

Press Statement

**New (Illegal) U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem Impotent
To Serve U.S. Citizens Under Israeli Jurisdiction**



(Ramallah, Oct. 20, 2019) – As Trump is nearing impeachment and many in his Administration are jumping ship, one landmark policy action he recently took in the Middle East seems all but forgotten by Americans -- except by those U.S. citizens living or visiting Israeli-occupied Palestine. We know this because we, the Right to Enter Campaign, are a grassroots campaign for the protection of residency rights and foreign passport holders residing in and/or visiting the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

A little over a year ago, Trump moved the U.S. Embassy in Israel, which was located in Tel Aviv, to Jerusalem, a city which is, according to international law, not part of Israel's sovereign territory, and which is belligerently occupied by Israel. Not only did this embassy move reverse longstanding U.S. policy, it was made in clear violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 478 (1980) which rejected Israeli annexation of Jerusalem. This resolution explicitly calls on "All Member States to accept this decision," and called on "Those States that have established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions from the Holy City."

Accompanying the moving of the embassy was the closure of the historic U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, which was founded in 1844 and mainly served the Palestinian population and U.S. citizens living or visiting the occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. These citizens, many unable to reach the new embassy due to Israeli travel restrictions, are, in large effect, denied its services and protection.

Meanwhile, US citizens are among the largest national groups affected by Israel's essential freezing of family unification for almost twenty years now -- a policy that means an estimated 25,000 foreign nationals married to Palestinians are forced to choose between separating from their families, uprooting them from their homes, or living with them under constant threat of deportation. Over the past several years, US citizens seeking to work, study or visit the West Bank have also faced an escalation in arbitrary restrictions on visas or outright

denial of entry into the occupied-West Bank at the hands of Israeli authorities. This de-facto policy of hindering access to the oPt reaches well beyond those directly affected by visa denials -- it has broad socio-economic, political and humanitarian impacts on an entire society. At the time of writing, one Palestinian university alone reports it has lost one-third of its international faculty since last year and 60% of its international faculty currently in the country face significant, arbitrarily issued visa conditions and restrictions, with US citizens constituting half of the affected academics.

Recent email replies from the U.S. Embassy to affected US citizens reveal volumes regarding a U.S. foreign policy gone astray. While the current U.S. Administration has obliged a fanatic right-wing Israeli government with its most outrageous requests (closing the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem and moving the U.S. Embassy are just two of many examples), that same Administration is completely impotent to serve the interests of its own citizens in Israeli-occupied territory. Rather, like prior U.S. Administrations, the Trump administration is not even able to get the Israeli authorities to reply to inquiries on behalf of its own citizens. The U.S. has failed to secure satisfactory resolution to multiple complaints of arbitrary and discriminatory visa procedures and treatment of its citizens at Israeli-controlled borders for well over a decade.

In one recent reply, a consular official addressed a U.S. citizen about their extreme difficulties in “renewing visas to enter and reside in the West Bank”; these visas are issued by Israel which controls all borders into the Palestinian areas. The consular official wrote, "We understand the frustration, financial burden and inconvenience you are experiencing with the visa process. We have raised this issue with the Government of Israel and requested clarification regarding the current policy on visa applications and renewals for the West Bank, as well as procedures for residence and work permit renewals. To date, we have not received a response.”

Does the Trump administration know that its US embassy is currently impotent? It seems not. The same U.S. that grants Israel over \$4 billion annually—just to note one of the many handouts to Israel billed to U.S. taxpayers—is unable to receive a clear answer (or any answer at all) from Israel on what policies are applied by Israel to U.S. citizens seeking visas or work permits.

U.S. citizens will not find comfort in their embassy communicating that they should "Rest assured that [the U.S. Embassy Jerusalem] will continue to make inquiries and will share the information with you and other American citizens when it becomes available." After more than a decade, no one can expect that the embassy is serving the interests of its citizens.

Another U.S. citizen was informed by consular officials that, “Visa and border decisions are solely within the sovereign jurisdiction of the State of Israel and we are not able to intercede in individual cases. Please note that we made inquiries on the subject however, we have no information to share.” The Trump administration’s blindness (maybe ignorance) to the fact that the Palestinian territory is not “within the sovereign jurisdiction of the State of Israel” will not surprise anyone following the havoc this administration has brought on the U.S. standing in in the region, as well as domestically.

For nearly fourteen years, RTE has worked closely with the US Consulate in an effort to protect US citizens and ensure the US meets its domestic and international obligations. Since that time, we have called on the US to secure Israel’s implementation of the rights to family unity and family reunification and the establishment of a clear and transparent policy and corresponding procedures for foreign nationals seeking to maintain a presence in the oPt in keeping with international law. In the face of Israel’s intransigence with impunity, our demands have not changed and our efforts continue.

On this occasion, however, we will not even bother to appeal to or demand anything from an Administration which has sold out the U.S. to a right-wing fanatic Israeli government. Instead, as we await Trump’s impeachment to take its course, we will continue to work with U.S. civil society and to urge elected U.S. officials to comply with international law, U.S. law, and sheer common sense. It is long past time for the U.S. to hold Israel accountable for how it treats U.S. citizens, including by applying reciprocity to Israeli citizens visiting the U.S. if Israel continues to subject U.S. citizens and their families to discriminatory treatment and to arbitrarily hinder them from visiting, working or residing in the occupied Palestinian territory.

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