

## **“No Way to Treat a Child” – 19 Congressional Representatives Agree**

Last week, 19 members of Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry urging the State Department to make the human rights of Palestinian children a priority in the US -Israel bilateral relationship. Rep. Betty McCollum (MN) wrote the letter. also signed by both co-chairs of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and by members of committees on Armed Services, Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Intelligence.

The signers were responding to evidence compiled by many human rights organizations of systemic abuse by Israel of Palestinian children in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Over 7000 children have been arrested since 2003 by the Israeli military. Many are held for indefinite periods without trial. They are often arrested at home in the middle of the night and threatened with physical abuse and incarceration if they do not accuse other children of crimes. Israeli human rights workers have documented 1300 cases of injury by the military to these children while in custody in recent years.

By contrast, Israeli children in illegal settlements in the West Bank and accused of crimes are tried in civilian courts with full legal rights.

Many US groups have worked in recent weeks to educate Congress about these conditions, including Jewish Voice for Peace, several Christian church denominations and American Friends Service Committee.

Under US foreign aid laws, a country that systematically violates human rights should not receive US foreign military aid, and the Secretary of State should document such violations annually in reports to Congress. Israel is the recipient of the largest single US military aid program. But these abuses go unreported. The McCollum letter asks the Secretary of State to enforce the law. Why, then, have only 19 out of 435 Congressional representatives signed the letter?

There are probably many reasons why the rights of Palestinian children are ignored. For one thing, American news services provide very little reporting on such matters. Most reporting is heavily dominated by the massive propaganda efforts of the Israeli government proclaiming that the Israel Defense Force, which “polices” the Occupied Territories, is “the most moral army in the world,” to quote Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. International investigative commissions have repeatedly found major human rights violations by the IDF in warfare, but US officials lobby intensively behind the scenes, as they did this month, to keep Israel off the UN list of major violators of children’s rights. The US press accepts at face value assurances from US leaders that Israel is an indispensable ally and therefore hesitates to report negative news.

McCollum’s letter, however, casts a strong light on the problem. The abuse they cite is not an incidental effect of warfare. It is a conscious policy of Israel to subject civilian children under occupation to a regime of official abuse by the Israeli army, with no effective means of appeal to any judicial authority. And aiding such an army violates a law of Congress.

We at New Haven Jewish Voice for Peace are disappointed that no Connecticut congressperson signed on to the McCollum letter. We recently asked Representative Rosa DeLauro to send a staff person a briefing on this issue at the Capitol. We are grateful that she did send someone. We would have liked to meet with her to discuss it further, but we were told she was too busy. We heard the same thing a year ago. We will keep on contacting her. She has a good record on human rights, and it’s not too late for her to sign on to the letter. Join us in encouraging her; call her at (202) 225-3661.

—by JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE NEW HAVEN 6/28/2015 Contact us at JVPNH.org

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