

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20451

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to express concern with the violent assault on Palestinian filmmaker Hamdan Ballal, an Oscar-winning co-director of the documentary, *No Other Land*. This attack underscores the escalating violence in the West Bank and highlights the urgent need for the United States to combat rising levels of Israeli settler violence. We urge you to immediately reinstate sanctions against individuals who perpetrate violence that undermines regional stability and security in the West Bank.

On March 24, Mr. Ballal was attacked by a group of Israeli settlers in his home village of Susiya, located in the occupied West Bank. The Israel Defense Forces claimed that “several terrorists hurled rocks at Israeli citizens, damaging their vehicles,” and described the incident as a “mutual rock-hurling.”<sup>1</sup> Credible eyewitness accounts describe the events differently. According to these reports, a group of Israeli settlers—some armed with batons, knives, and rocks—entered Susiya and brutally assaulted Mr. Ballal, who sustained serious injuries to his head and stomach.<sup>2</sup> Witnesses immediately called the police, but Israeli officers reportedly did not intervene and instead, detained Mr. Ballal on his way to an ambulance, blindfolding and handcuffing him before transporting him to a military facility. He has since been released.

Mr. Ballal is one of four directors of the Oscar-winning documentary, *No Other Land*. It chronicles the lives of Palestinians living under occupation and the demolition of Palestinian homes in and around the Masafer Yatta area in the West Bank between 2019 and 2023. Given Mr. Ballal’s platform, we are especially concerned that this violent attack and failure to hold his perpetrators accountable suppresses his freedom of speech and those who tell Palestinian stories.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ephrat Livni & Rawan Sheikh Ahmad, *A Palestinian Director of ‘No Other Land’ Is Attacked and Detained, Witnesses Say*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 24, 2025) <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/24/world/middleeast/no-other-land-director-attack.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Livni & Ahmad *supra* n. 1; Nir Hasson, *Palestinian Director of ‘No Other Land’ Attacked by Settler Mob, Arrested by Soldiers, Israeli Co-Director Says*, HAARETZ (Mar. 24, 2025) <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-03-24/ty-article/.premium/palestinian-director-of-no-other-land-attacked-by-settler-mob-arrested-by-idf/00000195-c980-da24-affd-fba4541a0000>.

The assault on Mr. Ballal occurred against the backdrop of intensified Israeli military operations across the West Bank. Since January, the Israeli government's operations have displaced more than 40,000 Palestinians.<sup>3</sup> While it is important to dismantle militant cells in the West Bank that threaten the security of the Israeli people, we are concerned recent Israeli operations have disproportionately impacted Palestinian civilians. Further, they have coincided with the continued expansion of Israeli settlements and a surge in settler violence against Palestinians that advance right-wing extremist plans for annexation of the West Bank.

In response to this violence and the threat it poses to U.S. foreign policy objectives, the Biden Administration imposed sanctions against individuals and entities involved in actions that threaten peace, security, or stability in the West Bank, including violent acts against civilians and efforts to expand or support settlement activity.<sup>4</sup> President Trump repealed these sanctions in January, which has emboldened supporters of Israeli annexation of the occupied West Bank.<sup>5</sup>

Given the gravity of this attack and its implications on the ability of Palestinian civilians to advocate for self-determination peacefully, the U.S. must put pressure on the Israeli government to hold perpetrators accountable. We request that you respond to the following questions in writing no later than April 24, 2025:

1. Has the Department of State contacted Israeli counterparts to determine the details of the events that led to Mr. Ballal's detention? What other steps will the U.S. government take to determine the details of the assault on Mr. Ballal, including speaking to witnesses, establishing whether any of the perpetrators are U.S. citizens, and determining what actions, if any, Israeli police officers took to stop the armed settlers from entering Susiya?
2. What steps is the United States prepared to take to ensure that Israeli settlers who engage in acts of violence against Palestinians are held accountable and can no longer act with impunity? Given that such attacks undermine U.S. foreign policy objectives, will the Administration consider reinstating sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for these acts, in order to uphold U.S. interests and deter further violence?

