

LETTER SENT ON BEHALF OF RELIGIOUS AND FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE USA

THESE ARE OUR VOICES CRYING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS

December 15, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator
U.S. Department of State U.S. Agency for International Development
2201 C St. NW 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520 Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Mr. Secretary and Administrator Shah;

On behalf of the 21 signing organizations, many of whom have long experience and close partnerships with Palestinian civil society groups in Gaza, we are writing to raise serious concerns related to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. As you know, the situation in Gaza was already dire and is now worsening considerably with the onset of winter. Already the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) declared a state of emergency on November 27 due to flooding in the Gaza City area, a worrisome and early signal of what is to come.

Nearly four months after the cessation of Israel's "Operation Protective Edge," an estimated 100,000 people in Gaza still do not have adequate shelter. Electricity blackouts are common and key infrastructure such as water treatment plants have not been repaired. This humanitarian crisis is unconscionable and is the clear result of policy inaction and failure.

Despite the much-touted Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM), UN OCHA's Access Coordination Unit found that just 2.9 percent of the materials needed for reconstruction and recovery plans have entered thus far, with fewer reconstruction materials entering Gaza in November than over the past three months. This level of access, including in the two months since the GRM was signed, is lower than comparable periods in 2013. As Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, noted last month, "the process for reconstruction is proving far too slow and is largely ineffective."

In November, UN OCHA recorded just 287 trucks of construction materials that entered Gaza, whereas to complete reconstruction within three years, a minimum of 735 truckloads of construction materials is needed per day. The Popular Committee for Monitoring the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip estimates that at the current pace it will take at least 20 years to rebuild the Gaza Strip.

Therefore, we request that the U.S. government:

- Increase the U.S. financial commitment to the reconstruction of Gaza, and ensure that these funds are disbursed immediately to relevant U.N. agencies and non-governmental organizations operational in Gaza.
- Urge Israel to fully lift the blockade on Gaza, allowing full freedom of movement of people and goods to and from Gaza and lifting restrictions on the import and export of goods, a crucial step for recovery and development of the local economy;
- Urge Egypt to allow full freedom of movement through the Rafah crossing;
- Work with the Government of Palestine/Government of National Consensus, Government of Israel and the United Nations to resolve problematic aspects of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, including:
 - Removing the requirement that Palestinian homeowners receiving building materials register identifying information in a database accessible to Israeli intelligence agencies;
 - Ensuring that the primary purpose of the mechanism remains the temporary facilitation of rebuilding and recovery assistance—i.e., the GRM must not become a tool for enforcing the blockade by creating an additional level of scrutiny for construction materials entering Gaza in the future;

- Ensuring that reconstruction efforts are carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the clarification that Israeli companies that operate in settlements or are complicit in violations of international humanitarian law must not profit from reconstruction efforts.

As you know well, Israel maintains that their imposition of restrictive measures related to Gaza are necessary for security reasons. All people desire to live in security and stability, including the people of the Gaza Strip. Meaningful security should be rooted in the provision of basic needs and respect for human rights.

Thank you for hearing our views. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

ActionAid USA

ActionAid Palestine

Alianza por la Solidaridad

American Friends Service Committee

ANERA

Christian Peacemaker Teams – Palestine

Church World Service

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Handicap International

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Mennonite Central Committee - Palestine

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Norwegian Refugee Council - Palestine Office

Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace

Pax Christi International

Presbyterian Church (USA)

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and [International Thomas Merton Society](#)