

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our serious concerns regarding the significant issues with management of the humanitarian supply network between Al Arish port and the Rafah Crossing at the Egyptian-Gaza border. These issues are reportedly preventing faith-based and international charitable organizations from effectively delivering aid to civilians impacted by the war in Gaza. It is clear to us that a more effective and efficient logistics chain is needed to improve the flow of humanitarian goods to the Rafah Crossing. Based on our consultations with a range of stakeholders, we are respectfully providing a set of recommendations for how the administration can work with Egypt to remedy this situation.

For months, international relief agencies, faith-based groups, and non-governmental organizations have struggled to navigate Al Arish port. The Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) is the sole entity designated with the authority to receive aid from these agencies, which has prevented other agencies from participating in their management and operations of the ports. Additionally, the ERC operates as a single entity charged with reviewing all aid requests but lacks an effective and fully-resourced reception system to manage the volume of requests from third party aid groups. There is also no system for how they are prioritized on the ground to cross the Rafah Gate, nor is there an effective system to locate shipments that reach Al Arish in the first place.

The problems extend beyond Rafah Crossing. Relief groups are permitted to sign temporary memorandums that consign their shipments over to the ERC for delivery at Kerem Shalom on the Israeli border, rather than painstakingly applying for an NGO designation that allows them to operate inside Egypt. But this process is arduous and limits their ability effectively track their own aid packages. While well intentioned, it has become clear that the ERC does not have sufficient technical expertise to run such a complex humanitarian intervention on their own, and Egyptian government concerns over working with outside experts is directly impacting civilian lives.

While we recognize it is unrealistic to completely overhaul the ERC's operation, we request the Department of State consider the following actions to support the Egyptian government and help the ERC to improve the process. We have developed this list through consultations with experts and numerous stakeholders on the ground.

1. Encourage Egyptian authorities to grant “provisional” registration for organizations filing for NGO status in Egypt, which would allow them to immediately operate on the ground as they pull together their application. The extra time it takes for applications to be processed only delays delivery of aid to civilians in Gaza.
2. Encourage Egyptian authorities to create a category of registration to allow aid groups to operate from Egypt if they have received U.S. Agency for International Development (“USAID”) funding. Organizations that have pre-cleared by the U.S. government should be given the opportunity to launch quick humanitarian response efforts.
3. Help the ERC to strengthen accountability and reporting systems and establish a specific point of contact assigned to each relief organization responsible for questions about their shipments and

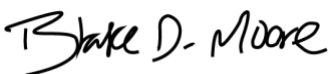
providing the relevant supporting documentation for the shipments' progress. This point of contact would best be based in Al Arish or Rafah and must stay up to date on the situation throughout the supply network.

4. Help the ERC to standardize its operating procedures and develop official terms of engagement consistent across all actors, including pricing structure, pre-determined supporting documentation, and standard operating procedures.
5. Help the ERC to provide transparency on how trucks are prioritized.
6. Allow international non-governmental organization staff to enter Al Arish to facilitate the reception and transport of goods in coordination with the ERC.
7. Allow international non-governmental organization staff to facilitate the transport of goods from Al Arish to screening areas with their contracted and vetted freight forwarding companies.

We also request that the Department of State deliver a formal briefing to the signatories of this letter regarding current efforts to resolve these challenges, with a focus on work done by U.S. Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs David M. Satterfield and his team.

We are grateful for President Biden's strong support for Israel as it defends itself from terrorism and commend the Israeli government for opening their Kerem Shalom entrance into Gaza in December to facilitate more aid. Though Israel, the United States, and Egypt have coordinated on providing for the humanitarian needs of civilians in Gaza amid Hamas' blatant disregard for human life and international law, we ask that you work with the Egyptian government to improve the ERC's ability to facilitate the swift transfer of aid. Egypt is an important global player and an important security partner for the United States. Their relationship with the Israeli government has played a valuable role in efforts to create stability in the region among a vexing humanitarian crisis. We hope that the United States can work effectively with the Egyptian government and ERC representatives to resolve these logistical challenges at Al Arish port and to ensure the timely and regular supply of aid to civilians suffering under Hamas's brutality.

Sincerely,



Blake D. Moore
Member of Congress



Adrian Smith
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress