



## Council on American-Islamic Relations

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Chair Anne Healey  
House Rules Committee  
230 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

### **Re: Testimony In Support of HJ 9 Condemning Violence and Violations of Law - Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gaza, and Sudan**

Dear Chair Healey and Members of the House Rules Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the **Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)**, I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support of House Joint Resolution 9**.

HJ 9 affirms a principle that should never be controversial and has been reaffirmed previously in this body: **civilian life is not conditional**. Regardless of geography, politics, or the identity of those involved in a conflict, the intentional or reckless harm of civilians and violations of international humanitarian law must be condemned clearly and consistently.

This resolution recognizes three ongoing humanitarian catastrophes that demand moral clarity from democratic institutions.

In **Gaza**, the humanitarian devastation has reached catastrophic levels. Hundreds of thousands of children, women and men have been killed, and vast portions of the population have been displaced as homes, hospitals, schools, places of worship, and essential infrastructure have been destroyed. Numerous renowned international and Israeli human rights organizations - including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem - have affirmed Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, raising the alarm that the scale of killing, destruction, and displacement raises grave concerns under international law. The destruction and violence have produced unprecedented danger for humanitarian and medical workers and members of the press, with hundreds killed in the course of providing aid or reporting on the ground.

In **Sudan**, conflict that erupted in April 2023 has triggered one of the world's largest humanitarian emergencies. Hundreds of thousands have been killed and **millions have been displaced internally or forced to flee across borders**. International observers have documented massacres, ethnic targeting, attacks on displacement camps, and atrocities that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, particularly in Darfur and surrounding regions.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, decades of violence fueled by armed groups and regional actors have resulted in an estimated **six million deaths since the mid-1990s**. Civilians have endured mass displacement, acute food insecurity, widespread sexual violence, and repeated indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas. The scale and duration of this crisis make it one of the deadliest conflicts since World War II, yet it remains among the least addressed globally.

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Although these crises differ in their origins and actors, they share a common and tragic reality: **civilians are bearing the overwhelming burden of genocide and war.**

International humanitarian law exists precisely to prevent such outcomes. The protection of civilians, the prohibition of collective punishment, the safeguarding of hospitals and humanitarian infrastructure, and the guarantee of humanitarian access are not political preferences. They are core legal obligations recognized by the international community and embedded in the Geneva Conventions and the United Nations Charter.

HJ 9 reaffirms Maryland's longstanding commitment to these principles. The Maryland General Assembly has previously spoken out against mass violence abroad, including through resolutions condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and affirming the protection of civilian life. **This resolution continues that tradition by reinforcing that our commitment to human dignity and accountability must be consistent and universal.**

There should never be any controversy around this.

The resolution also matters because **Maryland is home to communities directly connected to these crises.** Many Maryland residents have family members, loved ones, and cultural ties to Palestine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan. For them, the devastation described in this resolution is not a distant geopolitical issue. It is personal. It affects their families, their communities, and their daily lives.

When Maryland's elected leaders acknowledge these crises and call for the protection of civilians, it sends an important message to those residents: **their suffering is recognized and their government stands for the equal value of every human life.**

HJ 9 also takes important steps by urging the United States government to use its diplomatic, economic, and political influence to prevent further atrocities, support humanitarian relief, ensure that foreign assistance is consistent with international law, and work with international partners toward durable and just peace.

These calls reflect a fundamental belief that **silence in the face of mass civilian harm weakens global norms against atrocity crimes.** Democracies must be willing to speak clearly when international law is violated and when vulnerable populations face the risk of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide.

By passing HJ 9, the Maryland General Assembly would affirm that:

- Civilian life must be protected everywhere.
- Humanitarian access must never be obstructed.
- Accountability for violations of international law is essential.
- Maryland stands against mass violence and atrocities wherever they occur.

For these reasons, **CAIR Maryland respectfully urges a favorable report on House Joint Resolution 9.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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