



August 25, 2021

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

RE: Amnesty International USA and Amnesty Israel urge President Biden to uphold Palestinian rights, and demand an end to Israel's unlawful Gaza blockade and OPT displacement and settlement expansion during Prime Minister Bennett's 8/26 White House visit

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of Amnesty International USA and Amnesty International Israel, we write to you to urge you in your meeting on August 26th with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to push for an end to the Israeli government's systematic human rights abuses in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

For decades, our staff has documented flagrant abuses and violations of international law by Israeli authorities in Israel and the OPT. As a substantial ally and backer of Israel's government and security forces, the U.S. must make clear publicly and privately that these violations will not be met with silence.

Israeli authorities have entrenched a discriminatory regime in the OPT, carrying out an egregious pattern of forced displacement of Palestinians, arbitrary arrests, unlawful force, collective punishment, and repression. So far in 2021, Israeli forces have demolished [at least 625 structures](#) in the occupied West Bank, forcibly displacing 896 Palestinians; hundreds more face pending evictions. Just from [July 27th to August 9th](#), authorities demolished 57 buildings, displacing 97 Palestinians, overwhelmingly children. This far outpaces the rate from 2020, showing that the systemic abuses are only accelerating. Previous administrations made clear that these forced removals are unacceptable - this one must do the same.

These forced removals are carried out in tandem with illegal settlement expansions and restriction of Palestinian building, all in clear violation of international law. The claimed justification is "a lack of valid building permits," a cover for a discriminatory system that makes acquiring permits virtually impossible for Palestinians - a nonexistent barrier for illegal Israeli settlers, who are also [five times less likely](#) to be issued unappealable demolition orders. Of over 6,500 permit requests by Palestinians from [2000 to 2019](#), Israeli authorities approved only 245. Meanwhile, Israel issued nearly tenfold that in demolition orders against Palestinians just in 2016 to 2018 alone. During former President Trump's tenure, Israel built [9,200](#) illegal settler homes, in 2020 [approving plans for 12,159 more](#) - granting just 253 for Palestinians.

Prominent cases of Israel's displacement campaign, Sheikh Jarrah and [Silwan](#) are still [under threat](#). Israeli judges punted on the Sheikh Jarrah evictions, [delaying a ruling to an unknown date](#). The delay is just a band-aid for impending violations, leaving Palestinian families in continued fear of eviction.

This year has also seen a disturbing wave of repression and brutality against Palestinians by Israeli security forces, including [targeted campaigns of sweeping discriminatory arrests](#), torture and [unlawful force](#). On May 7th, over [170 Palestinians were injured](#) as Israeli forces stormed the al-Aqsa mosque during Ramadan, firing rubber bullets and tear gas at gathered worshippers and protesters. Israeli forces raided al-Aqsa again just days later, injuring 300 more Palestinians in another horrifying attack. And as Palestinians gathered to protest forced evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, Israeli security forces responded with a brutal crackdown, injuring 840 Palestinians.

When intercommunal violence erupted around the May escalation in Gaza, Israeli police systemically failed to protect Palestinian citizens of Israel from attacks by Jewish supremacists, at times willfully, with several premeditated attacks known to police ahead of time. And the thousands arrested and indicted for the violence were overwhelmingly Palestinian, denied leniency granted to the few arrested Israeli Jews.

[Beyond this clear disparity](#), police also used unlawful force against Palestinians during the crackdown, including in shooting a 15-year-old girl in the back at her Sheikh Jarrah home, and torturing eight detainees at a Nazareth police station. But these weren't isolated incidents. In Beita, illegal Israeli settlers began to build on Palestinian land, sparking ongoing protests since March in which Israeli security forces have [brutalized several hundred lawful protesters](#). In the span of three days from July 27th, Israeli troops in Beita shot and killed a [Palestinian city employee](#) on a protest-less night; unjustifiably fired on a car in Beit Ummer, killing [11-year-old Mohammed al-Alami](#); and at his funeral, used excessive force against protesters, killing [a 20-year-old](#). And on [August 6th](#), Israeli troops killed another Beita protester, the eighth since March. Overall, at least [173 Palestinian civilians](#) have died at the hands of Israeli forces this year.

Authorities indefinitely detain thousands of Palestinians without charge or trial, including [157 Palestinian children](#) in 2020. Without apparent cause, authorities raided Defense for Children International Palestine's (DCIP) offices on July 29th, stealing computers and confidential [client files of DCIP-represented child detainees](#) held by the Israeli military. UN experts [condemned the raid](#), a disturbing reprisal against a group documenting Israeli forces' abuses of Palestinian children. Days before, DCIP reported on Israeli soldiers' shooting and killing of unarmed [17-year-old Mohammad Tamimi](#) - at least the tenth Palestinian child in the West Bank shot and killed by Israeli forces in 2021. DCIP, [like Amnesty](#), finds Israeli forces' use of lethal force against Palestinian children may amount to extrajudicial, willful killings - a war crime.

