



May 20, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State of the United States
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Amnesty International USA calls on Biden Administration to push for an end to the escalating violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, rocket fire between Israeli and Hamas forces, and uphold accountability for abuses of human rights and crimes under international law

Dear Secretary Blinken:

On behalf of the Amnesty International USA and Amnesty Israel, we write to you today to urge immediate and meaningful action by the State Department and Biden Administration to help end and redress the suspected crimes against humanity and worsening humanitarian crisis in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

For decades, our researchers and advocates have documented abuses by all actors in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Numerous cycles of violence, violations, and impunity have led to this current crisis, speaking to the urgent need for meaningful efforts to hold perpetrators accountable, and for the United States to make clear both publicly and privately that violations of human rights will not be met with silence, no matter the perpetrator, and to focus on the injustice, discrimination, and dispossession that are the drivers of the ongoing violations and crimes - as seen in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem.

The Israeli military and Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups have traded rocket fire to an extent not seen since 2014, with several thousands of missiles launched at and from Gaza. Israel's disproportionate and ostensibly unlawful use of force in Gaza has included attacks which must be investigated as war crimes or crimes against humanity, devastating a civilian population already suffering the effects of 14 years of the illegal Israeli-Egyptian blockade and mass destruction of three previous deadly rounds of fighting. Civilians, overwhelmingly Palestinians, suffer the brunt of the death and devastation, while Israeli security forces and Hamas continue their crimes with impunity. At least 232 Palestinians including 65 children have been killed and over 1,900 wounded by the airstrikes. Twelve people in Israel, including two children, have been killed and at least 324 injured by Hamas rocket fire. Hundreds of Hamas rockets have fallen short in Gaza, causing further devastation and casualties. Over 2,500 people are now homeless and 75,000 displaced in Gaza after at least 90 residential buildings including over 1,000 housing units were destroyed by Israel's bombardment, according to the UN.

Meanwhile, public infrastructure in Gaza has been decimated and at least two top Gazan doctors have been killed. Israeli airstrikes in Gaza City damaged a Doctors Without Borders clinic, further damaging at least 18 total hospitals and clinics and destroying one health facility according to the World Health Organization. The airstrikes also destroyed the main road to the Al-Shifa hospital, the hospital that provides the vast majority of all general and emergency medical services in Gaza. Hundreds of thousands of Gazans are facing dire shortages of clean water, the delivering of humanitarian aid has

been severely impeded, and according to UNICEF at least 50 schools in Gaza and three in Israel have been damaged. Deliberate attacks on civilians or civilian objects – such as homes, medical facilities, schools, and governmental buildings – that are not verifiably being used for military purposes are against international law and are war crimes, as are disproportionate attacks and uses of force.

On Saturday, following a one-hour warning, Israeli forces destroyed via targeted missiles the Gaza headquarters of the Associated Press, Al Jazeera, and other local media based on yet-unsubstantiated claims that Hamas used the building for military intelligence offices. The targeting of media outlets is a war crime and merits an independent investigation.

Another worrying development has been the outbreak of intercommunal violence within Israel, with anti-Arab and anti-Jewish violence targeting people and property, including the burning and vandalizing of synagogues, mosques, and businesses. One Jew and one Palestinian citizen of Israel have each died from injuries inflicted in the violence. Further disturbing are emerging reports of discriminatory policing, whereby Israeli police have failed to protect Palestinian citizens and their property, and disproportionately detained Palestinians; nearly all 170 of the reported indictments so far have been against Palestinians. Additionally, police brutality against non-violent Palestinians has been increasingly documented. Growing protests in the West Bank have been met with further crackdown from Israeli security forces, leaving at least 27 Palestinians dead according to Palestinian authorities, with over 900 more injured, shot at by police with live ammunition. Palestinians in Israel have been attacked and denied their right to peacefully protest while Jewish Israeli right-wing extremists have continued with relative impunity.

This recent escalation of violence - including the horrifying crackdown on Palestinian worshippers by Israeli police at Al-Aqsa, Hamas' rocket attacks targeting Israeli civilians, the devastating airstrikes by Israel into Gaza, and the intercommunal violence in Israel - was sparked by Israel's efforts to forcibly evict several Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in occupied East Jerusalem based on blatantly discriminatory legislation. A ruling on the case by the Israeli Supreme Court was delayed due to fears of more unrest. It has been dismissed by the Prime Minister as "a private real-estate dispute" being used by Palestinians to "incite violence." We urge you to make clear in public statements that the imminent forced evictions and transfer of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah by Israel are violations of international humanitarian law and must be immediately halted.

Palestinians' experience of systemic discrimination, dispossession, and displacement is at the root of the ongoing violations we are currently seeing. The abuses in Sheikh Jarrah are just the latest episode in an egregious pattern of illegal settlement expansion, evictions, and demolition of Palestinian homes by Israeli authorities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories spanning decades within the framework of a heavily discriminatory regime. In 2020 alone, UN officials found that Israel demolished 848 Palestinian residential structures in the occupied West Bank, displacing 996 Palestinians, with around 200 additional Palestinian families facing pending eviction cases and forced displacement. U.S. policy in previous administrations has made clear that these forced, illegal removals, and flagrant abuse of the rights of Palestinians by Israel are unacceptable, and we urge you to adopt the same public position unequivocally. Further, we urge you to insist that Israel address the root causes of the injustices experienced by Palestinians to end and prevent ongoing and future violations.

We have appreciated your pledge to prioritize human rights in the Biden administration's foreign policy. This issue cannot be the exception; the United States must take meaningful action in defense of human rights right now in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We urge you to:

- Demand Israel cease the illegal home demolitions and forced evictions of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, and all other areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Block the pending \$735 million arms sale of precision guided missiles to the Israeli government pending the remedying human rights abuses.
- Support a UN Security Council resolution to impose an arms embargo on the Israeli government, Hamas, and Palestinian militias to prevent further violations of human rights and international law.
- Call for an end to the brutal, discriminatory, and repressive tactics used by Israeli police and security forces against Palestinian demonstrators across Israel and the Occupied Territories.
- Support and engage in multilateral efforts to end this current cycle of violations and crimes and to ensure unfettered humanitarian access to Gaza, including through joint United Nations Security Council statements and on-the-ground mediation.
- Call for an independent investigation into and accountability for human rights violations and war crimes undertaken in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories by all actors, including Israel's collective punishment of Gaza and the unlawful attacks on civilians by both Israel and Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups.
- End US opposition to investigation of this situation by the International Criminal Court.
- Recognizing that a right to self-defense does not justify Israel's besieging of a densely packed and impoverished strip of land, in addition to condemning rocket fire by Hamas and Palestinian armed groups from Gaza into population centers in Israel.
- Urge relevant authorities, political and community leaders in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories to condemn intercommunal violence targeting Palestinians and Jews and their places of worship, homes, and businesses.
- Review US security assistance and military aid, pursuant to the Leahy Laws, of the use of US-manufactured weapons and other aid in committing violations of human rights.

Signed,

Amnesty International USA
Amnesty Israel