



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

An Open Letter From Jewish Elected Officials Regarding The War In Gaza

LIZ KRUEGER February 20, 2024

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Signatories:

Senator Liz Krueger

Senator Brad Holyman-Sigal

Assemblymember Harvey Epstein

City Comptroller Brad Lander

City Councilmember Lincoln Restler

“I’ve had extensive conversations with the prime minister of Israel over the last several days, almost an hour each, and I’ve made the case, and I feel very strongly about it, that there has to be a temporary ceasefire to get the prisoners out, to get the hostages out.”

- President Biden told reporters at the White House

(Reuters Feb. 16th, 2024)

It has been over four months since Hamas launched its horrific attack against Israel, and with no end in sight to the war in Gaza, the situation continues to weigh heavily on our minds. We have seen how this war has been a tragedy for both Israelis and Palestinians and has also deeply affected the American Jewish community, particularly here in New York. Our position is rooted in our deepest Jewish values — honoring the life, dignity, and safety of all people. We feel deep anguish over the insurmountable loss of life in the region — notably the tens of thousands of civilians. Judaism teaches that all people are created in the image of God and all people are infinitely valuable.

The attacks that were perpetrated by Hamas on October 7th were monstrous and indefensible. We have lost loved ones, mourned with family and friends, and prayed for the safety of those held hostage. We continue to demand that Hamas release all the remaining

hostages immediately. We also join with the families of the remaining hostages in continuing to call on the Israeli government to do everything in its power to ensure the safe return of the remaining hostages. The reality is that this will only happen through the same active negotiations that brought home the first 112 hostages. Those negotiations must be the critical highest priority.

At the same time, the Israeli government cannot continue the mass destruction of Gaza and the killing of civilians who are trapped in a war zone with no possibility to flee to safety. Palestinians in Gaza have been killed in shocking numbers by indiscriminate, large-scale bombing, and the rest live in a state of constant fear, hunger, and vulnerability to disease. The war there has also led to increased persecution against Palestinians living in the West Bank and violence from some Israeli settlers who are using the Gaza war to hasten the evictions of Palestinians from their land to expand settlements that are illegal under international law. At the same time, others throughout the mid-east, looking for reasons to destroy Israel, are attacking from the north and fomenting antisemitism and anti-Zionism throughout the world.

As New Yorkers, many of us have deep connections to Israel and are committed to the existence of a democratic Jewish state. We make no excuses for terrorists or their defenders, but we cannot support the actions of the current Israeli government. We continue to call for a two-state solution where all Israelis and Palestinians have a right to statehood and self-determination on the land. While such a future looks bleaker now than ever, it remains the only viable alternative to endless conflict that honors the fundamental human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians and addresses the reality that neither people are going anywhere.

We call for the Israeli government to commit itself to a lasting peace, to halt its illegal

activities in the West Bank, immediately curb the expansion of settlements there, and protect Palestinians from settler violence. We understand that Netanyahu and his coalition allies do not share this goal, and so we are also stating our solidarity with Israelis who are organizing to replace this historically unpopular government with one that stands for universal human rights, for democracy in Israel, and for peace with its neighbors.

This war has deeply affected our constituents and our communities. We are extremely disturbed by the rapidly increasing number of antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents occurring right here in our diverse city. There is no excuse for violence, bullying, or vandalism, especially when motivated by hate. No New Yorker should feel unsafe because of their race, ethnicity, or religious identity. Many of our constituents feel afraid, misunderstood, and isolated, and as Jews, we know all too well how fear can divide a family, community, and nation.

We must also point out that the extreme Right in this country is using this fear to further stoke division within the Jewish community and between Jews and people of other faiths and to push undemocratic policies that will only bring further danger to Americans of all faiths. History shows us how the Jewish people have been used time and time again to push radical, racist, and fascist agendas that are not our own – and we refuse to be their pawns.

All parties in this conflict need to commit to finding a path to peace through negotiation for the sake of our communities, for the rights of Israelis and Palestinians, and for the real and lasting security of the State of Israel.

As Jewish elected officials in both the City and State of New York, we thank President Biden for all his efforts to date, and we call upon the Federal government of the United States to push for an end to this war as soon as possible.