

Dear Delegates of the Maryland General Assembly,

My name is Shahirah Mahmood, and I am a constituent of Maryland. I support HJ0002 and urge you to vote in favor of Supporting a Long-Term Ceasefire in Israel and Palestine.

I come before you today not just as a concerned citizen but as a human being deeply troubled by the unfolding tragedy in Gaza. While Hamas's actions on October 7th 2023, is reprehensible, it does not justify Israel's devastating military campaign in Gaza, which has resulted in the loss of more than 30,000 Palestinian lives, including over 12,000 children and 8000 women. Both the International Court of Justice and the United States Federal Court conclude that Israel is plausibly engaging in genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The U.S court declared that the Biden administration is providing "unflagging support" for the massive attacks on Palestinian civilians in contravention of international law.

The recent death of Mahmoud Fattouh, a two-month-old Palestinian boy from starvation, is a heart-wrenching reminder of the cost of inaction and the dire need for immediate, collective efforts to bring an end to this catastrophe. As a mother with 2 young children, I cannot stand idly by while yet another child lays waste to dehydration and starvation in what is primarily caused by a man-made famine.

As it was reported on February 25, 2024, two-month-old Mahmoud's death is not an isolated incident but a harrowing indicator of a much larger crisis. The United Nations has warned of an "explosion" in child deaths due to a lack of food and water, with at least 29,606 Palestinians killed and 69,737 wounded since the onset of Israel's war on Gaza in October. Furthermore, the UN reports that some 2.3 million people in Gaza are now on the brink of famine.

During Muslim Lobby Day (2/26), I had the pleasure of meeting Delegate Kaufman. While we agreed to respectfully disagree about an immediate, permanent, and bilateral ceasefire in Gaza, I urge you, members of the Maryland general assembly to focus on a few points.

I want to offer a response to a predominant perspective from those supporting the Netanyahu government's war on Gaza that they "would only support a ceasefire after all of the hostages are released, and Hamas is eliminated." The problem with this statement is that it neglects context.

If Israel were using advanced military and intelligence technologies to conduct precision strikes against the Hamas military, that would be one thing. But that is not what Israel is doing. Israel continues to conduct the strikes and operations that have killed tens of thousands of innocent people while, as a UN expert has said, using starvation as a weapon of war.

Calling for a ceasefire only after Hamas is eliminated is an utterly depraved position to hold. The issue here is not the battle between Israel and Hamas, but the

atrocities committed by Israel against the Palestinian people in Gaza (and multiple international humanitarian actors there to help them). Calls for a ceasefire now are not calls of support for Hamas, they are calls for an end to wanton murder.

I appeal to your humanity and strongly encourage you to vote in favor of HJ0002.

Respectfully,
Dr. Shahirah Mahmood