

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2020

His Excellency Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister of Israel
c/o Embassy of Israel
3514 International Drive NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

We write to you regarding the ongoing attempts of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) to evict the Sumarin family from their home in East Jerusalem. We are gravely concerned that the Sumarins will be forced from their home, which the family has continually inhabited since 1950. Given that this case is ongoing during the global COVID-19 pandemic, we have additional concerns for the immediate safety of the family members should they lose their home.

Thirty years ago, JNF asked the Israeli government to seize the Sumarin family home based on Israel's Absentee Property Law, even though the family had the rightful title and were never absent. On May 23, 1991, without notification to the family, the property was purchased by JNF from the Development Authority in a land barter. In 1994, Judge Yehudit Tzur ruled that the declaration of the home as absentee property was unlawful and denied the claim for eviction, yet the land and the title to their home were never returned to the Sumarin family. The Israeli Government's Klugman Commission later noted "grave findings regarding the functioning of the Custodian of Absentee Properties," and pledged to end the use of the law but failed to apply the policy retroactively to past eviction cases.

On June 30, 2020, the Jerusalem District Court rejected the Sumarin family's appeal against eviction by JNF, requiring the family to vacate the home by August 16th. If the family does not comply, JNF can then ask for removal by force, a potentially explosive act in East Jerusalem. On August 5th, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case and issued a temporary order delaying the eviction.

We believe that the eviction of the Sumarin family and expropriation of their property sets a dangerous precedent that is detrimental to the stability of Jerusalem and further undermines the opportunity for peace. We are highly concerned that, if the government of Israel permits the

misapplication of the Absentee Property Law in the case of the Sumarin family, it could be further applied in areas that Israel might acquire through any future unilateral annexation of West Bank territories. We believe this could formalize the illegal expropriation of private Palestinian land on a massive scale.

As supporters of Israel as a democratic state, we urge you to consider the dangerous legal precedent and negative implications for future peace negotiations should this eviction go forward. We hope you share our concern and commitment to seeing that justice prevails in the Sumarin family's case.

Sincerely,

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Eleonor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

David E. Price
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress