

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 18, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20451

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to you at a time of great instability in Israel and the West Bank. Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed disturbing violence in the region as innocent civilians in Israel fall victim to terrorist attacks. Since the start of the year, cold-blooded murders of Israelis have been celebrated by perpetrators and supporters of Palestinian terror. Deeply concerned by the Palestinian Authority's refusal to condemn these senseless killings, and in particular, their ongoing incentivizing of terror through the egregious "pay for slay" program, we ask that you report to Congress on ongoing efforts to end this practice.

For some Palestinians, terrorism literally pays. As you know, the Palestinian Authority has for decades provided financial compensation and other benefits to families of terrorists jailed in Israeli prisons and "martyrs" killed while carrying out attacks against Israelis. These payments cost the PA more than \$300 million annually, at 8% of its budget.¹ In an attempt to reform this practice, the U.S. ended direct budgetary support to the PA in 2014. The PA refused to change its behavior, and, in 2018, Congress passed the bipartisan Taylor Force Act. In an effort to cut off "pay for slay" at the source, many of us helped pass this much-needed, bipartisan legislation that prohibits U.S. assistance to the West Bank directly benefiting the PA.

In January 2023, following an attack by a Palestinian terrorist that killed 7 in a Jerusalem synagogue, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza celebrated the carnage by handing out sweets, blasting festive music from their cars, and lighting fireworks.² Days earlier, Akram Rajoub, the mayor of Jenin, said that the "PA will not stop the transfer of funds...President Abbas made it clear that the Palestinian Authority will not stop funding the families of our martyrs even if we are down to the last penny."³ Lone-wolf and organized attacks show little sign of stopping, and know no bounds. In late February, a Palestinian terrorist killed Columbia University graduate Elan Ganeles, a native of Connecticut. In early April, a Palestinian terrorist killed British-Israeli mother Lucy Dee and her two daughters in an ambush in the West Bank. Those behind these heinous acts are lauded by Palestinian society, and it is abundantly clear that these payments continue to reward and incentivize terror.

The Palestinian Authority has clearly continued down the path of more hatred, violence, and terror, without regard for the damage inflicted, or for their role in diminishing the prospects for peace. But, so long as they pay citizens to murder civilians, they will do so without benefiting from the support of United States taxpayers. We know that the Administration shares the view that support for terrorism and the Palestinians' characterization of the martyr payment system as a form of social welfare is unacceptable⁴. Yet, five years after the Taylor Force Act was signed into law, the PA continues to bolster the Martyrs' Fund. To maintain a political horizon in

1 <https://israelpolicyforum.org/2021/04/02/palestinian-prisoner-and-martyr-payments-explained/>

2 <https://apnews.com/article/politics-israel-government-palestinian-territories-benjamin-netanyahu-fb2251b5b6c8ef73a21f87620d20090c>

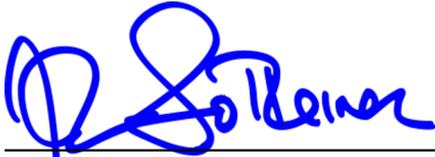
3 <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/palestinian-territories/1674127560-exclusive-defending-pay-for-slay-jenin-mayor-says-pa-will-always-fund-martyrs>

4 <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/biden-envoy-talked-with-pa-about-dropping-pay-for-slay-681392>

support of a viable two-state solution, the PA cannot continue this depraved practice. U.S.-Palestinian ties have improved in recent years, and the Biden Administration is uniquely positioned to change the status quo.

As such, we encourage the State Department to update Congress on the status of negotiating an end to the “pay for slay” program, and urge the Administration to continue to raise this issue with Palestinian officials. The United States is a trusted regional partner, and must utilize this unique position to bring an end to a system that has harmed so many.

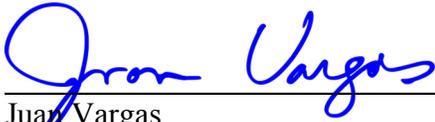
Sincerely,



Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



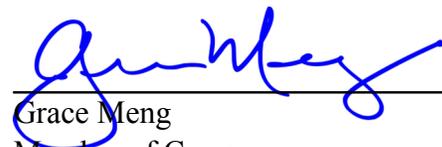
Juan Vargas
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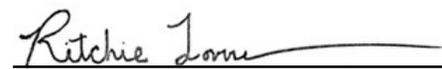
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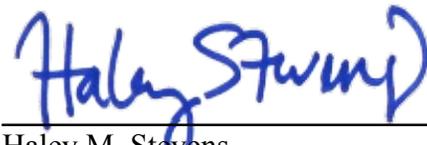
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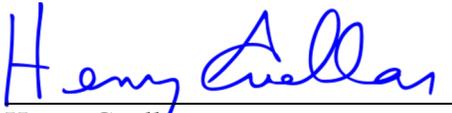
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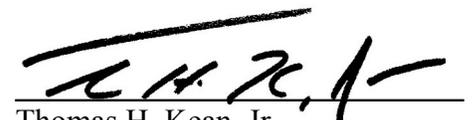
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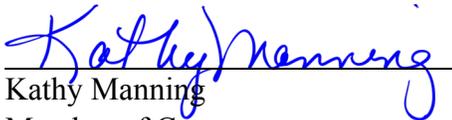
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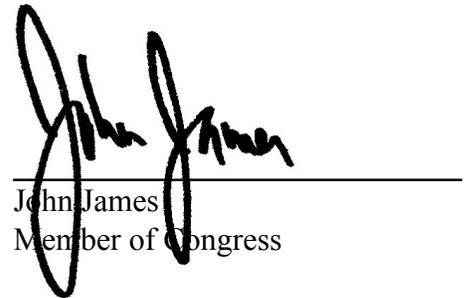

Kathy Manning
Member of Congress

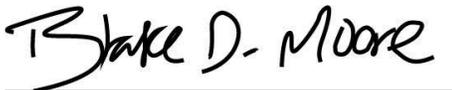

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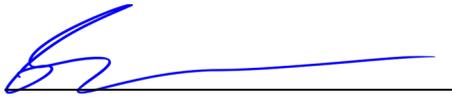

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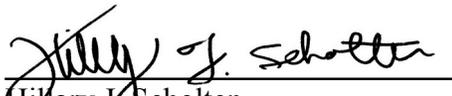
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