---

<sup>3</sup> Natan Odenheimer, Aaron Boxerman, & Adam Rasgon, *Israeli Police Release Palestinian Oscar Winner Who Said He Was Assaulted*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 25, 2025) <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/25/world/middleeast/israel-police-hamdan-ballal-palestinian.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Kelly, *Biden Announces New Sanctions against 'extremist' Israeli Settlers*, THE HILL (Nov. 18, 2024) <https://thehill.com/policy/international/4996111-biden-administration-sanctions-israeli-settler/>.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Tan & Adam Taylor, *Trump Win Emboldens Israeli Settlers Seeking Control of the West Bank*, WASHINGTON POST (Dec. 1, 2024) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/12/01/trump-israel-settlers-west-bank>

3. The law requires the U.S. government to investigate possible misuse of U.S.-origin weapons. Have you investigated allegations that settlers were armed with U.S.-origin rifles? Have you determined which unit of the Israel Defense Forces was involved in this incident, including whether it is a unit known to collaborate with settlers in violent harassment operations against Palestinian farmers and villagers?
4. Has the Administration received any indication or sought to determine if the assault on Mr. Ballal was a targeted attack in retaliation for his involvement in *No Other Land*?

We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and await your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch  
United States Senator



Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Maxine Waters  
Member of Congress



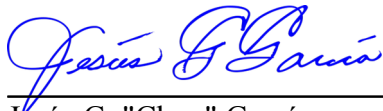
Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress



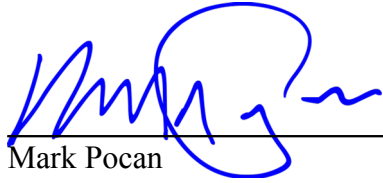
---

Jésús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress



---

Greg Casar  
Member of Congress



---

Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



---

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



---

Delia C. Ramirez  
Member of Congress



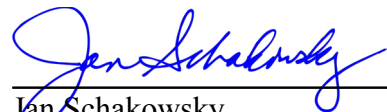
---

Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress



---

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



---

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



---

Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress



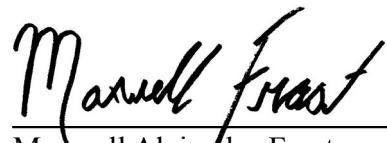
---

Andre Carson  
Member of Congress



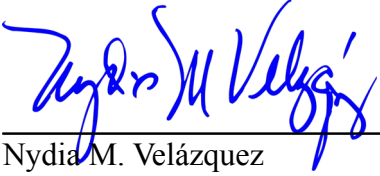
---

Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress



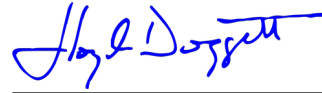
---

Maxwell Alejandro Frost  
Member of Congress



---

Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



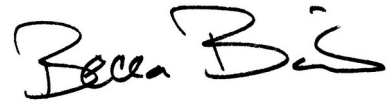
---

Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress



---

Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress



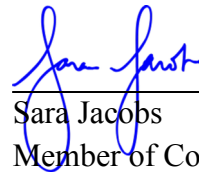
---

Becca Balint  
Member of Congress



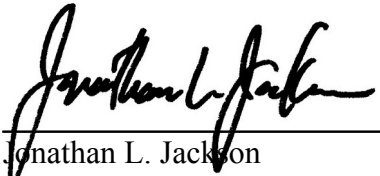
---

Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



---

Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



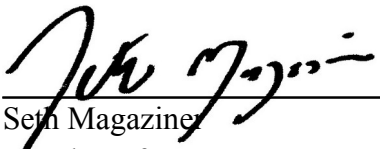
---

Jonathan L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



---

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



---

Seth Magaziner  
Member of Congress



---

Melanie Stansbury  
Member of Congress



---

Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress