaza and urging his leadership in addressing the
8 situation; now, therefore, be it

9
10 RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco denounces all forms of
11 violence against civilians and encourages nonviolent solutions to humanitarian crises in the
12 aforementioned region, and globally; and urges all San Francisco residents to engage in full
13 and open communication and education about this issue; and therefore

14 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco hereby joins the
15 global community including international human rights organizations, The Elders, over 50
16 nations, and thousands of Bay Area residents in condemning the Israeli Defense Forces'
17 military attack on the Freedom Flotilla on May 31, 2010 that resulted in the death of at least
18 nine people including a United States citizen; and, be it

19
20 FURTHER RESOLVED, The City and County of San Francisco expresses our
21 condolences for families of those killed in the raid on the Flotilla and wishes a speedy
22 recovery for those injured; and, be it

23 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco urges President
24 Barack Obama and Congress to strengthen their ongoing diplomatic efforts to create lasting
25

1 peace in the region and call for an independent investigation into the events surrounding the
2 raid on the Freedom Flotilla and, in particular, into the raid itself, the use of force and rules of
3 engagement by the Israeli Defense Forces; and, be it

4 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco urges President
5 Barack Obama and Congress to continue their work addressing the humanitarian crisis in
6 Gaza, actively seek an end to the blockade, and work towards genuine peace and security for
7 all peoples in the region.
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Security Council

Distr.: General
8 January 2009

Resolution 1860 (2009)

Adopted by the Security Council at its 6063rd meeting, on
8 January 2009

The Security Council,

Recalling all of its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008),

Stressing that the Gaza Strip constitutes an integral part of the territory occupied in 1967 and will be a part of the Palestinian state,

Emphasizing the importance of the safety and well-being of all civilians,

Expressing grave concern at the escalation of violence and the deterioration of the situation, in particular the resulting heavy civilian casualties since the refusal to extend the period of calm; and *emphasizing* that the Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations must be protected,

Expressing grave concern also at the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza,

Emphasizing the need to ensure sustained and regular flow of goods and people through the Gaza crossings,

Recognizing the vital role played by UNRWA in providing humanitarian and economic assistance within Gaza,

Recalling that a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved by peaceful means,

Reaffirming the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders,

1. *Stresses* the urgency of and *calls for* an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza;
2. *Calls for* the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment;
3. *Welcomes* the initiatives aimed at creating and opening humanitarian corridors and other mechanisms for the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid;



4. *Calls on* Member States to support international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza, including through urgently needed additional contributions to UNRWA and through the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee;

5. *Condemns* all violence and hostilities directed against civilians and all acts of terrorism;

6. *Calls upon* Member States to intensify efforts to provide arrangements and guarantees in Gaza in order to sustain a durable ceasefire and calm, including to prevent illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition and to ensure the sustained reopening of the crossing points on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access between the Palestinian Authority and Israel; and in this regard, *welcomes* the Egyptian initiative, and other regional and international efforts that are under way;

7. *Encourages* tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation including in support of mediation efforts of Egypt and the League of Arab States as expressed in the 26 November 2008 resolution, and consistent with Security Council resolution 1850 (2008) and other relevant resolutions;

8. *Calls for* renewed and urgent efforts by the parties and the international community to achieve a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace with secure and recognized borders, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), and recalls also the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative;

9. *Welcomes* the Quartet's consideration, in consultation with the parties, of an international meeting in Moscow in 2009;

10. *Decides* to remain seized of the matter.



Security Council

Distr.: General
1 June 2010

Original: English

Statement by the President of the Security Council

At the 6326th meeting of the Security Council, held on 1 June 2010, in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council deeply regrets the loss of life and injuries resulting from the use of force during the Israeli military operation in international waters against the convoy sailing to Gaza. The Council, in this context, condemns those acts which resulted in the loss of at least ten civilians and many wounded, and expresses its condolences to their families.

"The Security Council requests the immediate release of the ships as well as the civilians held by Israel. The Council urges Israel to permit full consular access, to allow the countries concerned to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately, and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance from the convoy to its destination.

"The Security Council takes note of the statement of the UN Secretary-General on the need to have a full investigation into the matter and it calls for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards.

