

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 14, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We are writing to express our deepest concern regarding the ongoing humanitarian disaster taking place in Gaza, where over 18,000 people have been killed and many others are missing and presumed dead in the rubble left by the relentless bombardment that also threatens the safety of the hostages being held by the terrorist group Hamas. Most alarming is the impact the bombardment is having on women and children, who make up approximately 70 percent of the casualties reported since the start of the war.¹

We witnessed with great hope and optimism the diplomacy and dialogue that produced the seven-day cease fire, during which time dozens of innocent Israeli and other hostages were freed from captivity while much needed aid was allowed to flow into Gaza. Now that the relentless bombing campaign resumed with no end in sight, the casualties continue to mount. We believe that diplomacy is the only way forward to achieve peace, and much more must be done towards long-term peace in the Middle East.

We write with great urgency about the 5,500 women in Gaza who are expected to give birth within the next 30 days.² These women have limited access to medical professionals, safe delivery spaces, sanitary supplies, and clean water; the necessities to bring life into the world. With continuous bombardment causing displacement and unsanitary living conditions, the more than 180 deliveries each day are becoming emergency cesarean sections or premature births.³ Furthermore, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports alarming instances in which cesarean sections have been performed on women in labor without access to anesthesia.⁴

Newborns in Gaza are especially vulnerable. Since premature babies rely on neonatal and intensive care services, the impact of instability and power outages caused by the lack of fuel in Gaza, alongside evacuations and continuous bombardment, pose severe threats to babies' lives. We are heartbroken by the report of nurses who were urged to evacuate Al-Nasr Medical Center in Gaza City due to incoming bombardment, leaving behind premature babies reliant on oxygen. Two weeks later, when the nurses were able to return to the hospital during the humanitarian

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-many-palestinians-have-died-gaza-war-how-will-counting-continue-2023-12-06/>

² <https://www.unfpa.org/news/after-month-siege-bombardments-and-health-system-obliterated-pregnant-women-gaza-are-caught>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/more-premature-babies-born-gaza-due-stress-trauma-oxfam-2023-11-23/#:~:text=Juzoor%2C%20an%20Oxfam%20partner%20organisation,have%20suffered%20stress%20and%20trauma>

⁴ <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-11-03/pregnant-women-in-gaza-in-dire-straits-with-no-food-water-or-anesthesia-for-cesareans.html>

ceasefire, the babies were found dead.⁵ In addition, a reported 6,600 children have died in Gaza since October 7, and hundreds more are estimated to be trapped in the rubble of collapsed buildings.⁶

Moreover, we are alarmed by recent reporting in the *New York Times* that indicates your administration is effectively bypassing the congressional review process for arms sales by moving forward with a sale of \$106 million worth of tank ammunition to Israel through an emergency provision in the Arms Export Control Act.⁷ This action is especially concerning in light of the fact that members of Congress have repeatedly urged your administration to ensure that US arms are used in accordance with US law, international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict.

These grave circumstances have resulted in an ongoing and preventable crisis, and the collective punishment of women and children. The scale of devastation is unfathomable and unacceptable. For this reason, we urge your administration to do the following:

- Urge a ceasefire and immediate halt of offensive military attacks, including bombardments and other military operations.
- Press the Israeli government to allow sufficient fuel to sustain civilian life in Gaza, including fuel for the operation of hospitals, the pumping and treatment of clean water, and the maintenance of basic sanitation services.
- Facilitate the restoration of commercial activity and much-needed humanitarian aid efforts to provide basic and life-saving goods and services to the population in Gaza.
- Continue working to release all hostages, especially women and mothers, as was done during the seven-day humanitarian pause, and work with international partners to pressure Hamas to allow International Committee of the Red Cross visits and care for all hostages held in Gaza until their release is secured.

As the conflict rages on with no end in sight and places of refuge within Gaza become more overcrowded and less safe, we urge you to use your influence and resources to advocate for an immediate ceasefire. The protection of civilians, particularly pregnant women, and children in Gaza, is paramount. Additionally, we implore you to facilitate the restoration of commercial activity and much-needed humanitarian aid efforts to provide basic and life-saving goods and services to the population in Gaza.

Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

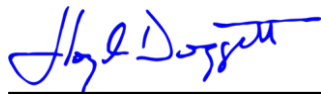


Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/abandoned-babies-found-decomposing-gaza-hospital-evacuated-rcna127533>

⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/22/israel/gaza-hostilities-take-horrific-toll-children>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/09/world/middleeast/us-israel-tanks-ammunition.html>




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Barbara Lee
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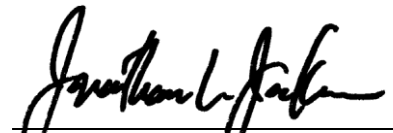
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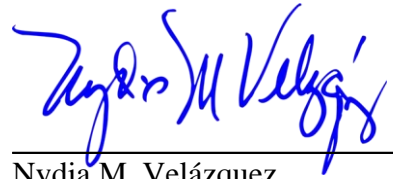
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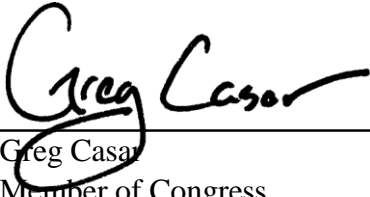
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