

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We urgently write to express our concern regarding the significant challenges to press freedom in the current war in Gaza. Since October 7, at least 88 journalists and media workers have been killed during the conflict.¹ This includes the two Israeli journalists who were killed by Hamas during the violent terror attack on October 7, as well as 83 Palestinian journalists and three Lebanese journalists reportedly killed as a result of Israel's response in Gaza and Lebanon.² As Israel conducts operations against Hamas, we ask that you work with the Israeli and Egyptian governments to protect press freedom and ensure journalists are able to execute their "vitally important role," as you have described, in providing accurate reporting on the full scale of the war.

With more journalists killed in three months than have ever been killed in a single country over an entire year, we remain concerned that not enough steps have been taken to safeguard the lives of the civilian population in Gaza, including journalists.³ We are grateful for your continuous work to address the unbearable conditions and high number of civilian casualties including by ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians, but more must be done to address the unique challenges journalists in Gaza face.

We greatly appreciate your remarks recognizing the deaths of Al Jazeera Gaza Bureau Chief Wael Dahdouh's sons and other family members as "the worst possible loss," and thank you for raising the issue of protecting journalists on your recent trips to the region. In that spirit, we respectfully request that you work with your counterparts to address additional challenges posed by Israel, as well as Egypt, that hamper the ability of journalists to do their dangerous yet important work. Hamas, which has a history of harassing and physically torturing journalists in Gaza in attempts to obstruct the free flow of information, has already created an environment dangerous for journalists.⁴ Palestinian and foreign journalists in Gaza now must contend with constant aerial bombardments and the repeated internet blackouts caused by damage to network facilities.

Since October 7th, the number of international journalists allowed to enter Gaza has been severely limited, and those who are guaranteed entry are often unable to freely move around and are limited to tours organized by the IDF. We ask that you work with Israeli and Egyptian partners to guarantee independent freedom of movement necessary for journalistic reporting. While these restrictions have been framed as necessary to protect journalists' lives, the free flow of information and accurate reporting on the

¹ Ellen Francis, Artur Galocha and Joe Snell, "The journalists killed in Gaza — and what they tried to show the world," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2024/israel-gaza-war-journalists-killed-cpj/>.

² Committee to Protect Journalists, "Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War," January 24, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/01/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/>.

³ Committee to Protect Journalists, "Israel-Gaza War Takes Record Toll on Journalists," December 21, 2023, <https://cpj.org/2023/12/israel-gaza-war-takes-record-toll-on-journalists/>.

⁴ International Federation of Journalists, "Palestine: Hamas arrests journalist exposing corruption in Gaza," November 8, 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/end-impunity-2022/article/palestine-hamas-arrests-journalist-exposing-corruption-in-gaza>.

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war's impact are critical to preserving the democratic principle of the freedom of the press, informing the international community about the reality on the ground, and pursuing accountability.⁵ Conflict-zone reporters are aware and accustomed to the risks associated with such reporting and should be allowed to continue their courageous work.

At the same time, Israel must do all they can to protect the lives of civilians at large, including local journalists. In addition to life-saving humanitarian aid and medical supplies, Palestinian journalists require access to personal protective equipment, such as bulletproof vests and headgear, to allow them to continue reporting from the field. The Israeli and Egyptian governments must also allow injured journalists to leave Gaza to receive medical treatment.

At the heart of every democracy, there is a right to free expression and journalists are allowed to do their jobs without interference. Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself, and as a democracy, must operate within the confines of international law. We therefore respectfully ask that you work with your Israeli and Egyptian counterparts, as appropriate, to secure the following:

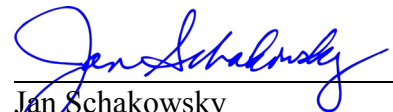
- Take every necessary measure to protect the lives of civilians in Gaza, including journalists;
- Permit the entry of foreign journalists into Gaza;
- Allow journalists, foreign and local, to leave the enclave if they wish;
- Ensure journalists may have access to personal protective gear and critical equipment, including distinguishing insignia, bulletproof vests, helmets, and phone chargers. Palestinian journalists already in Gaza should also be allowed access to these necessary products.
- Prioritize the protection of telecommunications and network infrastructure to prevent internet and phone blackouts, and facilitate quick repair of damaged facilities.
- Conduct a thorough and immediate investigation of cases of harassment, arrest, and attacks of journalists, to ensure that internationally accepted standards are being upheld.

Thank you for your efforts to prioritize the protection of civilians in the Israel-Gaza war, and we look forward to working with you to protect our shared democratic values, including a free and independent press.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

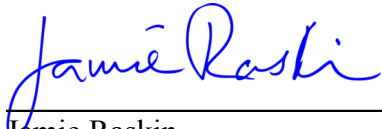


Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

⁵ Reuters, "Israeli military says it can't guarantee journalists' safety in Gaza," October 27, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-military-says-it-cant-guarantee-journalists-safety-gaza-2023-10-27/>.

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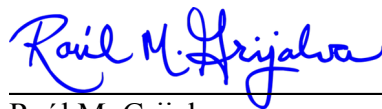
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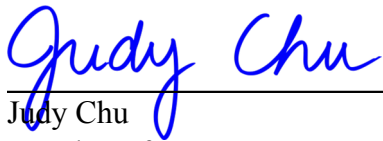
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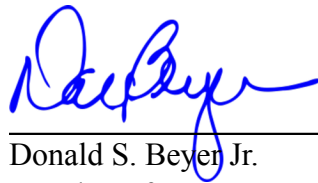
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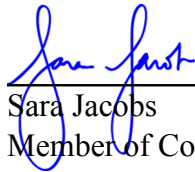
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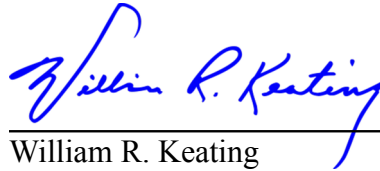
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