

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 16, 2026

The Honorable Marco A. Rubio
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

As you have said, the Government of Israel's efforts to annex the West Bank undermine prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.¹ President Trump and Vice President Vance have also both made recent statements rejecting such actions.² U.S. leadership is crucial at this moment. We need tangible steps to back these words with action, if we are to preserve the ceasefire in Gaza and the possibility of a negotiated two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Despite the United States' opposition to annexation, segments of the Israeli government have recently reaffirmed their commitment to advancing Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank. Alongside the Knesset's preliminary approval of two draft bills to impose Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, that body is also considering dozens of other proposed bills which, if enacted, would formalize various forms of annexation.³

Of particular concern are bills that would absorb settlements north, east, and south of Jerusalem to create an expanded municipality under Israeli control. Combined with the recent approval of the E-1 settlement project directly east of Jerusalem, these proposals would divide the West Bank into northern and southern enclaves, severing the contiguity of Palestinian land and—quite deliberately—undermining the viability of a future Palestinian state.

While this legislation is under consideration, *de facto* annexation through targeted violence, intimidation of Palestinian communities, and forced displacement is already widespread. Throughout the West Bank, Israeli settlers are driving Palestinians off their land and expanding Israeli settlements, including in:

- **Taybeh**, a majority-Christian Palestinian village in the West Bank, northeast of Ramallah. For decades, it has been subjected to Israeli settler violence, often accompanied by the Israeli military.⁴ In the summer of 2025, settlers targeted residents in a series of violent assaults, including setting fires near the village entrance and at the ruins of the fifth-

¹ Yolande Knell and David Gritten, *Vance and Rubio Criticise Israeli Parliament's Vote on West Bank Annexation*, British Broadcasting Corporation (Oct. 23, 2025) (online at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8xvj108z9o>).

² 'Threatening to the peace deal': Trump administration chides Israeli Knesset vote on West Bank, Politico (Oct. 23, 2025) (online at <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/23/white-house-israel-west-bank-00619954>)

³ Yesh Din, *Annexation Legislation Database* (online at <https://www.yesh-din.org/en/legislation/>)

⁴ Lubna Masarwa and Peter Oborne, *How the war in Gaza fuelled a wave of settler violence against West Bank Palestinians*, Middle East Eye (Oct. 20, 2025) (online at <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/how-war-gaza-fuelled-wave-settler-violence-against-west-bank-palestinians>).

century Church of St George.⁵ Settler violence has also disrupted the olive harvest, a key source of income for Palestinian families. Several Palestinian families have left Taybeh out of fear and intimidation.⁶ In July 2025, Ambassador Huckabee visited the village to witness the devastation firsthand and express solidarity.⁷

- **Wadi Foquin**, a Palestinian village in the Bethlehem District of the West Bank. This village has been subjected to ongoing land confiscation by the Israeli government since 1985, following the establishment of the illegal settlement of Betar Illit. Israeli authorities and settlers have routinely demolished trees, agricultural properties, and homes, while confiscating additional land for a settlement access road, a military road, and plans for an industrial park to serve the settlement community.⁸ These projects are part of a broader Israeli transportation plan that seeks to consolidate control and annex Palestinian land across the West Bank.⁹ The construction of the road will severely restricted the ability of Wadi Foquin's residents to access their own village, as Palestinians are barred from using Israeli settler roadways. Wadi Foquin and neighboring villages in the Gush Etzion Settlement Bloc would be formally annexed if the Knesset's proposed bills are enacted.¹⁰
- **Silwan**, a Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem, formally considered annexed by Israel in 1980. For years, Israeli authorities and settler organizations have systematically pursued evictions and home demolitions that displace families and alter the area's demographics.¹¹ The neighborhood of Batan al-Hawa in Silwan has been the recent target of evictions, with Palestinian families forced from their homes in order for Israelis to take possession of them.¹² Settlers are attempting to replicate the successful legal and administrative measures used to consolidate control, facilitate annexation, and dispossess Palestinians of their property in Silwan across East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

⁵ *Palestinians say settlers again attacked village of Taybeh in West Bank*, Times of Israel (Jul. 28, 2025) (online at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-say-settlers-again-attacked-village-of-taybeh-in-west-bank/>).

⁶ Sanad Sahelia, *Priest warns: Christian town in Holy Land no longer safe amid settler attacks*, Catholic News Agency (Jun. 26, 2025) (online at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/265035/priest-warns-christian-town-of-taybe-in-holy-land-no-longer-safe-amid-settler-attacks>).

⁷ U.S. Embassy Jerusalem, *Visit to the Community of Taybeh* (Jul. 20, 2025) (online at <https://il.usembassy.gov/statement-by-u-s-ambassador-mike-huckabee/>).

⁸ *Beatings, Then Bulldozers: How Israel Punishes Palestinians for Building on Their Own Land*, Haaretz (April 19, 2025) (online at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/twilight-zone/2025-04-19/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/beatings-then-bulldozers-how-israel-punishes-palestinians-for-building-on-their-own-land/00000196-4c5d-ddef-a5df-dfff4de20000>)

⁹ Breaking the Silence, *Highway to Annexation 2020* (Dec. 2020) (online at <https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/inside/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Highway-to-Annexation-Final.pdf>).

¹⁰ Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, *The Jerusalem Metropolitan Bill: A Legislative Path to Annexation* (Jun. 2025) (online at <https://www.jlac.ps/public/files/image/factsheets/The%20Jerusalem%20Metropolitan.pdf>).

