

Equal access to justice is essential for lasting peace in the Middle East. Today, I voice a concern shared by many of my colleagues: the incarceration, prosecution, and punishment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military justice system.

As a former public defender and member of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution, which has jurisdiction over human rights, I have a perspective on the way justice systems should treat children. To put it categorically, civilians, and especially children, should not be prosecuted in military courts. It is analogous to how I feel about child soldiers; children should not be recruited or allowed to serve in the armed forces.

The reasons should be obvious. Civilians are, by definition, noncombatants. Military justice systems lack independence and routinely fall short in providing the fundamental protections of due process and a fair trial that exist in the civilian justice system and which are rooted in international law.

Israel, however, automatically and systematically prosecutes Palestinian civilians in the West Bank in Israeli military courts under Israeli military law. These courts lack impartiality and transparency, as military court judges and military court prosecutors are active or reserve duty officers in the Israeli military and subject to the chain of command.

To make the process even less credible, in the West Bank Israeli military law only applies to the Palestinian population, while Israeli citizens have the benefit of the protections of Israeli civil law and courts. This double standard is glaringly inconsistent with the principle of equal justice that is foundational to a democracy.

According to numerous credible reports, Palestinian children are frequently arrested in their homes by heavily armed Israeli soldiers. They are bound, blindfolded, and often beaten in military vehicles during transport before arriving at an Israeli police station for interrogation, which is often located in an Israeli settlement. They are routinely interrogated alone without the presence of a family member or attorney and often threatened with physical violence if they don't confess.

Nearly half of the approximately 350 Palestinian children currently detained by Israel are in administrative detention. Most have not been formally charged or brought to trial. When they are charged in military courts, they are overwhelmingly accused of throwing rocks. Rarely are they accused of causing injury or significant property damage. Generally, there is no evidence-gathering process by Israeli authorities for children who are charged in the military courts, so the crux of the case is the child's confession or a signature on a document in Hebrew they don't understand. There can also be an affidavit from an arresting soldier or intelligence officer or an in-

criminating statement made against the child by another child who was also arrested and accused in connection with the same alleged incident.

Only a small percentage of Palestinian children in the military courts are released on bail. Custodial pre-trial—and often pre-charge—detention is the norm. Almost all prosecutions of children in military courts are resolved with plea agreements, which are the fastest way for a Palestinian child to be released from detention. Entering a not guilty plea is rare, and contesting a charge in the military courts means legal proceedings can be long and drawn out. To put it bluntly, punishment, not justice, is the goal of the military courts. The system is stacked unfairly against the child defendant, whose family is not even allowed to be present during court hearings, so irrespective of the facts or the reliability of the confession, pleading guilty in return for the shortest time in jail—which can still mean weeks or months or even years—is the norm.

I think of Mohammed Ibrahim, a Palestinian American who was detained for nearly 10 months after being arrested at the age of 15 in his home at 3 in the morning by heavily armed Israeli soldiers. He described being bound and beaten while being transported and threatened while being interrogated without the presence of a family member or an attorney. U.S. Embassy officials who visited him most recently in November described obvious deterioration in his mental and physical condition.

Mohammed's case fits the pattern, except that he is an American citizen. Putting aside that his confession may have been coerced, even if everything he was accused of—throwing stones that caused no harm—were true, it is unconscionable that he was abused and detained for months. He was deprived of adequate food and reportedly lost a third of his body weight. Senator VAN HOLLEN, I, and other Members of Congress repeatedly raised concerns about him, and thankfully, on Thanksgiving Day, he was released. It is now the Israeli Government's obligation to hold accountable the soldiers who beat him and the jailers who mistreated him.

Israeli authorities have defended this inherently flawed and discriminatory system as a necessary response to an ongoing state of hostilities. There are at least three problems with that argument:

First, these are children. Children do not belong in military detention or military courts, and the fact that they are caught in the middle of a decades-long conflict doesn't change that. A child does not become an armed combatant deserving of prosecution and punishment in the military justice system because of throwing a stone that causes no injury. Yet that is the reality for Palestinian children in the West Bank.

