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February 23, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
United States Secretary of State
The State Department
2201 C Street Northwest Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

I am formally requesting information related to the State Department's response to the January 19, 2024 killing of U.S. citizen Tawfic Abdel Jabbar in the West Bank including what steps the Department has taken to ensure Israeli authorities conduct a thorough investigation into Tawfic's killing. You will find privacy release signed by Tawfic's father attached to this letter.

Tawfic Abdel Jabbar was shot and killed around 2:15 pm on January 19, 2024 in Al-Mazra'a Al-Sharqiya, east of Ramallah in the West Bank. He was 17 years old. The Palestinian civil society organization, Defense of Children International Palestine reported that Tawfic was in a truck when an Israeli settler, later joined by an Israeli Defense force vehicle, began firing at Tawfic's vehicle.¹ An Associated Press journalist viewed the truck after Israeli authorities inspected it and reported that it had been hit by ten bullets, most of them on the back windshield.² This supports the account of Mohammed Salameh who was in the car with Tawfiq at the time of the shooting. Salameh stated that the shooting was unprovoked.

The Israeli police issued a statement following the shooting indicating that the incident involved people engaged in "rock-throwing activities".³ Israeli police added that shooting "ostensibly involved an off-duty law enforcement officer, a soldier, and a civilian." In conversations with my staff, Tawfic's father, Hafeth Jabbar, insisted that his son was not involved in rock throwing and asked for help from the U.S. government in seeking justice for his son.

¹https://www.dcpalestine.org/israeli_settler_soldier_shoot_dead_17_year_old_palestinian_american_boy Defense of Children International Palestine: Israeli settler, soldier shoot dead a 17-year-old Palestinian American boy.

² <https://apnews.com/article/american-teen-shooting-death-west-bank-violence-1783ff3a7fa5f65f5b792372fd093445>

³ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/witness-says-fatal-shooting-of-american-palestinian-teen-in-the-occupied-west-bank-was-unprovoked>

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I appreciate the statements issued by John Kirby of the National Security Council and the State Department's Vendant Patel calling for an urgent investigation to determine the circumstances of Tawfic's death and accountability as appropriate. According to Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din, 93.7 percent of all investigations of violence against Palestinians in the West Bank are closed without an indictment⁴. Given this poor record of pursuing justice for crimes committed against Palestinians in the West Bank, I fear that simply asking for an investigation is not sufficient to ensure a just outcome for Tawfic's family.

U.S. citizens, regardless of any additional nationality they may hold, must not be killed with impunity. I urge the Department to make holding those accountable for Tawfic's killing a priority.

I request a briefing for my staff at whatever classification is appropriate about the actions the Department has taken related to this case and whether the Department plans to take any additional steps to independently assess the validity of an Israeli law enforcement investigation into Tawfic's killing.

Sincerely,
Chris Van Hollen



CC: Ambassador Jacob Lew

⁴ Yesh Din: Data Sheet, December 2023: Law Enforcement on Israeli Civilians in the West Bank (Settler violence) 2005-2023