

November 14, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
United States Secretary of State
The State Department
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As strong supporters of the United States-Israel relationship, we watched in horror on October 7 as Hamas mounted a vicious terror attack against Israel, murdering more than 1,400 Israelis. We thank you for your leadership during this difficult time. The conversations you had with leaders in the Middle East are critical for helping to secure the release of hostages and for addressing the dire and deepening humanitarian crisis. It will also address Israel's need to ensure that atrocities like those perpetrated by Hamas on October 7 never occur again.

As you continue to engage with our partners and allies in the region, we urge you to always protect the possibility of achieving our ultimate goal – a two-state solution where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace, mutual security, and prosperity. While the world has been focused on Gaza, the situation in the West Bank has also deteriorated rapidly since October 7. Your leadership in realizing a two-state solution is critical and your attention to the crisis in the West Bank is necessary during this conflict.

As National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan rightly stated, it is the responsibility of the Israeli government to “rein in” extremist settlers in the West Bank. We agree with him that “it is totally unacceptable to have extremist settler violence against innocent people in the West Bank.”

Since the Israel-Hamas War began, there has been a growing number of documented incidents in which settlers attack nearby Palestinian communities, at times escorted by Israeli soldiers. According to recent reports, in the month following the October 7 terror attack, at least 185 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces and settlers in the West Bank. More than 1,100 adults and children were forcibly driven from their homes following settler violence. These actions are a serious violation of basic human rights and endanger the possibility of a two-state solution.

Recent reports from October 28 draw our attention to a disturbing episode in which settlers, accompanied by Israel Defense Forces personnel, attacked residents in the Palestinian community of Susya in the South Hebron Hills. It is our understanding that settlers also threatened the village with an ultimatum to evacuate within 24 hours or face further violence and intimidation. We are profoundly concerned that the forced displacement of Susya would further embolden violent settler attacks and intimidation against the surrounding Palestinian communities. With several of the undersigned members on this letter having seen firsthand the extraordinary levels of deprivation and other challenges faced by the people of Susya, we are particularly disturbed by these developments.

Therefore, we urge you to immediately and strongly convey to the Israeli government its responsibility to uphold the rule of law in the West Bank and protect all civilians under its

jurisdiction, while holding perpetrators of vigilante attacks and intimidation to account. The destabilizing consequences of vigilantism and lawless displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank threaten to expand the current war to another dangerous front.

We cannot allow extremist settlers to use this crisis as an opportunity to expand illegal settlements in the West Bank. We echo President Biden's concern that attacks by "extremist settlers" amount to "pouring gasoline" on the already raging fires in the region.

Instead, it is vital that the United States make every effort to stabilize the West Bank by strengthening the Palestinian Authority (PA). A robust and empowered PA is essential for creating an environment conducive to peace negotiations and social progress. We appreciate your diplomatic initiatives to address this issue, as well as the vital coordination that is being done by the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the PA. We urge continued efforts to strengthen the PA's effectiveness, which is vital for the realization of peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

As you noted in your testimony to the Senate Appropriations Committee on October 31, the PA is operating under significant resource constraints. Your advocacy for releasing tax revenues underscores the importance of providing the PA with the necessary financial resources needed to stabilize the West Bank. By strengthening the PA, we can enhance its ability to uphold the rule of law, protect civilians, and deter extremist elements in the West Bank.

As the President said on October 19, "the decisions we make today are going to determine the future for decades to come." Our decisions must keep the meaningful prospects of a two-state solution alive. The prevailing atmosphere of violence and lawlessness in the West Bank undermines the potential for a successful two-state outcome.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.