

More than 50 U.S. lawmakers warn of Israel's use of collective punishment in Gaza

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Palestinian students inspect a classroom at a school destroyed during Israel's recent 11-day onslaught on the Gaza Strip, which killed more than 260 people including women and children, on the first day of the new academic year in Gaza City, on August 16, 2021. (Photo by AFP)

Washington, August 22 (RHC)-- Fifty-three Democrat members of the U.S. Congress have warned of the grim humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and denounced the Israeli regime's ban on the entry of essential materials into the impoverished coastal enclave and collective punishment of Palestinians there.

The lawmakers, in a letter addressed to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, described the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza as “untenable.” “Ensuring that Palestinians residing in Gaza receive humanitarian aid is vital to securing the well-being of Gaza's 2.1 million residents,” the letter continued.

The legislators, led by Mark Pocan and Debbie Dingell, noted that Gaza's humanitarian situation has been “exacerbated” three months after Israel's 11-day onslaught on the strip which killed more than 250 people, including women and children, and “left an estimated 1.3 million Palestinians in need of humanitarian assistance.”

“Unfortunately the recent Israeli air campaign in Gaza has only worsened living conditions, inflicting \$380 million in damage to the beleaguered Strip and necessitating \$485 million in immediate humanitarian and reconstruction aid,” the letter highlighted.

The letter then called on Blinken to work with Israel and Egypt, clearly state which materials are allowed into the Gaza Strip, and review the efficacy of the so-called Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism agreement.

The U.S. lawmakers said Israel “selectively bans materials that it considers having 'dual use' — any item it claims could have a military application.” They also condemned Israel's restriction of Gaza's fishing zone as a form of collective punishment.

“Although the restriction was recently reversed, the decision to collectively punish the people of Gaza by unilaterally restricting its fishing zone remains extremely concerning,” said the letter, urging Blinken “to work with the Israeli regime to refrain from such harmful and illegal actions.”

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007 when Hamas took control of the coastal enclave.

Former United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay will head an international commission of inquiry into Israeli crimes committed during the latest bombardment of the besieged Gaza Strip.

The siege has inflicted severe hardship on residents. The poverty rate among Gaza's population has reached 53 percent, while “extreme poverty” stands at 33.8 percent, according to statistics by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).

About 68 percent of families do not have enough to eat, while 80 percent of Gazans are dependent on aid. The area's unemployment rate stands at 45.1 percent, according to PCBS.

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