

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2018

His Excellency Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister of Israel

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

As Jewish Members of Congress who are committed to a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, we are writing with concerns over the decision to cancel an agreement with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to resettle half of the Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers who currently reside in Israel.

In recent months, many of us have heard from constituents who care deeply about Israel and who are also gravely concerned with respect to the future of the approximately 38,000 asylum seekers living in the Jewish State. As you are aware, most of the asylum seekers are from Sudan and Eritrea and cannot be returned to those countries because of international conventions preventing the repatriation of asylum seekers to home countries where they could face persecution.

We were heartened by the news that an agreement had been reached between Israel and UNHCR to resettle over the course of five years at least 16,250 of the asylum seekers in various Western countries and to allow the remaining individuals to stay in Israel. This appeared to provide a long-term solution for the Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers and those concerned about the development and rehabilitation of southern Tel Aviv. However, within a few hours, we were dismayed to hear that the agreement had been suspended, then cancelled, leaving the Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers in limbo with no clear next step.

We recognize that all countries must make difficult decisions regarding immigration that balance a variety of competing priorities. It is not our role as U.S. lawmakers to proscribe or even recommend a solution to the situation. However, we believe it is critical that any resolution is reached thoughtfully and ensures the safety and dignity of all those involved.

We deeply appreciate your attention to this issue and value every opportunity to engage with you during our visits to Israel and your visits to the U.S. and to express our solidarity with the Jewish state.

While we recognize the complexities of this situation, we were disappointed by the decision to cancel Israel's agreement with UNHCR, and we urge you to quickly find a solution that is in the best interest of both Israel and the refugees.


Sincerely,


Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress


Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress


Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

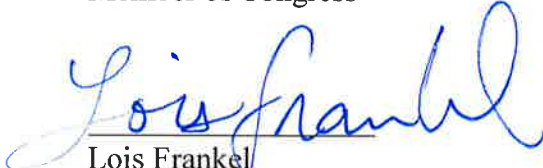

Sander Levin
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

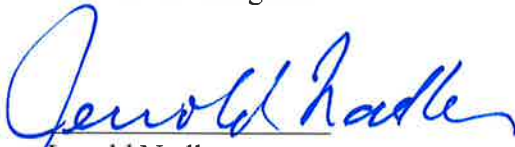

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Member of Congress



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