

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 26, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write with urgent concern over the decision by Israel's High Court to allow the military to evict approximately 1,000 Palestinian people from their homes in the Masafer Yatta region of the occupied West Bank. We ask that the Biden Administration immediately engage with the Israeli government to prevent these evictions and seek a solution that will keep people in their homes and prevent further conflict.

After litigation lasting over two decades, the court has ruled that the residents of eight villages may be forcibly removed and their homes demolished to make space for Israeli military use. We are deeply concerned that this relocation of Palestinian families from homes they have lived on for generations could spark violence, is in direct violation of international humanitarian law, and could further undermine efforts to reach a two-state solution. As supporters of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, we believe such evictions undermine our shared democratic values, imperil Israel's security, and disregard Palestinian human and civil rights.

In the early 1980s, Israel established a firing zone in the area of the West Bank that includes the villages of Masafer Yatta. Over the following decades, residents have been denied building permits, had their agricultural lands confiscated, and lived with the threat and reality of demolitions.¹ Additionally, these communities have experienced intensifying attacks from Israeli settlers in nearby settlement outposts built near and within the firing zone.²

We are deeply concerned about what may happen if these evictions move forward. We agree with comments you made last May regarding actions "that in the first instance could spark tension, conflict and war and also ultimately undermine even further the difficult prospects for two states" and that such actions include the "evictions of Palestinians from their homes where they lived for decades and generations."³ We are encouraged by statements made by State Department Spokesman Ned Price that reiterate your point with regard to the High Court's decision on Masafer Yatta, that "it is critical for all sides to refrain from steps that exacerbate tensions and that undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-state solution. This certainly includes evictions."⁴

1 Guardian, "Israeli court paves way for eviction of 1,000 Palestinians from West Bank area," 5 May 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/05/israeli-court-evict-1000-palestinians-west-bank-area>.

2 Associated Press, "In brazen attack by settlers, Palestinians see larger threat," 6 October 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-bedouin-israel-middle-east-west-bank-1184890addc0a58a9075a8fc99474944>.

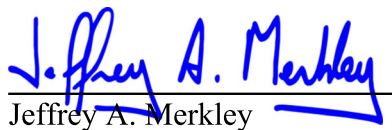
3 Axios, "Exclusive: Evictions of Palestinians could spark further conflict, Blinken warns," 27 May 2021, <https://www.axios.com/2021/05/27/sheikh-jarrah-evictions-conflict-blinken>.

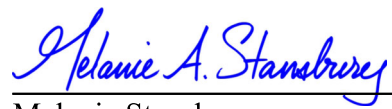
4 U.S. Department of State Press Briefing, May 9, 2022.


Evicting Palestinian people from their homes is inconsistent with international humanitarian law, according to Articles 49 and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and inconsistent with efforts to reach a two-state solution.


We respectfully request that you immediately engage with the Israeli government to prevent these evictions and further military training exercises in the area. We further ask that you encourage the Israeli government to approve master plans for the villages in Masafer Yatta so that these Palestinian communities may build and maintain homes, schools, infrastructure, and sustain their agricultural and pastoral lands. With President Biden visiting Israel in late June, it is critical that the Administration respond quickly to ensure that this momentous trip can deliver concrete steps toward peace.

Sincerely,

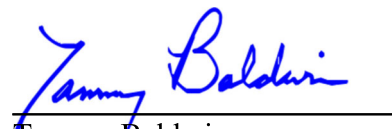

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator


Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Raphael G. Warnock
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



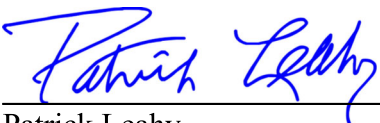
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



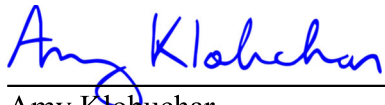
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



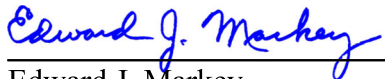
Tina Smith
United States Senator



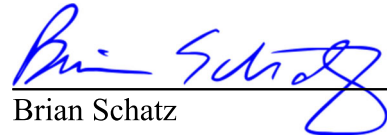
Amy Klobuchar
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Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



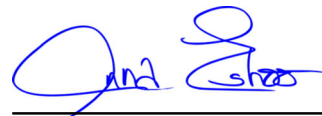
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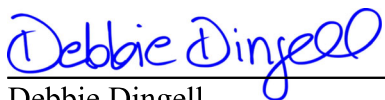
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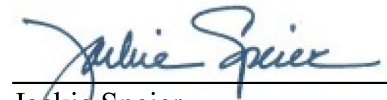
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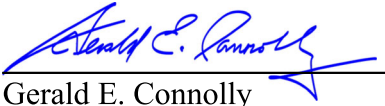
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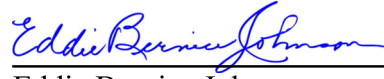
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Betty McCollum
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Eddie Bernice Johnson
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Marie Newman
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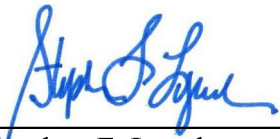
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Chellie Pingree
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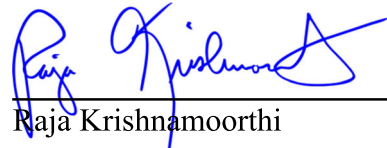
Pramila Jayapal
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Donald S. Beyer Jr.
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Joaquin Castro
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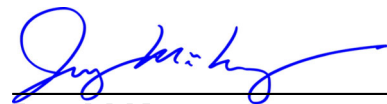
Zoe Lofgren
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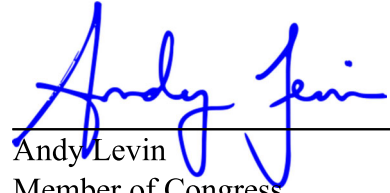
Jake Auchincloss
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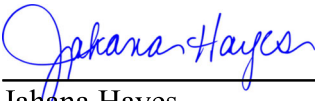
Jamie Raskin
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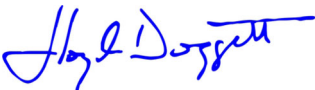
Andy Levin
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Jahana Hayes
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
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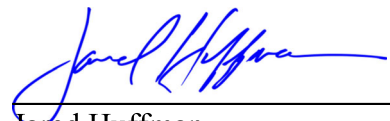
Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



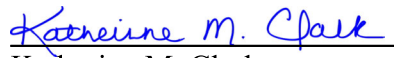
Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

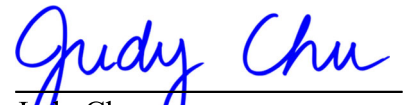


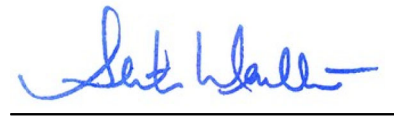
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Jared Huffman
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Judy Chu
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Lisa Blunt Rochester
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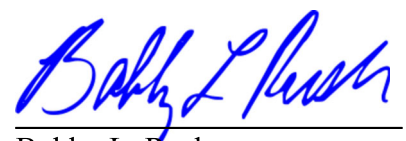

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

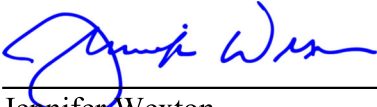

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Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
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Nydia M. Velázquez
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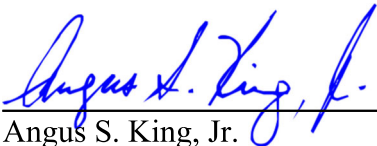
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Maxine Waters
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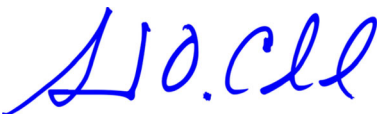
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Marcy Kaptur
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Madeleine Dean
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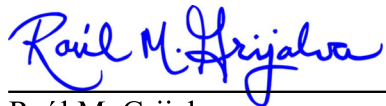
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