¹¹ *As evictions resume in East Jerusalem's Silwan, residents fear their homes will be next*, Times of Israel (Nov. 11, 2025) (online at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-evictions-resume-in-east-jerusalems-silwan-residents-fear-their-homes-will-be-next/>).

¹² *Settlers Seize Building in Silwan After Police Eviction*, Peace Now (Nov. 10, 2025) (online at <https://peacenow.org.il/en/shweiki-evictions-silwan>).

- **Al-Walaja**, a Palestinian village west of Bethlehem, parts of which were annexed to Jerusalem in 1967 and placed under Israeli civil control. For decades, Israeli authorities have refused to prepare or approve a zoning plan for the annexed area, making it virtually impossible for residents to obtain building permits for the Jerusalem section of the village and exposing the village to constant home demolitions.¹³ Three years ago, this policy was paused when the Israeli government announced its willingness to consider a zoning plan if village residents initiate it.¹⁴ Since then, despite continuous efforts of the village community, planning authorities have delayed the advancement of the review process. As a result, demolition orders have been issued to many dozens of homes in the Jerusalem part of the village, and many have already been destroyed leaving hundreds of residents homeless.¹⁵ The absence of approved zoning plans, coupled with the expansion of the settlements of Gilo and Har Gilo and new plans to for settler bypass roads, is part of a broader pattern in which discriminatory planning policies push Palestinians from their land while consolidating Israeli control.¹⁶

We strongly urge the State Department to clearly communicate to the Israeli Government the negative consequences that the pending Knesset bills and construction of the E-1 settlements would have on the prospects for peace and security in the region, on the daily lives of Palestinians, and on Israel's relations with the United States.

We further call for a stronger United States government response against those who commit violence that undermines peace, security, and stability in the West Bank. We urge the Administration to reimpose sanctions under Executive Order 14115 and to condemn the acts of de facto annexation undertaken by Israeli settlers. We have grave concerns about Israel's ongoing efforts to undermine the Trump Administration's stated policies and violate international law by illegally expanding settlements, with disastrous consequences for the long-term peace and security of both Israelis and Palestinians.

As you, President Trump, and Vice President Vance have all said, Israeli efforts to apply sovereignty or annex parts of the West Bank via the Knesset pose a grave risk to peace in the region and should not be pursued.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

¹³ B'tselem, *The Village of al-Walaja: Dispossession and Home Demolitions* (Apr. 05, 2022) (online at: https://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/dispossession_and_home_demolitions_in_al_walaja)

¹⁴ New Israel Fund, *Preventing East Jerusalem Home Demolition* (Apr. 14, 2022) (online at: <https://www.nif.org/stories/human-rights-democracy/preventing-east-jerusalem-home-demolitions/>)

¹⁵ *Palestinian village fears Israel wartime demolitions*, Al Jazeera (Jan. 16, 2024) (online at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/1/16/palestinian-village-fears-israel-wartime-demolitions>)

¹⁶ *Israeli Authorities Advance New Settlement Plan On Al-Walaja Lands*, Ir Amim (June 09, 2022) (online at: <https://old.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2868>)



Peter Welch
United States Senator



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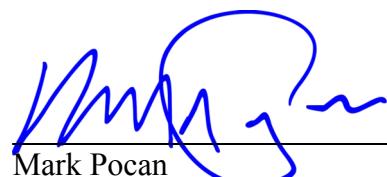
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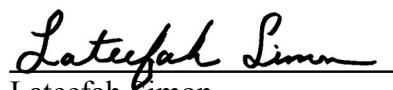
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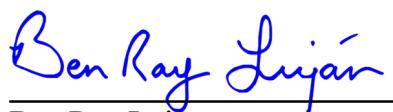
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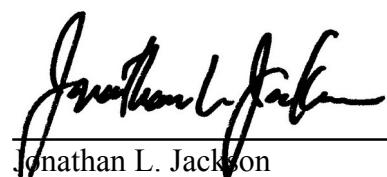
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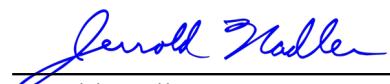
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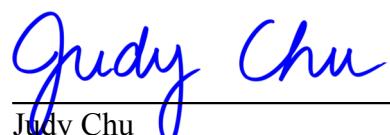
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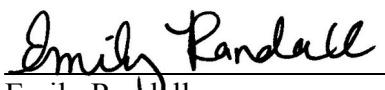
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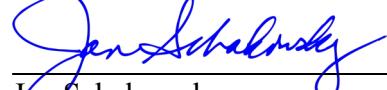
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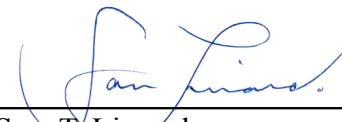
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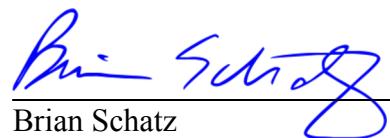
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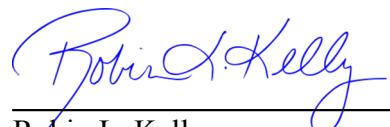
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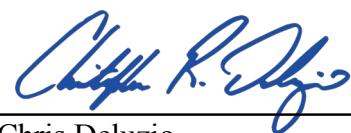
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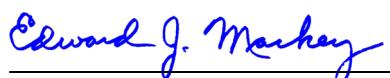
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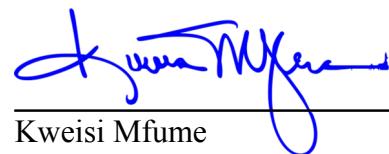
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