



[Letter to Pompeo re: Coronavirus Aid to the Palestinian Territories](#)

Earlier this week, a group of Democratic senators sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo asking him to ensure that the Palestinian territories receive the necessary aid to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The signatories also asked for details on how the Trump administration is planning to help provide Palestinians with access to the required resources, as well as what steps the State Department is taking to coordinate relief efforts with U.N. agencies, foreign governments, and non-governmental organizations. The letter was spearheaded by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and was also signed by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Senator Tom Udall (D-NM), Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Senator Tom Carper (D-DE), and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH).

In their letter, the senators urge the Trump administration to provide assistance to the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in order to prevent a potential humanitarian disaster. They note that the Palestinian Authority (PA) has already declared a state of emergency in dealing with the coronavirus outbreak and has also established a joint operations room with the Israeli government, however further aid from the United States is required, particularly in the Gaza Strip. On this point of financial assistance, the lawmakers are critical of the Trump administration's recent decision to freeze nearly all aid to the Palestinians, which has exacerbated the dire circumstances of the current health crisis. The senators also stress the importance of mitigating the spread of the coronavirus in the Palestinian territories due to the growing number of confirmed cases in neighboring Israel as well.

To combat the ongoing health crisis, Palestinian leadership and other actors have taken some steps to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. Recently, Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced a two-week lockdown in the West Bank in which Palestinians there were ordered not to leave their homes except in emergency cases. The regulations also required those coming from abroad to remain in isolation for 14 days at a medical facility, and urged Palestinian citizens of Israel to not travel to the West Bank in order to prevent a potential influx of new cases. Meanwhile in the Gaza Strip, the Ministry of Health has begun turning some schools there into quarantine centers. Furthermore, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has begun making home deliveries of food to Gaza residents so as to limit the number of people needing to go out into public spaces.

Health experts have warned that an outbreak of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip in particular could be catastrophic. Its residents are particularly vulnerable due to the fact that the coastal enclave has been under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since 2007, which has restricted the entry of essential medical resources and hampered the healthcare system. The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that Gaza's healthcare system would not be able to adequately deal with a coronavirus outbreak, and as such, it is critical that all parties play their part in helping to mitigate the spread of the disease there.