

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman John Olver today applauded the Obama Administration for authorizing the use of \$20.3 million from the U.S. Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (



) Fund to address critical post-conflict humanitarian needs in Gaza.

On January 28, Congressman Olver spearheaded a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton requesting the State Department release ERMA funds for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. Sixty-three Members of Congress joined Congressman Olver as signatories to the letter.

Congressman John Olver said, “As is the case with any humanitarian crisis, time is of the essence. There is a dire need on the ground for food, fresh water, medical assistance and electricity. The longer the people of Gaza go without these essentials, the worse this tragic crisis will become. I am very pleased that the Administration recognized the urgency of our request and responded so decisively.”

Of the \$20.3 million in new ERMA funds, \$13.5 million will go to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), \$6 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and \$800,000 to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). These organizations are distributing emergency food assistance, providing medical assistance and temporary shelter, creating temporary employment, and restoring access to electricity and potable water to the people of Gaza.

The text of the 1/28/09 letter to Secretary Clinton follows:

Dear Secretary Clinton:

First, we would like to congratulate you on being sworn in as our nation's 67th

Secretary of State. We are very hopeful that this new era in American foreign policy upon which we embark can advance the cause of peace in the Middle East and beyond.

As strong supporters of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, we are writing to express our deep concern for the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and to request immediate action by the United States to address this crisis. With the ceasefire now in effect, it is critical that the United States play a leading role in alleviating the suffering of civilians in Gaza and we respectfully urge your assistance in this task.

As you know, the situation on the ground is dire. The flow of humanitarian goods into the Gaza Strip is limited to food and medicine. Yet there exists a real need to allow for the importation of construction materials and fuel, which require the opening of crossings into Gaza. For example, only the Karni Crossing has the capacity for transporting large cargo, such as cement, but it remains closed.

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In addition, in order to rebuild civilian infrastructure in Gaza the international community is going to have to make significant monetary contributions. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimates financial needs of nearly \$350 million just to rebuild their own infrastructure and continue providing essential services to the Palestinians in Gaza.

We als

o remain especially concerned about the desperate condition of medical services in Gaza.

Although Israel has begun to allow limited medical supplies into Gaza, the need far outweighs the availability while hospitals remain understaffed and ill-supplied. One of the most crucial steps that needs to be taken is for Israel to allow critically ill patients to be transported out of Gaza and into Israel, the West Bank and Jordan, where they may receive necessary medical care. We therefore urge you to express this concern directly to Israeli government officials.

In addition to the several thousand individuals who were physically injured during the recent military operations, we can expect to see a dramatic increase in the number of individuals suffering from psychological trauma. In order to help the population to begin rebuilding, we will need to further ensure that funds are used to provide adequate mental health services in Gaza.

Failure to address this humanitarian emergency has the potential to produce a crisis of even more unspeakable proportions. We therefore respectfully request that the State Department release emergency funds to UNRWA for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. We

believe the State Department can make funds available through accounts such as Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) and urge you to facilitate the transfer of funds as soon as possible

We look forward to maintaining a productive and ongoing dialogue with the State Department and the Obama Administration regarding the United States response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Toward that end we respectfully request that you or your staff share with us prior to Congress recessing on February 13, 2009, the actions taken to date and the strategy you will pursue to address the humanitarian crisis.

Finally, we know that addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole is a top priority of the Obama Administration and we applaud President Obama and you for your early and public commitment to meet this challenge. We also believe that the naming of former Senator George Mitchell as special envoy to the Middle East is commendable. We believe the security interests of both Israel and the United States will be greatly enhanced by the establishment of a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and that United States involvement is indispensable in achieving that goal. We stand ready to work with you as the Administration furthers these efforts.

Full List of Signatories to the Letter:

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