



## Vermonters for Justice in Palestine

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Peace and Justice Center, 60 Lake Street, 1C, Burlington, VT 05401

### To the Vermont Congressional Delegation

November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Senators Leahy, Sanders and Representative Welch,

### **44th UN-declared “International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People” November 29th 2021**

We are asking you to support the 44th UN-declared International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Specifically, we are asking you to vote to end Israel’s exemption from human rights protections in the Foreign Assistance Act, to support H.R.2590 “Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act” (Representative Welch is already a co-sponsor), and vote against the \$1 billion in funding for Israel’s Iron Dome. Bernie Sanders has proposed an amendment about the humanitarian impact of the Gaza restrictions to the Defense Authorization Bill - See [https://vtjp.org/Sanders\\_Amendment.pdf](https://vtjp.org/Sanders_Amendment.pdf) - and intends to vote against that Bill in its present form.

We call on Vermont’s Congressional delegation to redirect the billions in funds for war and occupation into social programs to redress the inequalities here in Vermont.

The Senate Appropriations Committee proposes a \$29 billion increase to the Pentagon’s budget, bringing it to some \$726 billion, including \$1 billion for Israel’s Iron Dome (an additional \$1 billion is on top of the annual \$3.8 billion in military aid the US gives every year to Israel). Israel ranks in the world’s top 20 economies, with a per capita GDP (\$47,600) above that of the UK, Japan and France ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_GDP\\_\(nominal\)\\_per\\_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)_per_capita)). If the Iron Dome interceptors from Raytheon are an urgent matter, Israeli taxpayers should pay for them. US taxpayer funds are urgently needed at home!

#### What do these tax dollars mean for Vermont?

Our state’s share of the annual \$3.8 billion in military aid to Israel is over \$6 million. What would Vermont taxpayers prefer – to give over \$6 million to Israel for weapons purchases or use it to improve schools and support 76 elementary school teachers, or 4,085 people receiving food assistance, or 1,057 students receiving a Pell grant, or 2,593 children receiving healthcare, or 83 clean energy jobs? (from <https://uscpr.org/militaryfunding>). This at a time when so many Vermont residents are struggling to feed themselves and their families, to avoid eviction, to help their children make up for a lost year of schooling, to find affordable child care and cope with rising health care costs. The hardest hit are among communities of color.

#### What do these tax dollars mean for Palestinians?

The more Americans know about how the military aid given Israel is used to kill and oppress Palestinians, the more likely they are to oppose it. This funding helps sustain a discriminatory

Apartheid system, as detailed by human rights groups B'tselem and Human Rights Watch and two former Israeli ambassadors to South Africa, Ilan Baruch and Alon Liel, among many others.

While illegal Israeli settlements are being expanded throughout the West Bank, Palestinians are being driven into small enclaves surrounded by walls and checkpoints, as growing numbers lose their land, water supplies, livelihoods and homes (see <https://www.waterjusticeinpalestine.org/>). The Gaza Strip, blockaded from the world for 14 years, has been called an open air prison and a lab to try out advanced US weapons.

On a 2017 visit, Mandla Mandela, the grandson of Nelson Mandela, stated in an interview that “what we have experienced in South Africa is a fraction of what the Palestinians are experiencing. We were oppressed in order to serve the white minority. The Palestinians are being eliminated off their land...and this is a total human-rights violation. I think it is a total disgrace that the world is able to sit back while such atrocities are being carried out by Apartheid Israel.”

#### What should the US Congress do?

- Congress should stop giving Israel everything it wants and start enforcing its own laws. The pass given to Israel over the decades exempts it from the human rights protections in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the Arms Export Control Act of 1976 and the Leahy Law. This would be in line with a majority of Americans who support conditioning aid to Israel if it continues to build settlements in contravention of US policies, according to survey by the Arab American Institute poll. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1866936/middle-east>
- Support the ‘Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living under Israeli Military Occupation Act.’ This bill provides a sorely needed measure of transparency on how the aid the US gives Israel is used by requiring the Secretary of State to certify that none of the funds support Israel’s military detention and abuse of Palestinian children, seizure of Palestinian property and displacement. Peter Welch has co-sponsored H.R. 2590, Senators Sanders and Leahy should sponsor a Senate version of H.R. 2590.
- The Vermont delegation should reject an additional \$1 billion in funding for Israel’s Iron Dome from the FY22 Defense Appropriations Act. This weapon is not, as argued, ‘purely defensive’ but rather is part of Israel’s system of domination, shielding it as it carries out massive military assaults on what is essentially a captive and defenseless population in the Gaza Strip.

Yours sincerely,

Vermonters for Justice in Palestine.