



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504
<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

July 28, 2015

His Excellency
Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister of Israel

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu:

I write today to urge your government to halt its efforts to demolish the Palestinian West Bank village of Susiya. Demolishing Palestinian homes, displacing residents, and seizing additional Palestinian territory in the West Bank is a step away from peace. To preserve land for a future Palestinian state, your government must not destroy Susiya.

As you know, the Palestinian village of Susiya is on private Palestinian land within "Area C" of the West Bank, which is under the civil and administrative control of the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA). The village has existed in the South Hebron Hills at least since the 1830s and its residents have traditionally subsisted by shepherding and growing olive trees.

Since the Israeli settlement of Susiya was established in 1983, the ICA has repeatedly demolished Palestinian homes and displaced Palestinian villagers. For instance, in 1986, 60 families were forcibly displaced when Israeli authorities declared the area an archeological site. According to the residents, they did not receive compensation. In 2002, an Israeli settlement outpost, the Susiya Synagogue, was established in the same area.

In July 2001, Israeli soldiers destroyed Palestinian property, demolished their cave dwellings and blocked their water cisterns after Palestinians killed Israeli Yair Har Sinai, a resident of the Susiya settlement.

Israeli authorities have defended these actions by noting that the residents lacked a permit to construct homes and livestock shelters in the first place. Yet, as you know, the residents have made good-faith efforts to inhabit their homes

legally. For instance, in October 2013, the ICA rejected a proposed master plan drafted with the support of an Israeli NGO, Rabbis for Human Rights, which would have allowed Susiya's residents to build homes legally and connect to the available water and power grids.

The only way to preserve Israel as Jewish, democratic state is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state by its side. That is why I have repeatedly urged successive Israeli governments to halt settlement construction and growth on land that could become part of a future Palestinian state. Settlement activity directly imperils even the possibility of resuming negotiations, let alone establishing a sovereign Palestine.

Instead of taking action to demolish the village, the ICA should reexamine its decision to deny Susiya's petition for a master plan so that the area's Palestinian villagers can live in peace and with legal certainty. I fear that uprooting Susiya's residents before the world's attention would only further isolate Israel, increase tension with the Palestinians and provoke unnecessary violence.

We both care deeply about Israel and its future. So, for the sake of a future Israel that is secure, democratic and Jewish, I ask that you reconsider your government's stance toward Susiya. The world is watching, and I believe it is in Israel's best interests to respect the dignity of the people of Susiya and refrain from inflammatory or provocative action.

Sincerely,


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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