"The Security Council stresses that the situation in Gaza is not sustainable. The Council re-emphasizes the importance of the full implementation of Resolutions 1850 and 1860. In that context, it reiterates its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and stresses the need for sustained and regular flow of goods and people to Gaza as well as unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza.

"The Security Council underscores that the only viable solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an agreement negotiated between the parties and re-emphasizes that only a two-State solution, with an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours, could bring peace to the region.

"The Security Council expresses support for the proximity talks and voices concern that this incident took place while the proximity talks are underway and urges the parties to act with restraint, avoiding any unilateral and provocative actions, and all international partners to promote an atmosphere of cooperation between the parties and throughout the region."



Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 21, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your ongoing work to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for your commitment of \$300 million in U.S. aid to rebuild the Gaza Strip. We write to you with great concern about the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

The people of Gaza have suffered enormously since the blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt following Hamas's coup, and particularly following Operation Cast Lead. We also sympathize deeply with the people of southern Israel who have suffered from abhorrent rocket and mortar attacks. We recognize that the Israeli government has imposed restrictions on Gaza out of a legitimate and keenly felt fear of continued terrorist action by Hamas and other militant groups. This concern must be addressed without resulting in the de facto collective punishment of the Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip. Truly, fulfilling the needs of civilians in Israel and Gaza are mutually reinforcing goals.

The unabated suffering of Gazan civilians highlights the urgency of reaching a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we ask you to press for immediate relief for the citizens of Gaza as an urgent component of your broader Middle East peace efforts. The current blockade has severely impeded the ability of aid agencies to do their work to relieve suffering, and we ask that you advocate for immediate improvements for Gaza in the following areas:

- Movement of people, especially students, the ill, aid workers, journalists, and those with family concerns, into and out of Gaza;
- Access to clean water, including water infrastructure materials;
- Access to plentiful and varied food and agricultural materials;
- Access to medicine and health care products and suppliers;
- Access to sanitation supplies, including sanitation infrastructure materials;
- Access to construction materials for repairs and rebuilding;
- Access to fuel;
- Access to spare parts;
- Prompt passage into and out of Gaza for commercial and agricultural goods; and
- Publication and review of the list of items prohibited to the people of Gaza.

Winter has arrived and the needs of the people grow ever more pressing. For example, the ban on building materials is preventing the reconstruction of thousands of innocent

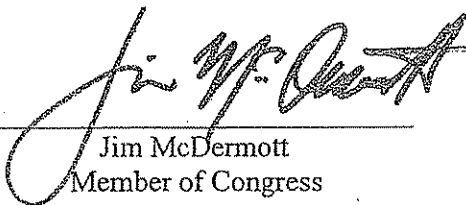
families' damaged homes. There is also a concern that unrepaired sewage treatment plants will overflow and damage surrounding property and water resources.


Despite ad hoc easing of the blockade, there has been no significant improvement in the quantity and scope of goods allowed into Gaza. Both the number of trucks entering Gaza per month and the number of days the crossings have been open have declined since March. This crisis has devastated livelihoods, entrenched a poverty rate of over 70%, increased dependence on erratic international aid, allowed the deterioration of public infrastructure, and led to the marked decline of the accessibility of essential services.


The humanitarian and political consequences of a continued near-blockade would be disastrous. Easing the blockade on Gaza will not only improve the conditions on the ground for Gaza's civilian population, but will also undermine the tunnel economy which has strengthened Hamas. Under current conditions, our aid remains little more than an unrealized pledge. Most importantly, lifting these restrictions will give civilians in Gaza a tangible sense that diplomacy can be an effective tool for bettering their conditions.


Your Administration's overarching Middle East peace efforts will benefit Israel, the Palestinians, and the entire region. The people of Gaza, along with all the peoples of the region, must see that the United States is dedicated to addressing the legitimate security needs of the State of Israel and to ensuring that the legitimate needs of the Palestinian population are met.

