

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As we watch the progress the new administration has made in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also keenly aware of the success the State of Israel has had in vaccinating its citizens. Yet in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinians have received only a very small number of vaccines. While we note that the Israeli government recently sent a few thousand doses to the occupied territories, we write to ask the administration to urge the Israeli government to do more to help the Palestinians in the territories receive adequate supplies of the COVID vaccine.

As the occupying power under international law, Israel is legally obligated to provide for the health and well-being of all people under its control. This obligation stems from the Fourth Geneva Convention Article 56, which states: “To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the cooperation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics.”

While the Oslo Accords gave the Palestinian Authority considerable responsibility for the health care of Palestinians in the occupied territories, which they should also be urged to uphold, the Accords do not supersede Israel’s responsibilities under the 4th Geneva Convention.

The contested nature of Israel’s responsibilities in combatting the pandemic demonstrate the need to clarify the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as territory occupied by Israel, with the rights and responsibilities of both parties that this status carries.

The urgency of the moment, as both Israelis and Palestinians face the threat of COVID, demands immediate action. Israeli citizens cannot be safe from COVID until the Palestinians who live right next to them are also immunized. We concur with those Israeli health officials who on Monday urged their government to vaccinate the entire Palestinian population.^[1] The attempt to treat some parts of the territories beyond the Green Line as Israeli while treating other parts, where the majority of Palestinians reside, as a separate entity jeopardizes the good work Israel has done in vaccinating its citizens, of all ethnicities.

Ultimately these issues will not be fully resolved until the occupation is ended and the Palestinian people’s right to national independence is realized. To that end, we also encourage you to follow through on the commitment to rebuild the U.S.-Palestinian

relationship by taking a number of early steps such as reopening the Jerusalem consulate; reopening the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Washington, DC office; reaffirming opposition to unilateral steps by either side that undermine prospects for two states and articulating consequences for such steps; and reversing the Trump administration's ill-advised decisions to blur distinction between Israel within its internationally recognized pre-1967 borders—the "Green Line"—and the West Bank.

We believe that by taking these steps the United States can help to revive the hope for peace while also ensuring the security, health, and well-being of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Sincerely,

JEWISHINSIDER