Second, administrative detention, compounded by physical and psycho-

logical abuse and humiliation of Palestinian detainees and the lack of due process that is endemic in the military justice system, have long-lasting impacts on a child. They have difficulty re-entering and continuing school, face increased restriction on freedom of movement, disruptions to family life, behavior and mental health issues, and it fuels resentment and hatred.

And third, Israeli settlers routinely and increasingly engage in provocations, threats, and violence—sometimes deadly violence—against Palestinians with impunity. These attacks and gratuitous destruction and theft of Palestinian property are often observed and tolerated by IDF soldiers. This too fuels hatred and more violence.

Absent a legitimate claim of self-defense, violence is wrong no matter who engages in it. But the incarceration, prosecution, and punishment of Palestinian children by Israeli military prosecutors and judges should stop. It is a flagrant violation of international law. It perpetuates an indefensible double standard of tiers of justice based on ethnicity, religion, and nationality. And by fomenting hatred, it makes Israel less secure.

Finally, it should stop because it reflects badly on the United States. The Israel Defense Forces are a major recipient of U.S. aid, and the United States should not explicitly or implicitly condone a flawed system of justice that systematically abuses and violates the rights of Palestinian children.

COMMEMORATING THE VISIT OF ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the visit of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the United States. As the spiritual head of the world's second-largest Christian Church, he is a significant figure for Orthodox Christians worldwide, including many within Nevada's nearly 10,000-strong Greek-American community. His visit is especially meaningful to that community and to all who look to him for guidance.

As he has done during previous visits, His All-Holiness met with the President in the Oval Office and with congressional leaders here at the Capitol, meetings that reflect the long-standing respect between our Nation and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Congress has also acknowledged his leadership in the past, awarding him the Congressional Gold Medal in 1997.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is the 270th Ecumenical Patriarch and the 269th direct successor of the Apostle Andrew. From Istanbul, he has spent decades building relationships across faiths, promoting what he calls "a dialogue of loving truth," and reminding the world that "War in the name of religion is war against religion."

I also want to note that during this visit, he received the Templeton Prize

in New York, a meaningful recognition of his work to encourage dialogue, understanding, and care for our shared humanity. He now joins distinguished figures such as the Dalai Lama and Jane Goodall.

I am pleased to recognize His All-Holiness's visit and the impact of his leadership, both globally and for the Greek-American community in Nevada and across the country.

TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL SHANNON "SOJU" BEERS

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I would like to recognize Lt. Col. Shannon Beers, known as "Soju," for his exceptional work as a defense fellow in my Senate office for the past year. For more than a decade, Lieutenant Colonel Beers has served his country with honor and distinction, both out in the field and most recently in our Nation's Capitol.

In 2008, Lieutenant Colonel Beers commissioned into the U.S. Air Force as a distinguished graduate of the ROTC program at North Carolina State University, where he received his Bachelor of Science in electrical and computer engineering. He went on to complete the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training in Texas before completing F-16 fighter aircraft training in 2011. Since that time, Lieutenant Colonel Beers has flown F-16s in the United States, Korea, Japan, Germany, Singapore, and Jordan.

From August 2011 to February 2013, Lieutenant Colonel Beers served as the F-16 flight lead and electronic combat pilot, 36th Fighter Squadron, at Osan Air Base in South Korea. He then went to Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, where he served as an F-16 flight lead and assistant chief of scheduling at the 79th Fighter Squadron, as well as an F-16 instructor pilot and wing electronic combat pilot at the 20th Operational Support Squadron. Lieutenant Colonel Beers was then stationed in South Korea from October 2015 to July 2016 as the scheduling flight commander of the 36th Fighter Squadron.

After graduating from the highly selective U.S. Air Force Weapons School, he returned to Osan Air Base in 2017 as the lead tactician of the 36th Fighter Squadron. While serving in South Korea, during a period of heightened tensions due to North Korea's multiple missile tests, he played a key role in the 36th Fighter Squadron's preparations for possible contingencies on the peninsula.

Next, Lieutenant Colonel Beers spent 2 years at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, where he led the tactical execution of the U.S. military's only evaluation program for air-to-ground weapon systems. While there, Lieutenant Colonel Beers was responsible for validating weapons requirements and testing weapon systems in possible combat scenarios. His work still impacts yearly technical publications and recommendations to the defense industry.