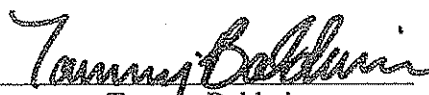
Sincerely,

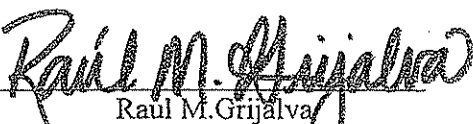

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

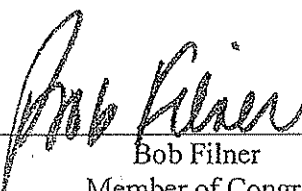

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

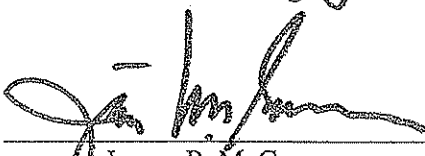

Lois Capps
Member of Congress

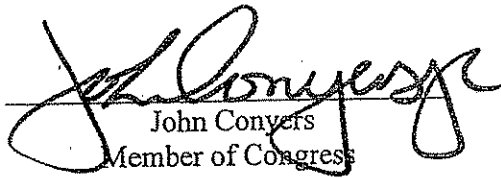

William D. Delahunt
Member of Congress


Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress



Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Bob Filner
Member of Congress

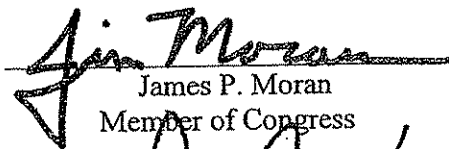

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

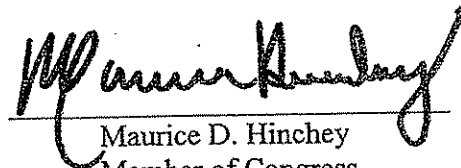

John Conyers
Member of Congress

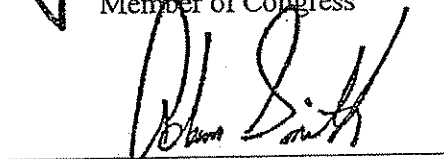

Fortney Pete Stark
Member of Congress

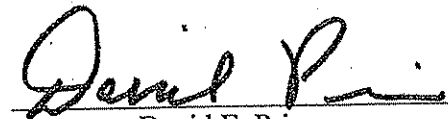

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

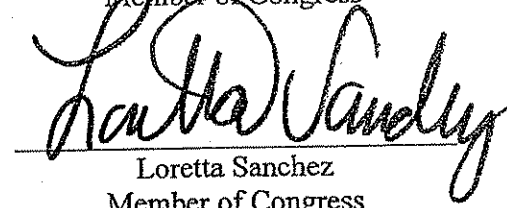

James P. Moran
Member of Congress



Maurice D. Hinchey
Member of Congress

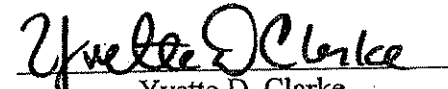

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

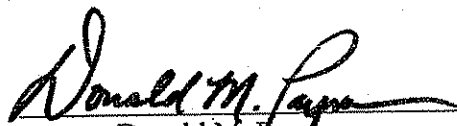

David E. Price
Member of Congress



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

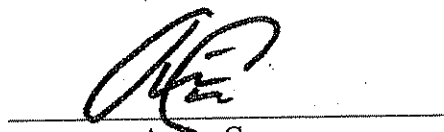

Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress

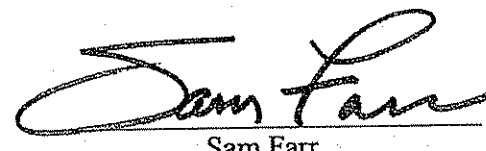

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress


Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress


Donald M. Jayle
Member of Congress

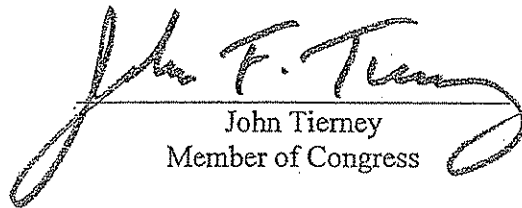

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress


Andre Carson
Member of Congress


Sam Farr
Member of Congress



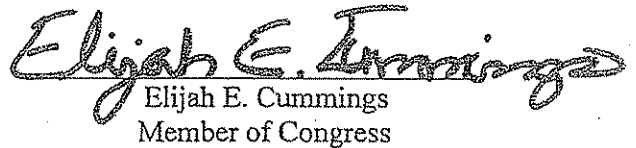
Peter Welch
Member of Congress



John Tierney
Member of Congress



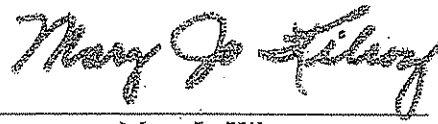
Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress



