

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 20, 2024

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

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
301 7th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

We write to strongly support a Priority-2 (P-2) designation under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for certain Palestinians.<sup>1</sup>

In the eight months since the horrific October 7 terrorist attack by Hamas and the commencement of Israel's military response, conditions in the Palestinian territories have greatly deteriorated.<sup>2</sup> According to reports from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of June 14, 2024, at least 37,266 Palestinians have been killed and 85,102 Palestinians have been injured.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations estimates that 1.7 million people have been displaced in Gaza out of a total population of 2.2 million.<sup>4</sup> And recently the Director of the United Nations World Food Program stated that northern Gaza is experiencing a "full-blown famine" and that the famine is spreading south.<sup>5</sup>

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, many congressional offices have received distressing requests for assistance from constituents desperately seeking to reunite with their loved ones. We appreciate the steps that the Biden Administration has taken to evacuate American citizens from Gaza. However, without pathways for Americans to petition for their relatives in Gaza, countless families with strong ties to our nation remain stranded in life-threatening conditions.

We urge you to consider opening pathways to Palestinian refugees, particularly those with family members in the United States, to seek relief in the United States. Historically, the U.S. has resettled very few Palestinian refugees, including only 56 refugees, or 0.09 percent of the total number of resettled refugees, in fiscal year 2023<sup>6</sup> and only 16 so far in fiscal year 2024.<sup>7</sup> Given the dire conditions currently on the ground in Gaza, it is time for this to change. Specifically, we urge you to designate certain categories of Palestinians and their eligible family members, particularly close relatives of American citizens and U.S. lawful permanent residents, for access to the USRAP.

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<sup>1</sup> The USRAP has four categories of individuals who may access it, known as "priorities," and P-2 is for groups of special concern designated by the Department of State as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement. U.S. Department of State (DOS), About Refugee Admissions, <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/about/>.

<sup>2</sup> OCHA, *Reported Impact since 7 October 2023* (June 18, 2024), <https://www.ochaopt.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> OCHA, *Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel, Humanitarian Situation Update #179* (June 14, 2024), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-179-gaza-strip>

<sup>4</sup> OCHA, *Reported Impact since 7 October 2023* (June 18, 2024), <https://www.ochaopt.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> New York Times, *Parts of Gaza Are in Famine, World Food Program Chief Says* (May 4, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/04/world/middleeast/cindy-mccain-gaza-famine.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Refugee Processing Center, *Refugee Arrivals by Nationality and Religion Group and Religion-FY2011 to FY2023*, <https://www.wrapsnet.org/archives/>.

<sup>7</sup> Refugee Processing Center, *Admission and Arrivals, Refugee Admissions Report as of April 30, 2024*, <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>.

The USRAP has long provided a secure pathway to resettle refugees in the United States, with the most rigorous vetting of any traveler coming to the U.S.<sup>8</sup> All individuals who are considered for refugee status in the U.S. must not only demonstrate their eligibility, but also complete a USCIS interview, provide biometric data, and pass both medical exams and strict security screening prior to approval to come to the United States.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, national security and foreign policy experts have long viewed the refugee program as a valuable tool for the United States to decompress conflicts abroad, strengthen regional stability, and set an example for other countries.<sup>10</sup>

We believe the time has come for the United States to lead in this manner and grant a P-2 designation for refugee processing for certain Palestinians who are relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents and are affected by the ongoing violence.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Greg Casar  
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

<sup>8</sup> La Corte, Matthew, Niskanen Center, *Early Signs of Success: 2,500 refugees resettled in the U.S. through the Safe Mobility Office (SMO) initiative so far* (December 13, 2023), <https://www.niskanencenter.org/early-signs-of-success-2500-refugees-resettled-in-the-u-s-through-the-safe-mobility-office-smo-initiative-so-far/>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Refugee Processing and Security Screening*, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees/refugee-processing-and-security-screening>.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Hayden, Michael V. and James Stavridis, Miami Herald, *U.S. must lead on refugee crisis* (July 8, 2016), <https://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article88582362.html>; Natter, Robert J. and Hertling, Mark P., *Cutting refugee admissions will have severe consequences for the U.S. military*, Wash. Post (Sept. 8, 2019), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/09/08/cutting-refugee-admissions-will-have-severe-consequences-us-military/>; and *Statement of Principles on America's Commitment to Refugees* signed by dozens of national security leaders, <https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/STATEMENT-ON-AMERICAS-COMMITMENT-TO-REFUGEES.pdf>.



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United States Senator



Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress



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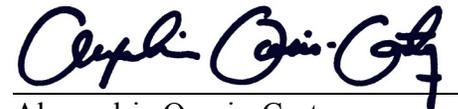
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United States Senator



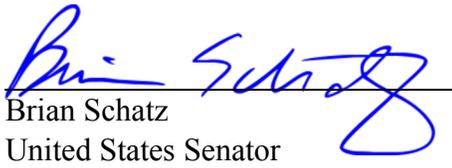
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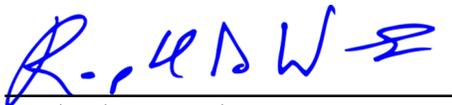
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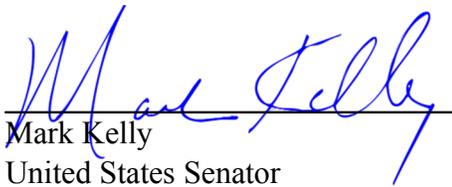
  
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Mark Kelly  
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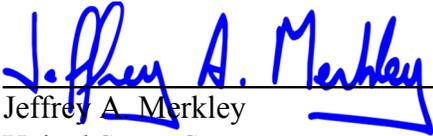
  
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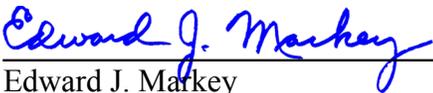
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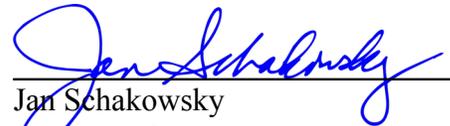
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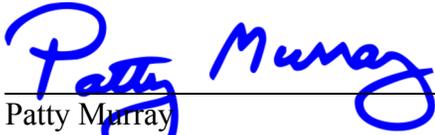
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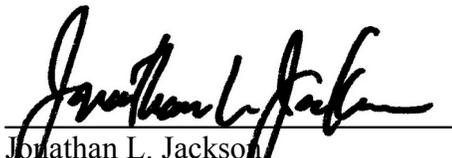
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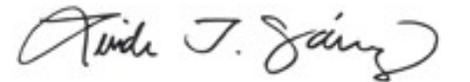
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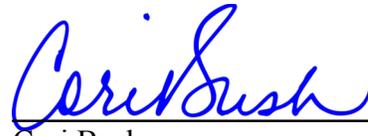
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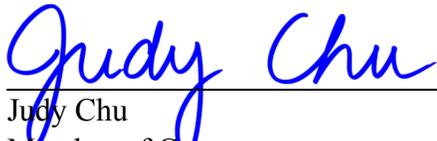
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