September 19, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you prepare to attend the United Nations General Assembly, we write to address the issue of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. At a time of great challenges in the Middle East, we are disappointed that talks between Israelis and Palestinians remain stalled. The only way to resolve the conflicts between the two is through direct negotiations that lead to a sustainable two-state solution with a future state of Palestine living in peace and security with Israel. This outcome would provide Israel with greater security and strengthen regional stability. We remain optimistic that, under the right circumstances, Israelis and Palestinians can successfully resume productive negotiations toward this goal.

At this delicate stage the international community should both provide hope to the parties and avoid taking action that would harm the prospects for meaningful progress. Even well-intentioned initiatives at the United Nations (UN) risk locking the parties into positions that will make it more difficult to return to the negotiating table and make the compromises necessary for peace. The United States remains an indispensable trusted mediator between the parties, and we must continue to insist that neither we nor any other outsider substitute for the parties to the conflict.

Your administration has consistently upheld the longstanding U.S. policy of opposing — and if necessary vetoing — one-sided UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. As U.S. Ambassador to the UN, the Honorable Susan Rice summarized your Administration’s position well when she exercised America’s veto on a February 2011 resolution: “It is the Israelis’ and Palestinians’ conflict, and even the best-intentioned outsiders cannot resolve it for them. Therefore every potential action must be measured against one overriding standard: will it move the parties closer to negotiations and an agreement? Unfortunately, this draft resolution risks hardening the positions of both sides. It could encourage the parties to stay out of negotiations and, if and when they did resume, to return to the Security Council whenever they reach an impasse.”

Mr. President, you also clearly stated in your September 2011 address to the General Assembly, “Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations — if it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians — not us — who must reach agreement on the issues that divide them…. Ultimately, peace depends upon compromise among people who must live together long after our speeches are over, long after our votes have been tallied.”
We could not agree more with these statements. We urge you to continue longstanding U.S. policy and make it clear that you will veto any one-sided UNSC resolution that may be offered in the coming months. Any such resolution, whether focused on settlements or other final status issues, will ultimately make it more difficult for Israelis and Palestinians to resolve the conflict.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

M. Michael Rounds  
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

Kelly Ayotte  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Mike Crapo  
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

Roy Blunt  
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

Susan Collins  
United States Senator

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

Mark Kirk  
United States Senator
Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

Bill Nelson
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator

John Cornyn
United States Senator

Thom Tillis
United States Senator

Michael Lee
United States Senator

Richard Burr
United States Senator

Orrin Hatch
United States Senator

Cory Gardner
United States Senator

John Boozman
United States Senator
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator

David Vitter  
United States Senator

Patty Murray  
United States Senator

Lamar Alexander  
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

Jeff Sessions  
United States Senator

Claire McCaskill  
United States Senator

Roger Wicker  
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

Thad Cochran  
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

Dan Sullivan  
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Bill Cassidy  
United States Senator