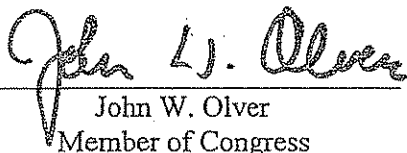
Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress



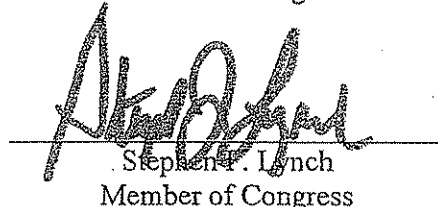
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



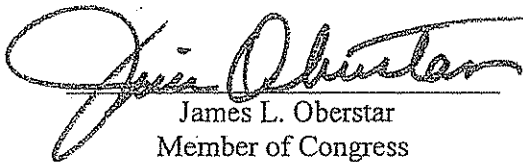
Mary Jo Kilroy
Member of Congress



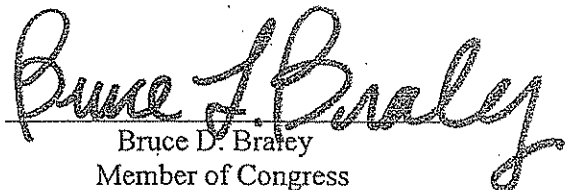
John W. Olver
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



James L. Oberstar
Member of Congress



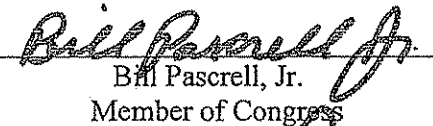
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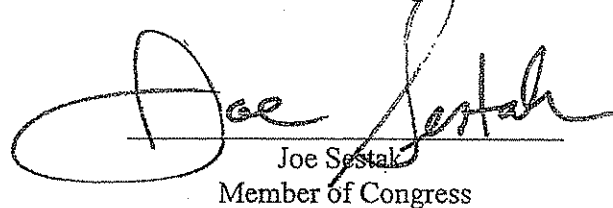
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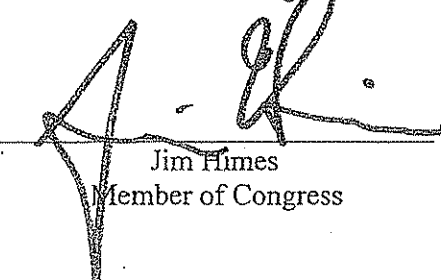
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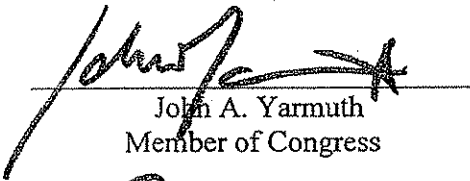
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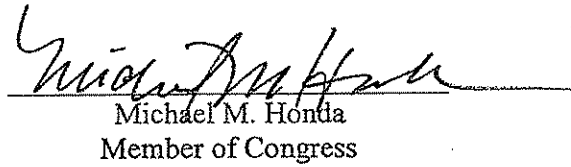


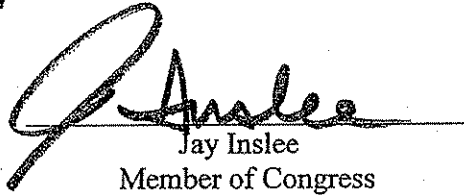
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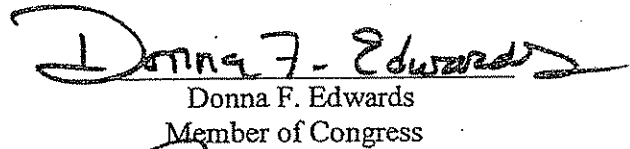


