

agreed to, and the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the Rodriguez nomination, upon reconsideration; further, that if cloture is invoked, all time be considered expired at 2 p.m.; that following the confirmation vote, the Senate resume legislative session for the consideration of Calendar No. 340, S.J. Res. 62, that the motion to proceed be agreed to and the Senate immediately vote on passage of the joint resolution; that upon disposition of the joint resolution, the Senate resume executive session and resume consideration of the Schydlower nomination; finally, that if any nominations are confirmed during Thursday's session, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of Senator SANDERS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

ISRAEL

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, we are currently witnessing one of the worst humanitarian disasters in modern history, and the United States is complicit. Anyone who turns on the television or opens a newspaper can see the unbelievable devastation now taking place in Gaza. We can see—if we choose to see—the images of starving, emaciated children. And that is because one of our closest allies, Israel—a country we have poured tens of billions of dollars into—has created a situation in which hundreds of thousands of people are slowly starving to death.

The United States of America cannot—and must not—be complicit in this unspeakable tragedy. We cannot be complicit in starvation as a military strategy. We cannot be complicit in the physical and emotional destruction of an entire generation of beautiful Palestinian children.

For months, the United Nations and other aid organizations have warned about imminent starvation and possible famine in Gaza. And now that is exactly what is happening.

How did we get to this point? How have we—the Congress of the United States—allowed this situation to reach this point?

Nobody disputes that Hamas—a terrorist organization—started this war with its barbaric, brutal attack against Israel on October 7, which killed 1,200 innocent people and took more than 250 hostages.

And as I have consistently said, Israel had the right to respond to that

attack and go to war against Hamas. But it did not—and it does not—have the right to go to war against the entire Palestinian people, which is exactly what it has done and what it is doing right now.

Almost 32,000 Palestinians have been killed, and almost 74,000 have been wounded, two-thirds of whom are women and children. So 1.8 million Palestinians—80 percent of the population of Gaza—have been driven from their homes. Nearly 70 percent of the housing units and more than half of all buildings in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed. Nothing has been spared—not refugee camps, not schools, not hospitals, not U.N. facilities. All have been bombed.

In the wake of the Hamas attack, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant declared a total siege of Gaza. He said:

We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly . . . There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed.

Well, he has kept his word. In many parts of Gaza today, there is no electricity or fuel. Hospitals have been destroyed, and water infrastructure has been made inoperable.

Israel has also blocked communications networks, making it impossible for humanitarian organizations to safely coordinate aid deliveries.

In this context, over 4 months ago in November, the U.N. first began to warn of severe shortages of food and water in Gaza—4 months ago—and of the imminent risk of starvation and possible famine. And aside from a brief pause in the fighting in late November which allowed aid to come in, very little has changed.

In December, the U.N. reported that Israel's blockade of food and water meant that a quarter of the population of Gaza—over half a million people—were one step away from famine.

In January, Senators VAN HOLLEN and MERKLEY went to the Rafah Crossing from Egypt to learn what was preventing humanitarian aid from getting into Gaza. They saw miles of trucks waiting, often for weeks, to be cleared by the Israelis.

They reported that trucks are unloaded and reloaded repeatedly. And if a single item is rejected, the entire cargo must start the weeklong process all over again.

And they heard about items being rejected for no reason, such as tents, medical kits, and water filters. In other words, our colleagues saw a process that was completely broken and no Israeli interest in fixing it, despite the profound humanitarian crisis that was developing.

It is difficult to look at these facts and not see, at worst, an intentional Israeli effort to starve the people of Gaza of what they need to survive and, at best—at best—a complete disregard for Palestinian lives.

And sure enough, in January, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said at a press conference that “we provide minimal humanitarian aid. . . . If we

want to achieve our war goals, we give the minimal aid.”

The situation, as a result, has continued to get worse and worse and worse. In the north, almost no humanitarian aid has gotten through in February. The Israelis rejected most U.N. attempts to deliver aid to the north and then began actually targeting the police who escort U.N. aid trucks. Amid the desperation of north Gaza, this has led to incidents in which hundreds of starving Palestinians, desperate to secure food, were shot by Israeli troops or trampled in the chaos.

For 3 weeks now, reports have emerged of people eating leaves and animal feed to try to stay alive, and the first long-feared reports are coming in of children dying from malnutrition and dehydration.

A few aid convoys are now getting through to the north. Under intense U.S. pressure, Israel has allowed about half—half—of the requested humanitarian missions to proceed in recent weeks. But that is still nowhere near enough to reverse months of starvation and stave off a wave of deaths from malnutrition, dehydration, and preventable diseases.

Earlier this week, the U.N. and other humanitarian NGOs released a new version of their most comprehensive assessment of the food crisis, called the IPC. I would just like to read the headline here.

Famine is imminent as 1.1 million people, half of Gaza, experience catastrophic food insecurity.

That is the headline. The report goes on to say that “extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality [are] imminent for more than two-thirds of the people in the north.” And that is a technical way of saying that more than 200,000 people are now starving to death and that if nothing changes, more than a million people could starve.

At least 31 people, including 27 children, have already died of starvation and dehydration. And the real total is much likely higher, as aid organizations and medical teams are unable to reach the hardest hit areas.

UNICEF said on Friday that nearly one in three children under 2 years of age in northern Gaza suffers from acute malnutrition.

We put billions and billions of dollars into Israel year after year. And today, nearly one in three children under 2 years of age in northern Gaza suffer from acute malnutrition.

Once a young child reaches that point, it is very difficult to reverse the process. The child's body consumes itself from within, and only through careful medical treatment can they be saved—treatment that is impossible without a functioning healthcare system, a system that certainly does not exist in Gaza today.

