

[Ros-Lehtinen/Berham/Royce/Engel letter to President Obama, circulated for co-signers Monday, December 10, 2012; no closing date specified]

December XX, 2012

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Your Administration discouraged the Palestinian leadership from pursuing non-member state observer status at the United Nations and took a firm stance in both voting “no” and encouraging other nations to do the same, and we appreciate those efforts.

We are deeply disappointed and upset that the Palestinian leadership rebuffed the entreaties of your Administration and the Congress and insisted on pursuing this distinctly unhelpful initiative. This Palestinian action violated both the letter and spirit of the Oslo Accords, and it opened the door for expanded Palestinian efforts to attack, isolate, and delegitimize Israel in a variety of international forums—a threat which, even if unrealized, would hang over Israel’s head during any future negotiation or any effort by the Israeli government to defend its citizens from terrorism.

This is a truly unfortunate outcome. History has shown that direct talks are the only means for resolving disputes between Israel and its neighbors. Direct talks were the path that brought peace treaties between Israel and Egypt and between Israel and Jordan. Direct talks also led to the Oslo agreements between Israel and the PLO, and the PLO pledged in Oslo that it would take no unilateral action to change the status of the West Bank and Gaza.

Now PLO Chairman Abbas has violated that signed agreement. Accordingly, we believe the United States must respond strongly to the Palestinian leadership’s failure to uphold its obligations. First, we must send a clear message of disapproval, beyond our negative vote, with Chairman Abbas and the PLO’s decision to seek a UN status upgrade at the General Assembly. One important way of expressing U.S. disapproval would be to send the message that such actions are not cost-free and that, at a minimum, they result in setbacks to U.S.-Palestinian relations. We can do this by closing the PLO office in Washington, D.C. We can also call our Consul-General in Jerusalem home for consultations. We urge you to take these steps.

Second, we stand ready to work with you and commit to using every means at our disposal to ensure that this General Assembly vote does not serve as a precedent for elevating the status of the PLO in other UN bodies or international forums. Over the past year, Palestinian leaders have indicated an intention to apply for full membership in the International Criminal Court and over a dozen other international institutions in order to assert Palestinian claims against Israel. Such efforts would not only unfairly target our Israeli ally, but would devastate efforts to resume the peace process and do possibly irreparable harm to those international institutions. We should do everything possible to make sure that does not happen, including by reaffirming our commitment to maintaining and enforcing U.S. laws that require withholding U.S. contributions from any international forum that grants membership to the PLO.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Member of Congress

HOWARD L. BERMAN
Member of Congress

EDWARD R. ROYCE
Member of Congress

ELIOT L. ENGEL
Member of Congress