

Congresswoman Cori Bush

## Remarks Introducing Ceasefire Now Resolution

Monday, October 16, 2023, at Virtual Press Call

We all are grieving at the profound loss of life that has occurred over the past 10 days. At least 2,700 Palestinians, 1,400 Israelis, and many Americans have been killed. Tens of thousands of people have been injured. Nearly 200 Israelis are being held hostage. Families have been destroyed, and Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Muslims, are facing unimaginable trauma as they navigate this horrific moment.

Adding to the crisis, the Israeli government has cut off electricity, food, fuel, internet—and up until yesterday clean drinking water—to Gaza. It has bombed neighborhoods and civilian infrastructure. It has ordered 1.1 million people—including those who are children, elderly, sick, injured, disabled, and pregnant—to leave their homes in Northern Gaza, and then bombed them as they evacuated.

Let me be clear: the collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza is a war crime. With a full-scale invasion of Gaza likely imminent, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of lives hang in the balance—and it's not only happening right before our eyes, it's happening with the support and power of the United States government. It's shameful. In addition to sharing my grief and sorrow, I want to affirm my strong belief that all human life is equally precious. A belief that above all else we must save lives; we must lead with love and solidarity; we must fight against violence and human suffering.

As a pastor, I'm reminded in this moment of Matthew 5:9, which says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." This Biblical call to facilitate reconciliation, not violence, could not be any clearer to me. [Add more here re: backing behind phrase] And this responsibility of peacemaking is not conditional. It's universal.

My beliefs are rooted in my experiences as an activist in the movement to save Black lives. Where everyday I marched and protested on the Ferguson Frontlines – frequently joined by my Jewish and Palestinian siblings, might I add – demanding an end to the violence, brutality and oppression that is killing Black people in America. My commitment to ending violence, brutality, and oppression is not conditional. It's universal.

My beliefs are also rooted in my experiences as a Congresswoman. My commitment to the people of Missouri's First District has always been to do the absolute most to save lives, starting with those with the greatest need. Over the past week, many of my constituents have called my office, leaving anguished voicemails urging me, urging all of us in Congress, to stop a humanitarian catastrophe in Palestine and Israel right now.

One of the constituent voicemails that play over and over in my head is from a woman who said, quote, *“I’m calling as a Jewish person. Even though I know it’s probably futile, I urge you to continue to advocate for a ceasefire and to advocate for the lives of Gazans.”* She then began to weep and hung up in tears. Our empathy and solidarity cannot be conditional. It must be universal.

This is why I’m so proud to be leading this resolution alongside my extraordinary and courageous colleagues today. Because I promised to save lives. Because I see the shared struggles between the people of Ferguson and the people of Palestine, between the people in St. Louis and the people in Israel. Because I preach the notability of peace. Because I’m against human rights violations wherever they occur. Because I’m against state-sanctioned violence wherever it happens. Because I want equality, justice, safety, and dignity for everyone. And because I have love for the Israeli and Palestinian people who are suffering because of this violence and the inability of our governments to resolve the root causes of systemic oppression, military occupation, and the crimes of apartheid.

You don’t have to be a pastor, or an activist, or a Congressperson, to understand the value of human life. You only need to be willing to choose the tougher course of love and peace over the easier path of hatred and violence. You must allow yourself to be consistent in your love and respect for humanity. You must not let yourself turn a blind eye to the mass murder of Palestinians, even as we strongly condemn Hamas for its appalling attack against Israelis last weekend. Together, we must work to end the violence in the short and long term.

Violence will never bring us peace. Violence leads to more violence. Together, we must be bold. We must stand on the side of humanity. We must stand on the side of justice. We must stand on the side of equality. We must stand on the side of self-determination. We must stand on the side of love. We must stand on the side of safety. We must stand on the side of peace. And we must be willing to speak out against war and violence—and against our government’s complicity in it.

In this moment, ask yourselves: are you for war or against war? Are you for saving lives or against saving lives? The time to decide is now.

Because we need a ceasefire NOW. We need peace NOW. The United States government has a responsibility to use every diplomatic tool we have to demand and mediate de-escalation, the safe return of hostages, and accountability for all perpetrators who dare violate international human rights laws.

You know, Dr. King was once denounced for daring to speak out against the Vietnam War. He said, quote:

*We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation and for those it calls "enemy," for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers.*

To my colleagues in Congress, I urge you to choose humanity. Choose peace. Choose love. Choose courage. Join this resolution now.

I'm so grateful to my colleagues and the advocates, faith leaders, organizers, affected people and families who are supporting this effort. Know that we will not back down until there is peace. We need a ceasefire NOW.

Thank you.

*\*\*Remarks as prepared for delivery\*\**