In 2020, after 12 years of Active-Duty service, Lieutenant Colonel Beers joined the D.C. Air National Guard full-time at Joint Base Andrews-Naval Air Facility Washington. He flew F-16 alert missions in defense of the National Capitol Region, playing an integral role in our Nation's defense. In 2022, Lieutenant Colonel Beers transitioned to the C-40C and has flown numerous executive airlift missions supporting U.S. diplomacy around the world.

Adding to this field experience, Lieutenant Colonel Beers also has an exemplary education record. Only the best Air Force pilots are selected to attend the USAF Weapons School, and Lieutenant Colonel Beers's graduation from the school further honed his tactical acumen and superior leadership skills. He also received a Masters of Science in aeronautical science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He also graduated from the Air Command and Staff College in 2023.

Given this impressive background, it is no surprise that Lieutenant Colonel Beers came highly recommended to my office. His defense expertise, vast experience, and desire to learn solidified his position as an invaluable member of my national security team. Aside from his tactical acumen, Lieutenant Colonel Beers is an honest, helpful, and generous person who is always willing to pitch in on any task. He quickly became a trusted adviser on all Air Force-related matters, especially concerning my duties on the Airland Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

During his year in the Senate, Lieutenant Colonel Beers staffed numerous high-level engagements and hearings, for which he provided top-quality preparation materials. He drafted various pieces of legislation for this year's National Defense Authorization Act, which will positively impact the military. He has also been instrumental in advocating for and ensuring the future of foreign fighter jet training at Ebbing Air National Guard Base, a top priority for Arkansas.

One of Lieutenant Colonel Beers's most significant contributions to both my office and the nation was his excellent work on the COUNTER Act. This crucial and timely legislation gives the military the necessary authority it currently lacks to protect our bases in the homeland from drone incursions. Lieutenant Colonel Beers's wide-ranging knowledge, deep understanding of technical details, and limitless perseverance through challenges were instrumental to the success of this effort.

Lieutenant Colonel Beers also played a major role in securing support for the Integrated Viper Electronic Warfare Suite. This package provides F-16s with essential electronic warfare capabilities, allowing for more effective operations against the latest generation of aircraft. Lieutenant Colonel Beers's diligent work and persistent efforts—which were reflected in both the One

Big Beautiful Bill passed earlier this year and in the National Defense Authorization Act—contributed to maintaining America's air superiority.

Finally, I cannot honor Lieutenant Colonel Beers without also thanking members of his family, specifically his wife Jenn, an Active-Duty Air Force Officer, and his father, a veteran of the U.S. Army. Their support, encouragement, and influence have helped to make Soju an exceptional servicemember, staffer, and leader.

Lieutenant Colonel Beers has had an impressive career, spanning the Air Force, the Air National Guard, and now, the legislative branch. It has been an honor to have him as part of our team for the past year.

Soju, thank you for your service to the United States and the State of Arkansas. May God continue to bless you and your family in all of your future endeavors.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING 3C ROOFING & CONSTRUCTION

• Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, as chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, each week I recognize an outstanding Iowa small business that exemplifies the American entrepreneurial spirit. This week, it is my privilege to honor 3C Roofing & Construction of Crawford County, IA, as the Senate Small Business of the Week.

In just a little over a year since opening their doors, Brendan and Amanda Allard, owners of 3C Roofing & Construction, have demonstrated how a young business can strengthen a community when it is built on compassion, integrity, and service. Named after their three sons, Caius, Callum, and Coe, the company carries the Allards' family values into every project. Though newly established, Brendan brings more than a decade of residential and commercial contracting experience, giving the company a solid foundation from the start. Today, 3C Roofing & Construction and their team of three provide roofing, coatings, repairs, siding, interior and exterior work, seamless gutters, and handyman services. The team has quickly earned a reputation for reliability across Crawford County.

What truly sets the company apart is the Allards' belief that their work extends beyond construction; they see their business as a way to support neighbors when they need it most, a belief that has shaped their actions from day one. When Crossroads of Crawford County began preparing for a fundraiser, the Allards immediately offered a substantial discount to ensure more resources went directly to families in need. Their commitment to the community was further demonstrated when a devastating house fire in Denison displaced a local family. Folks