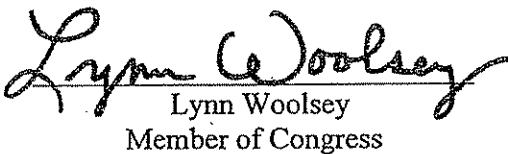
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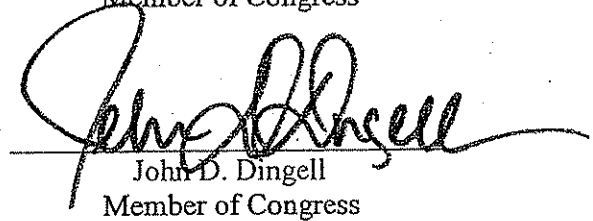

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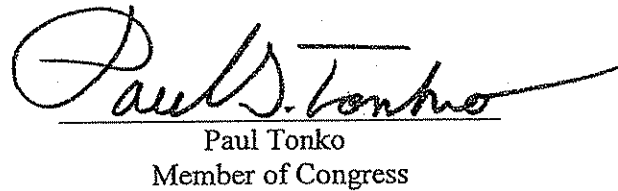

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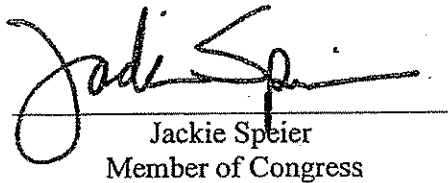

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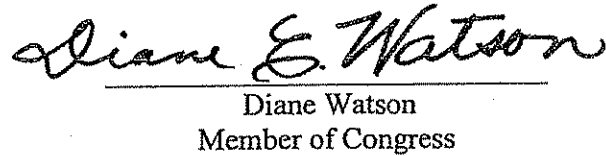

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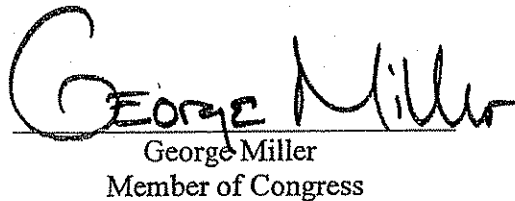

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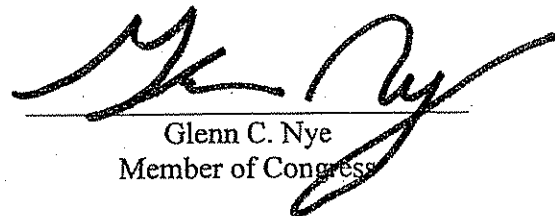

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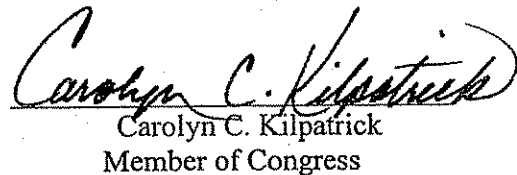

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SUFFOCATING GAZA - THE ISRAELI BLOCKADE'S EFFECTS ON PALESTINIANS

1 June 2010

Israel's military
blockade of
Gaza has left
more than 1.4
million
Palestinian
men, women
and children
trapped in the
Gaza Strip, an
area of land



More than half of Gaza's population are
children

© Amnesty International

just 40 kilometres long and 9.5 kilometres wide.

Mass unemployment, extreme poverty and food price rises caused by shortages have left four in five Gazans dependent on humanitarian aid. As a form of collective punishment, Israel's continuing blockade of Gaza is a flagrant violation of international law.

The situation in Gaza has been made worse by the Egyptian government's general closure of the Rafah crossing, although this was opened following the deaths of activists on the Gaza flotilla.

However, it is Israel, as the occupying power, that bears the foremost responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the inhabitants of Gaza.

Closed crossings

Since the blockade of Gaza was imposed in June 2007, none of the Israeli-controlled crossings between Gaza and Israel has been open in a regular or consistent way, and relatively little aid is getting through.

The one other land crossing at Rafah, on the border between Gaza and Egypt, is kept shut most of the time. The closures prevent the movement of Palestinians into and out of Gaza in all but a handful of cases, generally in exceptional humanitarian cases.

Basic goods

The blockade prohibits most exports and restricts the entry of basic goods, including food and fuel. Much of the available food is provided by the UN and other aid agencies, or smuggled in through tunnels running under the Egypt-Gaza border and then sold on at exorbitantly high prices to Gaza's beleaguered residents.

The situation has been made worse by the Egyptian government's construction of a steel wall along the border at Rafah to disrupt the cross-border smuggling that has become Gaza's lifeline, as well as the bombing of tunnels by the Israeli airforce.

