



**Statement of  
Senator Peter Welch  
Remarks as Given on the Ongoing  
Gaza Humanitarian Crisis, U.S. Actions on Israel  
*March 5, 2024***

Mr. President: Every day we are reminded of the worsening humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Most of the infrastructure in the territory has been destroyed. Thousands of apartment buildings, schools, mosques, hospitals, shops, and markets have been reduced to piles of twisted metal and rubble, under which the bodies of an unknown number of people are buried.

Of the world's many humanitarian crises, the situation in Gaza is among the worst. This is due in large measure to onerous impediments by the Netanyahu government to the delivery of sufficient food, water, medicines, shelter, and fuel.

Getting aid to those who are suffering and preventing starvation should be our most immediate and highest priority, along with obtaining the release of the hostages.

As I said when I spoke out for a ceasefire in November, an immediate and indefinite ceasefire is the only way to achieve these goals. I am very heartened by Vice President Harris' call for an immediate, if temporary, ceasefire to get aid in and hostages out.

Because the reality is, the supply of lifesaving aid has dwindled to a trickle.

Last week, the depth of the humanitarian emergency in Gaza exploded with the deaths of dozens of Palestinian civilians as they frantically tried to reach food supplies from aid trucks guarded by Israeli soldiers. People were trampled, people were run over by trucks, and they were shot.

It was a horrifying scene and a direct result of the Netanyahu government's failure to put in place workable procedures for the delivery of sufficient aid to starving people. As others have said, there is no legal or security justification for restricting humanitarian aid to civilians who are caught in the middle of an armed conflict.

The more desperate people become, the more chaotic and precarious the security situation, the more likely there will be other senseless tragedies just like this.

Mr. President, I recently introduced a Resolution, along with 15 of my colleagues, calling for the urgent delivery of sufficient humanitarian aid.

And the Biden Administration has repeatedly called for greater access for more aid trucks to Gaza, but the number getting through remains far below pre-war levels. And I am encouraged, never-the-less, that President Biden has directed the United States to begin airdropping aid in—a decision made with the understanding that, while not enough by any means, it could save lives.

Mr. President, Israel now occupies Gaza. It has an obligation under international law, not to mention a moral responsibility, to feed and shelter Palestinians under its occupation.

But beyond the moral imperative, the path to peace, security, and stability would be enhanced dramatically by facilitating the delivery of essentials for survival to the Palestinian people whose fate is imperiled.

But as we saw last week, that's not happening.

The Netanyahu government's rejection of U.S. and international appeals to meet the basic needs of innocent Palestinians trapped in Gaza, and the resulting loss of innocent lives, is really the latest in a pattern we have seen for years.

Mr. President, the United States has long supported—and the United States always will support—Israel, as a free and Jewish democratic state. But, Mr. President, candor requires acknowledging that we have an ongoing, serious difference with Israeli leadership.

It's the longstanding U.S. policy that the Middle East conflict can only be solved through negotiations to create two independent states of Israel and Palestine.

President Biden has reaffirmed this.

Yet Prime Minister Netanyahu has publicly rejected a two-state solution, and he's even credited himself for actively working to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. I'll use his words. He couldn't have been clear. He said, "I will not compromise on full Israeli security control over the entire area in the west of Jordan – and this is contrary to a Palestinian state."

Mr. President, the United States opposes settlements and the destruction of Palestinian homes, orchards, schools, and other infrastructure in the West Bank. It violates international law, and is a severe obstacle to peace. Secretary of State Blinken has reaffirmed this.

Yet, Prime Minister Netanyahu embraced settlements. In 2017 he said, "We will deepen our roots, build, strengthen and settle." In 2019, he said, "With God's help we will extend Jewish sovereignty to all the settlements as part of the land of Israel, as part of the state of Israel."

Under his leadership, settlements have expanded exponentially. Settlements bring extremist settler violence, some of it with firearms financed by American taxpayers.

Shootings of West Bank Palestinians, threats laced with hateful messages that if they don't leave their homes they will be killed, and the destruction of land and other property have surged in recent months, including in some instances with Israeli soldiers standing passively by and watching.

It is the longstanding U.S. policy, codified by the Leahy Law, that units of foreign security forces that violate human rights are not eligible for U.S. training, or equipment, or other assistance.

And according to multiple reports, that Law has not been applied to the Israeli Defense Forces, despite numerous cases of shootings of Palestinian civilians.

Mr. President, we must face the contradiction of what we are doing.

We are airdropping food to famine-stricken Gaza today and supplying bombs for Israel to drop on devastated Gaza tomorrow.

We call for humanitarian relief, but how can that call be meaningful, when aid workers are killed in their effort to deliver it, and Palestinians are killed in their effort to retrieve it?

It's time for us to acknowledge what the entire world knows: it is impossible to deliver humanitarian aid in a very active war zone.

Mr. President, Israel is a great country, Jewish and democratic. Israel has been—and remains—our closest ally in the Middle East. For decades, Israel has been under attack by those who have sought to destroy it.

President Biden—and so many of us—understand the history of Israel, and the history of the Jewish people. October 7<sup>th</sup> was the worst attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. We cannot ever let that happen again.

But both of our countries right now are on a wrong path. Israel must stop its indiscriminate attacks that are killing so many Palestinian civilians—women and children the majority among them who perished.

And the United States must end its unconditional support when Israeli policies are wrong; that are unjustified, that are causing so much suffering; and that – in the view of many of us – are doomed to fail in the goal of achieving lasting peace.

Mr. President, how many times do we have to be repudiated by Prime Minister Netanyahu—on the use of indiscriminate force; on the recklessness of expanding West

Bank settlements; on impeding the delivery of aid; on advocating an endless Israeli post conflict occupation of Gaza.

How long and how often will Prime Minister Netanyahu reject our policies but take our money before we say, enough.

How many more than the 30,000 Palestinians already killed and the 70,000 wounded before we say to Prime Minister Netanyahu, enough.

How many more homes and shops and schools and child-care centers and hospitals must be destroyed before we say to Prime Minister Netanyahu, enough.

Mr. President, Israel must—and Israel always will—make its own decisions as to who will be its political leaders. And Israel must—and Israel always will—make its own decisions as to when and how to defend itself. It's their right.

But the United States, too, must make its own decisions, consistent with our values, with our judgment, and with what we believe to be in our national interest. The Biden Administration has taken important steps to bring accountability through diplomacy, by issuing a National Security Memorandum that builds on the Leahy Laws.

But it is time for us, and I include the United States Congress, to stop accommodating the Netanyahu government. It has consistently shown it does not share our goal of achieving peaceful coexistence between the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Our failure to act damages the authority, credibility, and reputation of the United States, not to mention our foreign policy and security interests.

And in my view, it undermines the security interests of Israel, which is increasingly isolated in the international community. Opposition to the disproportionate use of force in Gaza is widespread, including in our own country. So too, regrettably, is the rise of anti-Semitism, which we must always condemn, and Islamophobia likewise, which we must always condemn.

It has been said many times before: U.S. aid is not a blank check. When it comes to the Netanyahu government, it has, for many years and across Democratic and Republican administrations, been a blank check.

It's long past time for the United States to stop supporting, by commission and omission, actions that are inconsistent with our principles and our policies and which make peace between Israelis and Palestinians ever more elusive, ever more difficult to achieve.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield back.