



September 3, 2009

The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We are writing to express our deep concern and to request a meeting to discuss the treatment of American citizens attempting to legally enter and exit Israel, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

As you know, for many decades now, this matter has been an issue of special concern to Americans of Arab, and especially Palestinian, descent, many of whom have deep ties and family connections to those lands. We have brought this matter to each sitting Secretary of State dating back at least thirty years. They, in turn, have raised this issue with the Israeli government at the highest diplomatic levels. Despite these efforts, the United States has been unable to guarantee safe and equal access, egress and passage for all American citizens traveling to Israel, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

The treatment of American citizens traveling to Israel and the Palestinian Territories frequently involves burdensome bureaucratic requirements, if not outright harassment and humiliation, and indicates a clear pattern of discrimination and practices intended to deter and encumber visitors. It was recently revealed that even more stringent travel restrictions have been implemented this year by the government of Israel and numerous instances of mistreatment of Americans have been reported to the Jerusalem Consulate.

Documented cases from the past eight months describe: Arab Americans trapped in Gaza and prohibited from exiting into Israel; American-born Palestinians forced to surrender their U.S. passports on entry and receive, against their will, a Palestinian ID document; numerous reports from American-born U.S. citizens of Palestinian descent or Arab heritage being singled out for prolonged questioning on entry and departure, and burdensome and discriminatory visa requirements imposed upon Palestinian Americans severely impacting their families and businesses.

We have been fortunate to have the support of personnel from several State Department offices, and are particularly grateful for the efforts of Michele Bond, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Overseas Citizens Services, and Michelle Bernier-Toth, Director of the Office of American Citizens Services, and their colleagues. We believe that it is imperative to augment their excellent work with a proactive approach that will ensure the security of all American travelers in the future.

We hope you will agree with us that the rights of American citizens traveling abroad should be protected and that, under no circumstances, should other governments be allowed to discriminate against or revoke the rights of any group of Americans based on their ethnicity, faith, or race.

We look forward to meeting with you at your earliest convenience. Please accept our thanks in advance for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Dr. James Zogby  
President  
Arab American Institute



Hon. George Salem, Esq.  
Chairman  
Arab American Institute

CC:

Ambassador Janice Lee Jacobs  
Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of Consular Affairs  
U.S. Department of State

Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman  
Assistant Secretary  
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Ms. Huma M. Abedin  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
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The Honorable Michele T. Bond  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Office of Overseas Citizens Services  
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Ms. Michelle Bernier-Toth  
Director  
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Mr. Thomas H. Goldberger  
Director  
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