

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 31, 2019

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We are writing with urgent concern over the humanitarian situation in northeast Syria. After the United States' abrupt abandonment of our Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) partners, all international aid operations are now at risk and thousands of civilians are fleeing from violence at the hands of Turkish-backed militias. It is critical that U.S. humanitarian assistance continues to reach these families who have fled across the Iraqi border. We therefore urge you to ensure that U.S. resources be made available for humanitarian organizations to evacuate personnel and continue assisting Syrian civilians inside Iraq.

As you know, more than 1.3 million people in northeast Syria are dependent on humanitarian assistance. U.S. assistance is channeled through international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) which deliver goods and services from Iraq into Syria via border crossing points at Semalka and Yarubiyeh. If access through these points is denied, all ability of international NGOs to deliver assistance into northeast Syria is at risk.

As a result of President Trump's reckless decision, Russia and Turkey will now dictate the terms of cross-border access. Under the terms of the October 22<sup>nd</sup> agreement between Turkey and Russia, "joint Russian-Turkish patrols will start in the west and the east of the area of Operation Peace Spring with a depth of 10 km, except Qamishli city." Furthermore, Russian military police and Syrian border guards will now "facilitate the removal of YPG elements and their weapons to the depth of 30 km from the Turkish-Syrian border." Under this description, it appears that the border crossings and Semalka and Yarubiyeh may fall under Syrian government control. If the SDF loses control of these crossing points, Assad's forces could terminate their use for cross-border humanitarian assistance, essentially ending the ability of humanitarian NGOs to work in northeast Syria. In other parts of Syria that Assad has retaken from opposition control, such as southwest Syria, the Syrian government eliminated cross-border access of NGOs which had delivered assistance across the border from Jordan for years. If a similar scenario plays out here, over one million Syrians could lose access to the humanitarian aid they depend on overnight.

As a result of Turkey's incursion into Syria, up to 200,000 Syrians have been displaced. At least 10,100 of those have crossed the border into Iraqi Kurdistan to escape the violence. Continued violence in northeast Syria may lead to even more Syrians crossing the border into Iraq. To prepare for this potential outcome, awards for humanitarian programming inside Syria should

also be made flexible to allow for that funding, in part or in whole, to be reprogrammed to cope with the humanitarian needs of an influx of Syrian refugees arriving in Iraq.

Moreover, Syrians employed by humanitarian NGOs could come under personal immediate threat of harassment, harm, imprisonment, or conscription by the Syrian government. These aid workers have risked their lives to work with NGOs, many implementing partners, and serve suffering Syrians throughout years of war. For those Syrian aid workers and their immediate family members who want to escape the threats from Assad's regime, the funding for U.S.-funded humanitarian assistance inside Syria should be made flexible so that it can also be used to cover the costs of their evacuation and relocation.

President Trump's decision not only abandoned our allies the Kurds to being slaughtered by Turkey, it puts at risk the entire international humanitarian aid operation in northeast Syria. We urge you to do everything in your power to mitigate this looming disaster.

Sincerely,



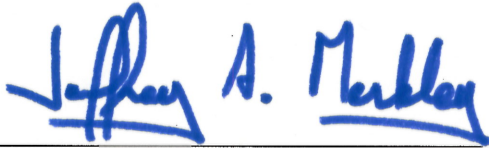
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Christopher S. Murphy  
United State Senator



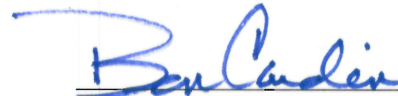
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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United State Senator



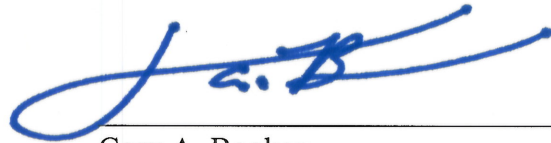
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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



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Jeanne Shaheen  
United State Senator



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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator