



June 2015

## Help your members of Congress plan their August recess trips to Israel!

The August recess is a key time for members of Congress to travel, and many take trips to Israel during this period. It is important that they get a full picture of the region during these visits, and we can help them do that.

In addition to meeting with political leaders in Israel and Ramallah, we need to urge members of Congress to go beyond the usual destinations to get a sense of daily life and the issues people are facing. Our elected officials need to see the occupation up close and personal. They need to know that there are Israelis and Palestinians who are working for a better future. They need to hear that you believe the U.S. can play a constructive role in making that happen.

If you've ever been to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza, then you have valuable stories to tell your senators and representative, and you know sites they can visit that will deepen their knowledge and understanding of the place and its people. Share your ideas with them!

Along with your personal suggestions, here are some places members of Congress could consider adding to an existing trip:

1. [Augusta Victoria Hospital](#) (AVH), a program of the Lutheran World Federation and located on the Mt. of Olives in East Jerusalem, began caring for Palestinian refugees after the 1948 war. Today AVH provides cancer radiation therapy and pediatric kidney dialysis, along with other specialty services, to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.
2. [B'Tselem](#), The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, located in Jerusalem, documents human rights violations in the occupied territories, and provides educational material on human rights issues.
3. **Bethlehem** is home to the Church of the Nativity, the site commemorating Jesus' birth. Manger Square, where the church is located, is ringed with shops, cafes and other businesses, offering a window into Palestinian daily life. An appointment with Bethlehem Mayor Vera Baboun, a Christian and the first female mayor of Bethlehem, will provide an opportunity to hear about the hopes and struggles of a city living in the shadow of the separation barrier.
4. [Tent of Nations](#), a peace project located on the 100-acre Nassar family farm near Bethlehem, operates by the motto, "We Refuse to Be Enemies." They offer summer camps for local youth, host international visitors and volunteers, and sponsor educational programs for women in a nearby village.
5. **Mar Elias Educational Institutions**, located in Ibillin, Israel, offer a living demonstration of peaceful co-existence, with students and teachers of Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Druze heritage. These schools continue to thrive under the inspiration and guidance of Father Elias Chacour, Archbishop of the Melkite Catholic Church of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth, and all Galilee. For more, see [Pilgrims of Ibillin](#).

6. **Gaza and southern Israel:** In addition to visiting the towns of southern Israel, ask your members of Congress to visit Gaza, an enclave of 1.8 million Palestinians who live under a crippling land and sea blockade.

**Contact your [senators](#) and [representative](#) today:** If they are planning a trip to the region, ask them to be sure to visit both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories and to meet with Israelis and Palestinians to hear their concerns and their hopes for peace.

If you do hear back that your member of Congress is planning a trip to the region, follow up in September to ask him or her how it went!

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**Sample letter: (If you have suggested places to visit, include those!)**

Dear Senator/Representative,

As the August recess approaches, I am aware that many members of Congress use this time for travel including trips to Israel. If your office is planning such a trip—during the August recess or anytime—I urge you to get a full picture of the region by visiting the occupied Palestinian territories, in addition to Israel, and by meeting with local Palestinians and Israelis to hear their concerns and their hopes.

I would urge you to visit, for example:

- **Augusta Victoria Hospital** in East Jerusalem which serves patients from the West Bank and Gaza;
- **B'Tselem**, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, located in Jerusalem, which documents human rights violations in the occupied territories, and provides educational material on human rights issues;
- **Bethlehem**, including the Church of the Nativity and Manger Square, and a visit with Mayor Vera Baboun, the first female mayor of Bethlehem;
- **Tent of Nations**, a peace project operated on the Nassar family farm near Bethlehem;
- **Mar Elias Educational Institutions**, located in Ibillin, Israel, which offer a living demonstration of peaceful co-existence, with students and teachers of Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Druze heritage;
- **Gaza and southern Israel:** See both the towns of southern Israel and neighboring Gaza, an enclave where 1.8 million Palestinians live under a crippling land and sea blockade.

I look forward to hearing from you about any upcoming trips to the region. I believe that seeing a broad range of places and meeting with people of diverse voices will contribute to better understanding and will help the U.S. to play a constructive role in seeking a just peace for Israelis and Palestinians. Thank you for considering my suggestions.

With appreciate for your service,