Open Letter Opposing S. 462, the United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act

The following organizations are writing to urge you to withdraw your co-sponsorship of S.462, the United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013. While there are numerous problematic provisions in this bill, we are particularly concerned about Sec. 9, which would designate Israel as a country included in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, allowing Israeli citizens to enter the United States for up to 90 days without a visa.

Currently, all 37 countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program must grant reciprocity to U.S. citizens and allow them to enter their countries without a visa. However, S.462 would exempt Israel from this requirement, holding it to a lower standard than all other countries. Instead of guaranteeing all U.S. citizens a reciprocal visa, the bill would allow Israel to enter the program after the United States has certified that it "has made every reasonable effort, without jeopardizing the security of the State of Israel, to ensure that reciprocal travel privileges are extended to all United States citizens."

As is well documented by the attached articles, Israel systematically discriminates against Palestinian-Americans, Arab-Americans, Muslim-Americans and other U.S. citizens from all ethnic and faith backgrounds who support Palestinian human and national rights by frequently denying them visas to travel to Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territory. When denying these U.S. citizens entry, Israel often subjects them to humiliating searches, intensive interrogations, and invasions of personal privacy, including demanding access to private email accounts.

Rather than hold Israel accountable for its ethnic, religious, and political profiling of U.S. citizens, S.462 would codify into law U.S. acceptance of Israel's discrimination and allow it to continue to deny visas to U.S. citizens through its unique catch-all "reasonable effort" and "security" loopholes.

In his April 17 testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the prevailing standards for a country joining the Visa Waiver Program include, among others, "reciprocal visa waivers," and that it "maintain less than 2 percent rejection for travel for non-immigrant applicants." Secretary of State Kerry then stated that he was "not in favor of waiving that" current standard for Israel or any other country.

In opposing this bill, we agree with Rep. Keith Ellison that "American citizens deserve to travel without fear of being turned away based on their race, religion, or countries they have visited. Denying law-abiding citizens does nothing to advance understanding between countries or the cause of peace."

Even Sen. Barbara Boxer, the sponsor of the bill, admits that "Israel rejects so many people" from entering. However, far from fixing this problem, S.462 would only exacerbate it by allowing Israel to continue its discrimination against U.S. citizens.

Rather than carving out yet another exemption in the law for Israel to attain special treatment afforded to no other country by passing S.462, we instead urge the Senate to hold Israel accountable for consistently violating the terms of the 1951 U.S.-Israel Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation. Article II of this treaty states: "Nationals of either Party shall be permitted to enter the territories of the other Party and to remain therein," and "Nationals of either Party, within the territories of the other Party, shall be permitted: (a) to travel therein freely, and to reside at places of their choice."

Consequently, we urge you to withdraw your co-sponsorship of S.462.

National Organizations

American Arab Antidiscrimination Committee

American Friends Service Committee

Council on American Islamic Relations

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Interfaith Peace Builders

Jewish Voice for Peace

National Lawyers Guild

Peace Action

US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation

Local/Regional Organizations

| Americans for a Just Peace in the Middle East | Friends of Sabeel-Colorado IDAP - Interdenominational Advocates for |
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| Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights | Peace Interfaith Peace-Builders |
| Another Jewish Voice of Santa Fe | Jewish Voice for Peace |
| Bay Area Labor Committee for Peace and Justice | Jewish Voice for Peace - Bay Area |
| | Jewish Voice for Peace - Portland |
| Bay Area Women in Black | Jewish Voice for Peace- DC Metro |
| Benedictine U. Law Faculty | Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical Council |
| Citizens for Justice in the Middle East Kansas City | Justice First Foundation |
| CNY Working for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel | LA Jews for Peace |
| | Madison-Rafah Sister City Project |
| Committee for Palestinian Rights | Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns |
| Dominican Sisters of Mission | Middle East Peace Now |
| Ecumenical Peace Institute | MidEast: JustPeace |
| Minnesota Peace Project | Sabeel DC Metro (FOSNA) |
| Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility | United Methodist Task Force on Peace with Justice in Palestine/Israel |
| NH Veterans for Peace | University of Denver Students for Justice in |
| North Coast Coalition for Palestine | Palestine |
| North Texas BDS | Uthans for a Just Peace in the Holy land |
| Palestinian Rights Committee | Vancouver for Peace |
| Peace & Social Justice Center of South Central Kansas | Vermonters for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel |
| Peace and Freedom Party Santa Cruz | Winston Salem Friends Meeting |
| County | Women in Black |
| Red Wing Alliance for Peace | 14 Friends of Palestine |
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