Economic collapse

Rather than targeting armed groups, the blockade mainly hits the most vulnerable, such as children (who make up more than half of the population in Gaza), the elderly, the sick and the Gaza Strip's large refugee population.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the number of refugees living in abject poverty in the Gaza Strip has tripled since the blockade began. These families lack the means to purchase even the most basic items, including soap, school materials and clean drinking water. According to the UN, more than 60 per cent of households are currently "food insecure".

Lack of facilities

There are worsening problems with the supply of electricity in the Gaza Strip, with many residents enduring 8-12 hours of power cuts each day. There are also recurrent shortages of cooking gas, requiring the implementation of a rationing scheme in which hospitals and bakeries are prioritized.

Aid blocked

While Israel allows some humanitarian supplies from international aid agencies into Gaza, these are strictly limited and frequently delayed. UN agencies have said that additional storage and transportation costs incurred from delays due to the blockade totalled around \$5 million in 2009.

Health

Gaza's health sector has been plagued by shortages in equipment and medical supplies during the blockade.

Following the Israeli closure of crossings, people with medical conditions that cannot be treated in Gaza have been required to apply for permits to leave the territory to receive treatment in either foreign hospitals or Palestinian hospitals in the West Bank.

The Israeli authorities frequently delay or refuse these permits; some Gazans have died while waiting to obtain permits to leave the territory for medical treatment elsewhere.

World Health Organization (WHO) trucks of medical equipment bound for Gazan hospitals have repeatedly been turned away, without explanation, by Israeli border officials.

The Gaza conflict

From 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009, Gaza was subjected to a devastating Israeli military offensive – Operation "Cast Lead" – which Israel said it carried out to stop Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups firing indiscriminate rockets into Israel.

More than 1,380 Palestinians were killed, including more than 300 children and other civilians, and thousands were injured. Many thousands of homes were destroyed or severely damaged, as were the electricity and water systems. Civilian buildings, including hospitals and schools, were also damaged or destroyed by Israeli attacks.

Operation "Cast Lead" pushed the humanitarian crisis in Gaza to catastrophic levels. Since it concluded, the blockade has severely hampered or prevented reconstruction efforts. With many construction materials barred or limited by Israel, Gaza's inhabitants are unable to rebuild their shattered lives.

Continued violence

In November 2009, Hamas declared a unilateral cessation of rocket fire, although this has since been breached on several occasions by members of Palestinian armed groups.

Since the ceasefire following Operation "Cast Lead" in January 2009, one person in southern Israel has been killed by mortars and rockets fired by Palestinian armed groups.

Israeli military forces, meanwhile, have conducted regular raids into Gaza and have continued to bomb the tunnels under the border at Rafah used for smuggling between Gaza and Egypt. In the year following Operation "Cast Lead", 71 Palestinians were killed and 130 injured in the Gaza tunnels from tunnel collapse, accidents or airstrikes.

Israeli soldiers also continue to shoot at Palestinian farmers, fishermen and other civilians when they venture near Gaza's perimeter or approach the three nautical mile limit that Israel imposes on Gaza's coastline causing deaths and injuries.

Collective punishment

The Israeli authorities have put forward a range of justifications for the blockade - saying variously that it is a response to attacks from Palestinian armed groups, a reaction to the continued holding of the captured Israeli Shalit, and a means to pressure the Hamas de facto administration.

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But whatever its stated justification, the blockade is collectively punishing the entire population of Gaza, the majority of whom are children, rather than targeting the Hamas administration or armed groups.

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[Israeli authorities urged to commission international inquiry](#) (News, 1 June 2010)

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The Elders condemn Israeli attack on Gaza relief ships

Meeting in Johannesburg addresses major international issues

31/05/2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Elders have condemned the reported killing by Israeli forces of more than a dozen people who were attempting to deliver relief supplies to the Gaza strip by sea.

Meeting in Johannesburg, the independent group of eminent global leaders repeated their call for an end to the blockade on Gaza. They called for a full investigation of last night's incident and urged the UN Security Council to debate the situation with a view to mandating action to end the closure of the Gaza Strip.

The group's biannual meeting also addressed a number of other major international issues.

Overnight, Israeli troops stormed at least one ship in a flotilla of vessels carrying 10,000 tonnes of relief supplies to Gaza. Around 600 people are on board the six cargo and passenger boats.

