



February 17, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

The results of last week's Palestinian legislative election have led some to challenge US aid to the Palestinian people. Because we understand that US funds do not go to the Palestinian Authority but instead provide development assistance, humanitarian aid, and vital support for building democratic institutions in the West Bank and Gaza, we urge you to continue our foreign assistance program to the Palestinian people.

In his State of the Union address, President Bush said, "Raising up a democracy requires the rule of law, and protection of minorities, and strong, accountable institutions that last longer than a single vote." If we believe in promoting democracy in the Middle East, we must remain committed to building the institutions that support a democracy—rule of law, an independent judiciary, vibrant civil society, and a free press. In fact, our aid programs do just that.

As you know, US foreign aid is disbursed to private contractors and nongovernmental organizations chosen and monitored by USAID who have signed the "Certification Regarding Terrorist Financing," ensuring that US funds do not benefit individuals or groups identified by your department as terrorists. USAID programs strengthen Palestinian civil society, empowering moderates to affect change in their government. Withdrawal of US financial support as a punishment for the results of a democratic election it actively supported could cause a breakdown in civil society. This vacuum could lead to civil war or increased interference from regional players.

Our involvement on the Palestinian issue affects our country's image throughout the Arab and Muslim world. USAID programs, which improve the daily lives of the Palestinian people through humanitarian aid, the empowerment of civil society, and fostering democratic institutions is a fundamental element of any successful public diplomacy strategy.

Finally, we believe that at this critical moment it is in our nation's interest to support President Mahmoud Abbas and other moderates in Palestinian society. Abbas has reiterated his commitment to a negotiated two-state solution and, as President of the Palestinian Authority, retains veto power over any legislation that comes out of the PLC. A withdrawal of US funds could result in the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, essentially creating a "failed state" in the West Bank and Gaza.

The American people can be proud of programs administered through USAID and its partners. We urge you to continue US aid to the Palestinian people.

Sincerely,

Dr. James Zogby
President
Arab American Institute

Dr. Ziad Asali
President
American Task Force on Palestine

Dr. Peter Gubser
President
American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA)

Omar Kader
Chairman of the Board
Development Associates, PAL-TECH

Ismael Ahmed
Executive Director
Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services

Makboula Yasin
Executive Director
United Palestinian Appeal

Yusif Farsakh
National Board
Birzeit Society

Samiah Bahhur
President
El Bireh Palestine Society

Steve Sosebee
President and CEO
Palestine Children's Relief Fund

Ronald Goodman
Co-Chair
American Diaspora Alliance for Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Nina Ghannam
President
Imagine-Life

Neal Abid
President
Arab American Community Center
Orlando, Florida

Saed Moujtahed
President
Citizens for Americans Interests

Hon. George Salem, Esq.
Chairman
Arab American Institute

Rateb Y. Rabie, KCHS
President
Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation

Hon. Theodore Kattouf
President
AMIDEAST

The Reverend Canon Richard K. Toll
Chairman of the Board
Friends of Sabeel-North America

Michael Mufarreh
President
American Federation of Ramallah, Palestine

Dr. Edward A. Hazbun, PhD., MBA, PE
Founder
Bethlehem Association

Linda Sobeh
National President, ex-officio
Palestinian American Congress

Linda Butler
Director
Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington Office

Salam Al-Marayati
Executive Director
Muslim Public Affairs Council

Samuel Halaby
Co-Chair
American Diaspora Alliance for Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Mitchell Plitnick
Director of Education and Policy
Jewish Voice for Peace

Sally Al-Daher, MD, MPH
Executive Director
Arab Cultural and Community Center
San Francisco, California