

JIM BANKS
THIRD DISTRICT, INDIANA



COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
STRATEGIC COMPETITION
BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE
CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1403

October 8, 2023

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

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, D.C., 20528

Dear Secretaries Blinken and Mayorkas,

I write to convey my urgent concern regarding Hamas's ongoing, unprovoked war against the State of Israel, and the acute threat the terrorist organization poses to millions of innocent Israeli citizens. As the United States continues to provide Jerusalem with the support it needs to defend itself against Hamas and other regional threats, I also urge the Departments of State and Homeland Security to expedite Israel's formal admission into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP), removing an extra hurdle for Israeli citizens looking to travel to America during this uncertain time.

As you know, the VWP allows citizens or nationals of participating foreign countries the ability to visit the United States for business or tourism on trips lasting 90 or fewer days. When this administration announced on September 27, 2023 that Israel would soon accede into the program, the administration noted that the designation would help both Israel and the U.S. "meet key national security goals."

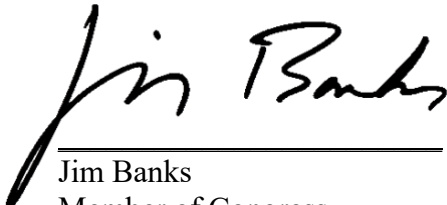
Currently, Israel's participation in the VWP is not formally slated to begin until November 30, 2023, well over 50 days from now. This timeline was made with the expectation that there would be no crisis which necessitated immediate visa-free travel. This expectation has clearly been overtaken by the tragic events since October 7. Israelis looking to travel to the United States are likely to face extraordinary circumstances, including ones that may prompt them to move their scheduled visits to the U.S. forward. For example, Israeli parents that only have relatives in the U.S. may be mobilized for military service but have no way to get their children visas in time to quickly send them to their American relatives.

To ease these logistical burdens, especially in light of the war that Hamas has thrust upon Israel, I strongly urge the administration to accelerate Israel's VWP accession so that visa-free travel from Israel to the U.S. enters into effect immediately. Such a move would be a small, but impactful step to provide respite to Israelis suffering as a result of Hamas's terror campaign and

would demonstrate America's enduring commitment to Israel at a time when such actions are needed to deter further attacks. Given that Israel's participation in the VWP has already been cleared, making that designation immediate would be a simple matter of moving up a timeline.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter. I look forward to your timely decision.

Sincerely,



Jim Banks
Member of Congress