

Testimony Supporting HJ0002: Supporting a Long-Term Ceasefire in Israel Palestine

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Distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Kenneth Feder, and I am a Jewish resident of Baltimore City. I am also a member of IfNotNow Baltimore: a movement of American Jews seeking to end Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and discrimination against Palestinians, and demand equality, justice, and a thriving future for all Palestinians and Israelis. I'm testifying today to urge the General Assembly to **support HJ0002 calling for a long-term ceasefire in Israel and Palestine, release of hostages, and adequate provision of humanitarian aid to Gaza.**

On Oct 7, Hamas, a Palestinian militant group, attacked Israel, murdered more than 1,000 people and kidnapped more than 200 mostly civilian hostages, including children. In response to Hamas's attack, Israel has attacked the Gaza Strip, the densely populated Palestinian territory where Hamas is based and which Israel has blockaded for more than a decade. Since Oct 7, Israel has cut off most of Gaza's supply of water, food, and fuel. Israel's military has bombed or assaulted entire residential neighborhoods, schools, ambulances, and refugee camps. In just under five months, 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, the majority of whom are women and children. 90% of structures in the Gaza strip are damaged or destroyed. Nearly the entire population of 2 million have been displaced and are living in squalid conditions amidst constant bombing and shooting with nowhere to flee. Constant violence has severely limited the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide aid. Without a ceasefire and increase humanitarian aid, experts predict tens of thousands of thousands will die in the coming months from famine and disease.

No military or political aim can justify such a level of destruction and killing.

There is also ample evidence, from its own statements and actions, that Israel's government is deliberately disregarding civilian life. Israel's energy minister has flatly stated that food and water for Gaza will not be restored until Hamas return all hostages; in effect holding more than 2 million residents of Gaza hostage as a bartering chip. Israel's own defense minister described the goal of their bombing campaign at the start of the war as "damage, not accuracy." These statements are entirely consistent with the longstanding attitudes of Israel's current right-wing government: one that has incorporated Jewish supremacist political parties and actively promulgated vigilante violence by Jewish settlers against Palestinian civilians. This is a government that has lost all credibility, and deserves no American trust or support.

Yet, despite the Israeli government's actions and statements, throughout this war, the United States has blocked every attempt to reach a ceasefire, and has continued to provide millions of dollars in military aid to Israel.

Moreover, all evidence to date suggests Israel's actions have been self-defeating and harmful to itself, the United States, and international humanitarian norms: More than 100 Israelis remain held hostage, a fifth of whom are thought to have been killed during the conflict, and hundreds of thousands of Israelis have been internally displaced due to border conflict. The United States has been drawn into repeated, deadly military conflict with militant backers of the Palestinian cause across the Middle East, and is internationally isolated and divided from our closest allies in our opposition to a ceasefire. There has been a massive upsurge of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic actions and statements, in the United States and around the world.

The United States should not be supporting this madness. We should be actively trying to stop it.

As our democratically elected representatives, the General Assembly is the most powerful voice representing Marylanders. Maryland needs to send a strong, unambiguous message to the President and to our Congressional Delegation: we need a ceasefire now! The United Nations, along with virtually every major reputable international humanitarian organization, has said a ceasefire is the only way to provide adequate humanitarian aid to Palestinians and end the staggering loss of human life currently take place in Gaza.

Finally, I wish to speak not just as a Maryland resident, but as a Jewish person. Support for a ceasefire, opposition to Israel's assault on Gaza, and opposition to Israeli occupation of Palestine are not inherently anti-Semitic simply because Israel is a Jewish state. Precisely the opposite: these positions are simply consistent with Jewish values, and with universal moral values, of respect for human life and dignity. Like many Jews all over the world, I have a personal connection to Israel, and am deeply concerned for the safety of my family there, and for Jews and Muslims around the world facing a surge in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. But for me the purpose of my faith is to require us to say and do what is right, even when anger, fear, expediency, or tribalism tempt us to abandon our values. Israel is a Jewish state, but its current actions are not consistent with my Jewish values, nor with any value set that treats all humans as equal and created in the image of God.

I urge the General Assembly to stand up for those same values: support HJ0002, a ceasefire in Israel and Palestine, release of all hostages, and increased humanitarian aid in Gaza.