Palestinian civilians, including children, protesters, and human rights defenders, are regularly subjected to unlawful trials in military courts, raids, harassment, torture, and travel bans - including [Amnesty staff](#). In June, authorities raided [the Palestinian Health Work Committees](#) (HWC), arbitrarily shuttering it and the critical services it provides as one of the main medical providers in the OPT. This is yet another example of authorities' repression of Palestinian civil society, harming public health in the OPT. Its members face [criminalization](#), with three jailed on questionable charges among a wider crackdown on human rights defenders. Allegations of their mistreatment by authorities have gone without investigation.

And in May, as [Amnesty wrote to Secretary of State Blinken](#) at the time, the escalation of violence in Gaza and Israel's unlawfully disproportionate use of force devastated a civilian population already suffering from previous attacks and the suffocating blockade. At least 260 Palestinians including 66 children were killed, as were twelve Israelis. Amnesty documented multiple cases of indiscriminate targeting of Gazan civilians by Israeli airstrikes, in some cases wiping out entire families. [Over 8,000 Gazans](#) remain displaced, [123 health facilities](#) and [72 schools](#) suffered significant damage, and [hundreds of thousands](#) lack access to clean water after airstrikes destroyed critical infrastructure. Deliberate attacks on civilians' homes, medical facilities, public infrastructure, and schools not verifiably used by the military are war crimes, and Israeli forces' grave violations demand open investigation. So far, authorities have [provided no evidence](#) in many [such strikes](#) of Hamas presence, let alone accountability.

From Gaza to the West Bank's nearly 600 military checkpoints, Israel's movement restrictions deprive the rights of Palestinians to health, education, and work, causing further suffering during the COVID-19 pandemic. And Israel continues its illegal blockade with Egypt of Gaza, for 14 years collectively punishing its two million residents. Movement of people and goods - [from construction material to medical equipment](#) - remain harshly restricted, only worsening Gaza's humanitarian crisis. Gazans must request Israeli permission to leave, yet are overwhelmingly rejected - even for critical medical care. This blockade is especially abhorrent in a pandemic, with severe medicine shortages on top of health facilities damaged by clashes. While Israel eased some restrictions recently, the changes have been far from enough.

Palestinians in the OPT have been deprived of adequate and equal access to COVID-19 vaccines, compounded by the blockade and the shuttering of the HWC in the West Bank. The pandemic has further illustrated and [exacerbated the institutionalized discrimination](#) of Israel's occupation. Israeli authorities have failed their obligation under international law as an occupying power to ensure the right to health

and access to adequate medical care - in this case, vaccines - for Palestinians. While Israel took [some positive steps](#), even the proposed 1-million-dose transfer to the Palestinian Authority did not meet Israeli authorities' obligations, as the doses were set to [imminently expire](#). Israel's May bombardment of Gaza also fully halted critical vaccine deliveries to Gazans for an extended period.

As of [August 23rd](#), 63% of Israelis are fully vaccinated, compared to just 8% of Palestinians in the OPT. Meanwhile, Israel - the first country to offer third doses - [rejected WHO pleas](#) to stop the booster shots, an immoral decision when millions in the territories it occupies have not even received a single dose.

Reconstruction efforts are crucial to mitigating the catastrophic conditions in Gaza. This month, Israeli officials took a helpful step in approving [\\$40 million in direct Qatari aid](#) to impoverished Gazan families. But the blockade has hamstrung reconstruction, with [materials needed to rebuild destroyed infrastructure](#) restricted or barred entirely. Last week, [53 members of Congress](#) called on the U.S. government to ensure greater aid access into Gaza, including via wider easing of the blockade, which [UN officials have also called on Israel](#) to do. It's crucial to Palestinians' human rights that the administration take action.

We appreciate this administration's pledge to prioritize human rights and accountability for violations generally, but the Israeli government cannot be an exception. As such, in his meeting with Prime Minister Bennett, Amnesty urges President Biden to stand up for human rights in Israel and the OPT by:

- Demanding Israel ceases unlawful home demolitions and forced evictions of Palestinians, and illegal Israeli settlement expansion in occupied East Jerusalem and throughout the OPT, as well as an end to the brutal repression, discrimination, and fair trial violations by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians, demonstrators, and civil society across Israel and the OPT.
- Supporting independent investigations into violations and war crimes committed in Israel and the OPT - namely Israeli forces' May air strikes in Gaza targeting civilians and residences; unlawful use of force and extrajudicial killings against Palestinians, including children; and detainee torture.
- Pressuring Israeli officials to lift the illegal, devastating blockade on Gaza and end the deprivation of free movement, and securing commitments for unfettered access for humanitarian assistance and essential goods to Gaza - especially those critical to health and reconstruction.
- Holding Israel's government accountable for failing its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as the occupying power to ensure [medical supplies](#) and preventative measures against [epidemics](#) to "the fullest extent" it can; and ensuring that authorities fulfill this obligation.
- Pushing Israel to remedy institutional discrimination that unlawfully deprives or impedes Palestinians' right to health in Israel and the OPT as protected under international law.

Sincerely,

Paul O'Brien
Executive Director
Amnesty International USA
pobrien@aiusa.org

Molly Malekar
Executive Director
Amnesty International Israel
molly.malekar@amnesty.org.il