

13 January 2009

To:

Mr. Samuel Witten, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State  
Ms. Barbara Strack, Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
President George W. Bush, The White House  
The Honorable Howard L. Berman, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. Congress  
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. Congress  
The Honorable Joseph Biden, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Congress  
The Honorable Richard Lugar, Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Congress  
Mr. Michel Gabaudan, Regional Director, United Nations High Commission for Refugees  
His Excellency Ambassador Sameh Shoukry, Egyptian Ambassador to the United States  
His Excellency Ambassador Sallai Meridor, Israeli Ambassador to the United States

As organizations committed to the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, we are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation of the 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, two thirds of whom are refugees. Due to the state of siege imposed by the Israeli Government over the past year and a half, persons have been trapped, with no freedom of movement or access to trade, markets, or livelihoods.

All human beings have a universal right to flee war and seek safety in neighboring countries. Both Israel and Egypt are signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. It is thus incumbent upon Israel and Egypt to immediately open their borders and provide full rights and protection to civilians under international law attempting to flee violence and persecution. We urge you to use your good offices to ensure the respect of refugee rights and humanitarian principles in this deteriorating situation. Moreover, we echo the call of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, that it is imperative that the immediate delivery of adequate humanitarian assistance to the civilian victims of this conflict be facilitated with the cooperation of Egypt and Israel.

Movement of humanitarian aid within the Gaza Strip is increasingly difficult. Professional medical volunteers from various countries continue to be denied entry to help treat injured civilians. We call on the Israeli Government to urgently facilitate their deployment to Gaza.

We welcome the U.S.'s recent commitment of \$85 million to UNRWA's emergency appeal. However, much more is needed to meet the basic humanitarian needs of the residents of Gaza. Many vulnerable populations including children, the elderly, and the physically and emotionally disabled are in great need of assistance. We encourage the U.S. in particular to take a more robust leadership position in securing an immediate ceasefire to mitigate this humanitarian disaster.

Sincerely,

American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee  
Amnesty International-USA  
Arab American and Chaldean Council  
Church World Service/Immigration & Refugee Program

Dominican Leadership Conference  
Episcopal Church  
Kurdish Human Rights Watch  
Refugees International  
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants