

Five steps to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza

Written by By Sen. Martin Heinrich
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Sen. Heinrich urges Biden administration to work with Israel

WASHINGTON D.C. — U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., joined U.S. Senators Chris Murphy, D-Conn., Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism, Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., Chris Coons, D-Del., Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., and 20 colleagues in a letter to President Joe Biden urging the administration to encourage Israeli officials to take five specific steps to significantly increase urgently needed humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza.

“The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is dire and the civilian suffering is at an unacceptable and staggering level. Ninety-three percent of Palestinians in Gaza are facing crisis levels of hunger. Eighty-five percent of the population is displaced. Seventy percent of those killed are women and children,” the senators wrote. “While the scale of the crisis is massive, the humanitarian assistance that is entering Gaza is just a fraction of what is needed to save lives. Since aid operations resumed on Oct. 21, delivery of lifesaving assistance to Gaza continues to be hampered, despite no evidence of Hamas theft or diversion of humanitarian assistance provided via the United Nations or international non-governmental organizations.”

In order to significantly increase the amount of humanitarian aid entering Gaza, the senators recommended the administration work with Israeli officials to take five specific steps:

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Repair and open a third border crossing at Erez to provide additional aid to north Gaza.

Planned missions by humanitarian actors to reach north Gaza from the south have repeatedly not been allowed to proceed by the Israeli Defense Forces due to cited security concerns, leaving hundreds of thousands living there stranded without enough food, water, and medical supplies and equipment.

Streamline the convoluted inspections process for aid entering via the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border crossings, and issue a pre-approved list of items for entry.

Establish a clear, enforceable deconfliction process inside Gaza to ensure humanitarian organizations can operate safely. Hundreds of health and humanitarian workers have died in Gaza, including humanitarian aid workers who have been killed in areas deemed “safe zones” by the IDF. Israeli authorities should establish a direct line of contact for the humanitarian community to the IDF, as well as hold regular meetings to review incidents and make improvements.

Increase capacity for processing humanitarian aid and restart the import of commercial goods via the border crossing at Kerem Shalom. Before Oct. 7, hundreds of trucks filled with commercial goods crossed through Kerem Shalom into Gaza every day. The current humanitarian trucking operation can help reduce the suffering, but it cannot substitute for a functioning commercial sector.

Open additional supply routes for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. Every option must be explored to increase the amount of humanitarian and commercial goods going in, including via Jordan, the West Bank, Ashdod, and maritime routes. To the extent feasible, we also encourage you to explore whether U.S. military assets could help support humanitarian deliveries, via maritime or air routes.

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