



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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May 25, 2006

The Honorable Richard G. Lugar
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

BY FAX: 202-228-0360

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express the bishops' concerns regarding S. 2370, the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006.

The Conference's perspective on this legislation is shaped by two overriding concerns. First, S. 2370 should be measured in light of the ultimate goal of promoting a two-state solution that provides security for Israel and a viable state for the Palestinians, two states living alongside one another in peace. Second, the legislation should provide for the urgent needs of the Palestinian people. A further deterioration of the humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinian people compromises human dignity and puts at risk the long-term welfare of both Palestinians and Israelis who long for a just peace.

Mr. Chairman, the bishops' Conference is grateful that this legislation acknowledges the goal of a two-state solution and incorporates some significant improvements over its companion bill in the House (HR 4681), but we remain deeply concerned that some of the provisions of the legislation would undermine the goal of a two-state solution.

The Conference of Bishops' relief and development agency, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), reports that their assistance programs in the Palestinian Territories could be severely curtailed and a number of programs ended under the proposed legislation. We understand that other reputable Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) report similar concerns. It is not in the best interests of either Israelis or Palestinians for desperation to grow in the West Bank and Gaza. Instead S. 2370 should send a message that Congress supports a wide range of basic assistance programs to the Palestinian people.

Compared to the House, the Senate has a less restrictive definition of assistance that can be provided by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to the Palestinian people in section 3 of the bill. However, we remain concerned that S. 2370 needs specifically to define a broader range of essential assistance including, but not limited to, food, water, medical services, sanitation services, education, job training, psycho-social counseling, agricultural development, and other assistance to meet basic human needs. Especially given the deepening poverty and unemployment in the Palestinian territories, the exception ought to explicitly mention or describe a broader range of services to meet "basic human needs."

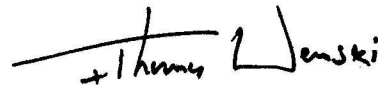
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S. 2370 rightly calls upon Hamas to renounce terrorism, recognize Israel and accept prior agreements, but then sections 5 and 6 discourage contact with all officials of the Palestinian Authority (except for President Abbas and his personal representatives), “including the Palestinian Legislative Council,” despite the fact that many members of the Council are not members of Hamas or another Foreign Terrorist Organization. In addition, the denial of visas to and the travel restrictions on representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the United States, even if discretionary, are particularly counterproductive as the PLO is on record as having renounced terrorism, recognized Israel and negotiated prior agreements, and Hamas is not a member of the PLO. These actions discourage contact with Palestinian leaders whose support is crucial for pursuing a two-state solution.

Finally, it is important that the certification described in Section 620K(b), which is the basis for all of the bill’s restrictions, should focus on essential reform requirements for the Palestinian Authority. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority ought to be pressured to recognize Israel, renounce terrorism and dismantle terrorist infrastructures, and accept previous agreements with Israel; but S. 2370 goes far beyond the Quartet’s demands of January 30. Good governance is always a worthy goal, but a laundry list of conditions beyond these essential ones may simply delay and impede a negotiated two-state solution.

The Bishops’ Conference asks that S. 2370 be modified to meet two important goals – to support a two-state solution to the conflict and to alleviate the urgent human needs of the Palestinian people. These goals are in the best interests of both Palestinians and Israelis who long for a just peace.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the name.

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy

CC: Members of Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Senator Mitch McConnell