The Elders described Israel's attack on the aid shipment and the resulting killings and injuries as completely inexcusable. They said this tragic incident should draw the world's attention to the terrible suffering of Gaza's 1.5 million people, half of whom are children under the age of 18.

The Elders reminded the world that under international law, the three-year blockade of Gaza by Israel is illegal collective punishment of its inhabitants. They said that the treatment of the people of Gaza is one of the world's greatest human rights violations and that the blockade is not only illegal, it is counterproductive. This is because it creates unacceptable suffering, in the process empowering extremists and undermining moderate forces in Gaza.

During their meeting in Johannesburg, the Elders also discussed a range of other issues in which they are engaged as a group. A brief summary of their views is as follows:

Sudan

The Elders are deeply concerned about the fragility of the situation in Sudan. With less than eight months before a referendum on self-determination in South Sudan, it is crucial that the international community implements a comprehensive strategy towards Sudan and ensures that the will of the people of South Sudan is respected.

The Elders recommend that the international community unites behind Thabo Mbeki, chair of the African Union's High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) as the lead international interlocutor on Sudan. There is currently a plethora of international envoys and special representatives and their diverse activities should support a unified approach by Mr Mbeki.

They call on the international community and regional players to remain neutral and make greater efforts to ensure that the will of the people of South Sudan is respected.

On Darfur, the Elders say the peace process needs to be far more inclusive. They believe the negotiations should include civil society groups representing the unarmed majority who should also participate in negotiations about their future.

Zimbabwe

Progress on the implementation of the Global Political Agreement is far too slow. Ending the stalemate over the reform process is essential for the future of Zimbabwe and the welfare of its people.

The Elders are currently examining ways to reinforce SADC's role, and especially that of South Africa's President Jacob Zuma as facilitator of negotiations between the parties to the GPA.

The pace of reform of the inclusive government needs to be accelerated so that the suffering of the people can be ended. We welcome the recent initiative of women ministers from all parties and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe to work together. Donors should continue to support Zimbabwe's efforts towards progress.

About The Elders' meeting

The Elders met from 28-31 May in Johannesburg – the city where the group was publicly launched by Nelson Mandela in 2007. All ten members of the group were present. This is the first time that they have all been together in the same place.

A highlight of their meeting was a private lunch with their founder and honorary Elder, Nelson Mandela on Saturday, 29 May. The ten Elders also met President Jacob Zuma on Thursday, 27 May, and had a lively discussion on Saturday, 29 May with 80 of Africa's top students about the future of the continent.

On the eve of the World Cup, the Elders took stock of the prospects for Africa as a whole. They are deeply concerned about high levels of poverty, poor governance and injustice in Africa, but they are also optimistic and confident about the continent's future.

They found their encounter with young Africans particularly encouraging. The students from all over Africa aged between 17 and 25 were positive, but also realistic about what needs to be done to tackle Africa's problems. The Elders were extremely impressed by the students' commitment to succeed, not only as individuals, but to use their skills to help many more people benefit from the continent's rich resources and human talent.

The Elders also held detailed discussions during their meeting on other areas in which they are engaged, especially the fight for equality for women and girls.

They met a group of men and women from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East and held detailed discussions on religious and traditional issues affecting women and girls. The discussions will help to inform the Elders' work on gender equality issues.

About the Elders

The Elders include Nobel Peace Laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari and former US President Jimmy Carter.

Other members are Norway's first woman Prime Minister Gro Brundtland who was also Director General of the World Health Organisation, former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Their fellow Elders, Ela Bhatt and Graça Machel, are globally recognised leaders at the forefront of the struggle against oppression and poverty, and Lakhdar Brahimi is one of the UN and the Arab world's most respected and effective diplomats.

Nobel Peace Laureates Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi, are honorary Elders. Having retired from public life, Mandela does not participate in Elders' meetings or activities but is kept informed of the group's efforts. Suu Kyi is under house arrest in Burma, imprisoned by

the military regime that denied her party's election victory in 1990. To highlight her cause - and that of thousands of political prisoners in Burma - the Elders always keep an empty chair at their table, symbolically draped in Burmese silk.

For biographies of the Elders, blogs, photos, videos and more information about their work please go to www.theElders.org

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