United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 23, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to urge you to use the resources, capabilities, and influence of the U.S. government to help provide relief to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced after heavy rain flooded more than 70,000 tents in Gaza, killing at least four people, including three children. Those affected need immediate relief, and we must implement a plan to prevent further suffering and death as winter sets in. Such life-saving assistance is not only in line with American values and U.S. law, but also in our national security interests as we seek a lasting peace in the region.

There is widespread agreement about the risk to Palestinians from flooding. On September 30, the United Nations' International Organization for Migration published a risk assessment for the winter season warning that of the almost two million people in Gaza who need urgent shelter assistance, nearly one million are at risk of flooding in the coming months.[1] On November 11, the UN Secretary-General deputy spokesperson stated that more than 150,000 tents, including approximately 117,000 from the Egyptian Relief Committee in El Arish, were waiting for Israeli permission to enter Gaza.[2] President Donald Trump's Board of Peace called the situation "an immediate humanitarian emergency," characterizing the Israeli government's response as "insufficient" and noting its delays "have exacerbated the consequences of a foreseeable humanitarian challenge."[3]

On November 6, 2026, the Israeli government announced it was working on a "winterization plan" in coordination with the Board of Peace, the United Nations, international organizations,

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[1] Humanitarian organizations report that 94 percent of Gaza's population needs shelter or basic household assistance, and that 1.8 million people now live in more than 1,700 displacement sites. International Organization for Migration, "Nearly 2 Million in Gaza Need Urgent Shelter Assistance as Winter Looms, IOM Chief Warns," October 9, 2026, https://mena.iom.int/news/nearly-2-million-gaza-need-urgent-shelter-assistance-winter-looms-iom-chief-warns.

[2] United Nations, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, November 11, 2026, https://press.un.org/en/2026/db261111.doc.htm.

[3] Board of Peace (@BoardOfPeace), "Statement by the Board of Peace on Recent Flooding and Urgent Winterization Needs in Gaza," X, November 9, 2026, https://t.co/lWxKhPxGeH.

and donor countries.[4] Since the implementation of the plan, Israel has provided more than 93,000 tents, 8,600 trucks carrying winter-specific items, and 16 sewage vacuum trucks have entered Gaza. While we welcome additional efforts, much more is needed to address basic human needs resulting from near-universal displacement in Gaza.

Although the Israeli government broadly recognizes that medical supplies, fuel, and shelter are needed to directly support the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, in practice, extensive review and approval processes can delay or block many supplies.[5] Furthermore, Kerem Shalom remains the only crossing open for aid. According to the lead humanitarian response organizations, getting materials into Gaza is the main operational constraint, hampered by a "layered approval process, with frequent rejection of dual-use items, including basic fixing materials."[6] The Department of State and the Board of Peace have both expressed to Congress challenges from the Israeli government's narrow definition of non-allowable dual-use items that includes wooden tent poles and other items critical for shelter. It is essential that key materials and supplies be delivered expeditiously and unimpeded, which is an explicit component of President Trump's 20-point plan endorsed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.[7]

Mr. Secretary, we urge you to use the leverage of the United States to ensure there is no obstacle to allowing sufficient rescue equipment, shelter, and other critical winter supplies into Gaza. For President Trump's peace plan to work, we ask you to encourage the Israeli government to reevaluate its dual-use item restrictions and constraints on implementer registration that have prevented humanitarian organizations from delivering life-saving assistance. And we cannot simply be reactive to each preventable tragedy. Specifically, we urge you to press for:

(1) Immediate clearance of the tents, tarpaulins, blankets, and other winter supplies already staged outside Gaza;
(2) Israeli officials to enable UN provision of the nearly 50 percent of winter-specific deliveries that have been approved by the Israeli government and not delivered to Gaza;
(3) A reevaluation of the security challenges that prevent expanded operations at additional crossings to allow humanitarian aid deliveries into Gaza, with the objective of opening additional crossings;
(4) A published, pre-agreed list of essential humanitarian items exempt from dual-use review, with a timely appeals process; and
(5) Restored operating access for experienced international humanitarian organizations.

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[4] Israel Defense Forces, "How is the IDF Preparing Humanitarian Efforts for Winter in Gaza?," X, November 6, 2026, https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/israel-hamas-war-gaza/how-is-the-idf-preparing-humanitarian-efforts-for-winter-in-gaza/.
[5] Government of Israel, "Humanitarian Effort within the Gaza Strip," accessed November 11, 2026, https://gaza-aid-data.gov.il/mainhome/humanitarian-effort-within-the-gaza-strip/.
[6] Palestine Shelter Cluster, "National Response Strategy 2026-2027," July 12, 2026, https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/sheltercluster.org/public/docs/Shelter%20Cluster%20National%20Response%20Strategy%202026-2027.pdf.
[7] Board of Peace, "Gaza Peace Plan," accessed November 11, 2026, https://boardofpeace.org/plans/gaza-peace-plan.

Just as we can all agree that Hamas must disarm and cannot again be allowed to govern Gaza, we surely agree that repairing tents, ensuring people don't have to live in sewage, and providing warmth to freezing children is a basic human obligation. We urge you to use your power to continue to push for the disarmament of Hamas, while ensuring the humanitarian needs of Palestinian civilians are met in a timely and efficient manner. We respectfully request a response by December 4 describing the steps the Department is taking to enforce U.S. law and the 20-point plan with the secure entry of life-saving supplies.

Sincerely,

Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Department of State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate

Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Senate