Let me repeat. We can hide our eyes. We can talk about a million other things. We can talk about this and that and everything else. But right now, the

reality is that tens of thousands of children are dying slow, painful deaths. And we are complicit in that reality.

All of this is preventable. As of yesterday, 1,200 trucks were waiting to enter Gaza—more than 800 of which were carrying food supplies. Hundreds and hundreds of trucks carrying food is sitting just a short distance from starving children. And yet the United States and other countries have had to resort to dropping supplies. They are trying to find ways to deliver aid by sea. In other words, we have put billions of dollars of aid—military aid—into Israel, and we are now trying to figure out a way to get beyond Israel's blocking at the borders by dropping food in the air or coming in through the sea, all of which is very expensive and very inefficient.

These contortions are absurd. There is no reason as to why trucks should not be able to drive across the border into Gaza, including through crossings in the north.

Looking at the situation this week, the U.N. senior human rights official said that "Israel's continued restrictions on entry of aid into Gaza . . . may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war"—starvation as a method of war—"which is a war crime."

The President of the United States, the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor—the whole U.S. Government—has been begging the Israeli government to change their approach for months now. Aside from opening one border crossing, there is nothing to show for all of that begging.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has taken the billions of dollars in military aid that American taxpayers have given him. He has taken our bombs and military equipment, and he has done exactly what he wants to do. We give him the money. We tell them what we think is right. He ignores us. He does what he wants to do.

Far from flooding the zone with aid—which has been the United States' position. We want to flood the zone with humanitarian aid, as is, in fact, necessary to avert mass death from starvation, dehydration and disease. The Israelis, this week, denied entry to Gaza for the head of UNRWA, the backbone of the humanitarian aid operation there.

Indeed, attacking UNRWA seems to be a primary concern of the Israeli Government. Tens of thousands of people are starving. UNRWA is trying to feed them, and the Israeli Government and its allies, like AIPAC, spend much of their time lobbying to defund UNRWA, the major organization which is feeding starving people.

Sadly, tragically, many Members of Congress seem to be happy to be part of this starvation caucus, happy to cut

funding for UNRWA and make it harder to get aid to Palestinians in the midst of this crisis.

Mr. President, as you know, the Senate passed a supplemental bill prohibiting funding to UNRWA against my vote, and it seems likely that the House will soon pass an appropriations bill containing additional provisions to defund this agency.

Israel has said that 12 UNRWA employees were involved in the October 7 attack. These are serious charges, and they are being investigated in a serious way. UNRWA immediately fired the accused employees, and the U.N. launched an investigation, as it should. I should note, by the way, that Israel has refused to cooperate with the U.N. investigation.

UNRWA plays a critical role in getting desperately needed humanitarian aid to millions of Gazans, and it is essential to regional stability, not only in Gaza but in Jordan and in neighboring countries. Whatever the outcome of this investigation, you do not starve millions of people and hundreds of thousands of children because of the alleged actions of 12 UNRWA employees out of a workforce of 30,000.

We should remember, by the way, that the Israeli military has killed 171 U.N. staff since this war began. But somehow my colleagues here in Congress—or many of them—seem not to pay much attention to that.

I think that all over this country, there is a lot of anguish in the hearts and the souls of American people. Whether you are a conservative Republican, whether you are an Independent, whether you are a progressive, you do not want to see hundreds of thousands of children starve to death while food trucks sit a few miles away. I don't think there are many Americans who want to see that.

The American people do not want to see a situation in which a longtime American ally, Israel, is using U.S. weapons and equipment to block the delivery of U.S. humanitarian aid, which, by the way, is against the law. Any country that blocks American humanitarian aid, by law, should have its funding ended.

The American people, in my view, no matter what your politics may be, do not want to be complicit in the slaughter of small kids who are bombed to death while they sleep.

The American people, in my view, do not want us to continue funding Netanyahu's cruel war.

I think maybe it is time we start listening to the American people. In my view, when we listen to the American people, what we have to do is stop begging the Israeli Government to end this humanitarian disaster. We have to stop begging them, and we have to start telling them that if they want U.S. aid,

they are going to have to fundamentally change what they are doing.

The fact of the matter is—and no one disagrees with this—that if you want the kind of aid that is needed to prevent the starvation that is taking place, what you need is a massive process of sustained ground deliveries. That means many, many, many hundreds of trucks every single day getting into Gaza and going into the most desperate areas. If you want to feed people, that is the only way you can do it efficiently.

Israel must open the borders and allow the U.N. to deliver supplies in sufficient quantities throughout all of Gaza. Israel must stop military operations—cease fire—to allow that to happen.

The bottom line here is that the United States must make it absolutely clear to the rightwing, extremist Israeli Government led by Netanyahu that failure to open up access immediately, failure to allow starving children to get the food they need and the medical equipment they need will result in the complete shutoff of the full range of American assistance to Israel.

The American people are not stupid. They understand that you can't go around criticizing Netanyahu, attacking Netanyahu, doing this and doing that and then say: Oh, by the way, we were just kidding, because here is your check for \$10 billion to continue your military assault against the Palestinian people.

History will judge what we do right now. History will judge whether we stand with starving children, whether we uphold American values or we provide massive aid to a war machine that is operating in an unbelievably barbaric way.

Mr. President, the United States must make it clear: not another nickel for Netanyahu's war machine.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 6:59 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, March 21, 2024, at 10 a.m.

CONFIRMATIONS

Executive nominations confirmed by the Senate March 20, 2024:

THE JUDICIARY

EUMI K. LEE, OF CALIFORNIA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA.

EDWARD SUNYOL KIEL, OF NEW JERSEY, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY.