

Rabbi Marvin Hier
Founder and Dean

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Associate Dean

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I am writing to you in connection with a January 21, 2010 letter to President Obama, which you cosigned with 53 other members of Congress about expressing concerns over Israel's alleged blockade against Gaza.

I too, share your concerns for the well being of innocent civilians on both sides of the Gaza border. In that connection, I decided to travel to Kerem Shalom, the main crossing point between Israel and Gaza last month. Later that same day I also visited the Sha'ar Efraim Terminal, a main nexus between Israelis and Palestinians on the West Bank. I would like to share my reflections on those 2 visits.

First, the West Bank crossing: Over 1000 trucks can cross on a daily basis between Israeli and Palestinian businesses with the only "interference", being a quick x-ray of goods-laden trucks to ensure that they contain no materials that can be used in terrorist's attacks. The facility is run efficiently by civilian employees and an adjacent terminal can also process over 3000 Palestinians a day for entry into Israel. The people I interviewed who work there have a can-do attitude to facilitate efficient movement of goods and people. The bottom line—Israeli and Palestinian business people are left alone to do their business with little or no interference.

The situation in Kerem Shalom adjacent to the Gaza and Egyptian borders is of course completely different. There is one reason: Hamas. It is they who control the Gaza Strip -- not the Palestinian Authority, and it is Hamas, not Israel, that bears the full responsibility for the current situation.

As you know, in August 2005, Israel unilaterally disengaged from the Gaza Strip, a painful gesture for peace that cost billions of dollars and displaced 9000 Israelis, some of whom had lived in the area for a quarter of the century. The hope was that this unprecedented gesture would generate a peace dividend. But Hamas' idea of the peace dividend consisted of cross-border suicide bombings, kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, 8000 rockets launched-- not into "occupied territories", but Israel proper; launched against Sderot and other civilian centers, along with terror forays against the terminals that connect Gaza and Israel.

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Nonetheless, despite these conditions, Israel has continued to facilitate the movement of food and other necessities to ensure that no one in Gaza would go without food or medicine. During the 3 hours of my visit on January 21, I saw numerous trucks including pallets of bottled water destined for businesses and homes make their way from the Israeli to the Palestinian side.


I also saw the procedures in place for the movement of goods and people from the Gaza side into Israel. What I saw could hardly be called 'normal' commerce but neither did it constitute a "blockade". No one is starving in Gaza and basic goods needed by the civilian population are being transferred from Israel to Gaza.

I am attaching, for your perusal, a list of goods brought in and out of Gaza during 2009 (see attached.)

██████████ the most important contribution to normalizing the lives of the people of Gaza is for America to do everything possible to thwart Hamas' openly stated objective of annihilating the Jewish state. Until Hamas changes its charter and behavior or until it no longer controls Gaza, Israel has no choice but to ensure that all materials that have in the past been converted by Hamas to bolster their terrorist infrastructure and capabilities, not be permitted to reach the Gaza Strip.

As one of the signators of the Gaza/Blockage letter to President Obama, I urge you to reconsider your position and to arrange to visit these transit facilities and steps taken by Egypt, on its border with the Hamas-controlled territory to get a fuller understanding of the facts on the ground.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Abraham Cooper
Associate Dean

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Breakdown of Israel's Facilitation of Aid to Gaza

(Figures supplied by Israel government)

- **900 %** increase in humanitarian aid delivered to Gaza in 2009, compared to 2008.
- **724,925** tons of humanitarian aid delivered to the Gaza Strip, from Jan. 19, 2009 – Jan. 16, 2010.
- **29 million gallons (110 million liters):** Heavy-duty diesel fuel for the Gaza power station delivered to the Gaza Strip since Jan. 19, 2009.
- **3,500:** Blankets provided by the United Nations (UN) for Palestinian civilians stolen, by Hamas.
- **400:** Food deliveries provided by the UN for Palestinian civilians, stolen by Hamas.
- **10,346:** Gaza residents who entered Israel for medical and humanitarian reasons, Jan. 19 – Nov. 7, 2009.
- **11,508 tons:** Monthly average of humanitarian aid entering Gaza from February – June 2008, a period of intense rocket fire prior to Israel's defensive operation in Gaza.
- **34,253 tons:** Monthly average of humanitarian aid entering Gaza during period of calm prior to Israel's defensive operation in Gaza, July - December 2008.
- **18,500:** Permits Israel issued to Gaza residents to enter Israel or travel overseas in 2009.
- **1.3 million:** Carnations exported from Gaza via Israel to the EU as of Jan. 17, 2010.
- **41:** Tons of strawberries exported from Gaza via Israel to the EU as of Jan. 17, 2010.
- **28,400:** Flowers from Gaza exported to Europe on Dec. 10, 2009.
- **\$6.7 million (25 million shekels):** Money authorized for transfer on Jan. 24, 2010 to Gaza residents entitled to social security and pension payments from Israel.