

Senator Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

October 27, 2015

Dear Senator Feinstein,

I am writing as head of NGO Monitor ([www.ngo-monitor.org](http://www.ngo-monitor.org)), a Jerusalem-based research institute that analyzes the rhetoric, publications, and funding of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Also, as a professor of political science at Bar Ilan University, I examine NGO credibility, bias, and the implications for journalists and decision-makers who rely on these powerful but unaccountable political organizations.

I would like to raise concerns regarding your statements, Twitter posts (see appendix), and other activities you have undertaken surrounding the village of Susiya in the West Bank. These appear to reflect an unwarranted reliance on a number of highly biased political advocacy NGOs, including one that participates in the BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) campaign's efforts to isolate Israel politically, economically, culturally and militarily, and attack corporations that do business with Israel.

The reliance on these NGOs includes your July 28 letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu, social media posts, and sponsorship of a September 28 NGO briefing on Capitol Hill (see appendix). These activities raise major concerns regarding the absence of due diligence. Each item reflects the systematic bias and methodological failures of NGOs such as Rebuilding Alliance and B'Tselem.

- The California-based NGO known as Rebuilding Alliance (see appendix) claims to “ease trauma, build trust, [and] strengthen peacemakers.” But in their activities, leaders of this NGO frequently exploit the language of human rights and join anti-Israel BDS campaigns that demonize Israel.
- As documented in detail, B'Tselem also has a long history of using a biased approach to human rights and international law to promote a political agenda outside the Israeli democratic process. Reflecting its failures in Israel, B'Tselem's advocacy, which is largely funded by foreign governments, has used international platforms to promote its narrow agenda.<sup>1</sup>

In essence, your statements on Susiya reflect the tendentious allegations of these NGOs, erasing key facts that contradict their claims. It is regrettable that only one side of the Susiya story has been presented. I would kindly ask you to examine these omitted details, which can be found in decisions of the Israeli High Court of Justice, from the Israeli Embassy, and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

I would urge you to reexamine the details in the light of this information, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Gerald M. Steinberg  
President, NGO Monitor  
Professor of Political Science, Bar Ilan University

## Notes

1. NGO Monitor, "B'Tslem," [http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/b\\_tselem](http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/b_tselem). (accessed: October 27, 2015)
2. Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Behind the Headlines: Susiya," July 21, 2015, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Issues/Pages/Behind-the-Headlines-Susiya.aspx>. (accessed: October 27, 2015)

## Appendices: Tweets, Invitation to briefing, and Information on Rebuilding Alliance

### I. Senator Feinstein's Tweets from September 25, 2015

The screenshot shows a Twitter interface with a navigation bar at the top containing 'Home', 'Notifications', 'Messages', and the Twitter logo. A search bar is on the right. The main content area displays three tweets from Sen Dianne Feinstein (@SenFeinstein) dated Sep 25. The first tweet says: 'This summer I urged PM Netanyahu to halt efforts to demolish the West Bank village of Susiya. Read my letter: feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.c...'. The second tweet says: 'Plain and simple: Israel should not destroy these Palestinians' homes. It will only inflame an already difficult situation.' The third tweet is a promotional message: 'For more information on efforts to #SaveSusiya click here, via @btselem btselem.org/savesusiya/eng...'. Below this tweet, it shows 46 retweets and 41 favorites, with a row of profile pictures of users who interacted. A reply from Gerald M. Steinberg (@GeraldNGOM) dated Sep 27 is visible at the bottom, stating: '@SenFeinstein ICYMI @btselem = political advocacy NGO w/o credibility. Long'. The background of the tweets is a scenic view of the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco.

## II. Rebuilding Alliance's invitation to briefing

# Rebuilding Alliance



### Media Advisory

#### Contact:

Kelly Leilani Main

(650) 325-4663, [Contact@RebuildingAlliance.Org](mailto:Contact@RebuildingAlliance.Org)

### SEPT. 28: SEN. DIANNE FEINSTEIN SPONSORS BRIEFING FOR FAMILIES OF PALESTINIAN VILLAGES SLATED FOR DEMOLITION

#### Congress Urged to Make Calls Today to Safeguard Palestinian Villages of Susiya, Umm al Kheir

**Washington, DC** – As a follow-up to her tweets last Friday, the Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), is sponsoring a briefing on **Monday, Sept. 28 at 3 pm in the Dirksen Senate Office Building Room SD106** called, "[Face to Face with the Children of Palestinian Villages Slated for Demolition: Calls from Congress Keep their Villages Standing.](#)" The children of Susiya and Umm al Kheir will describe what peace means to them. Their parents, who hold clear and undisputed title to

their land, will describe what it is like to live under the threat of village demolition from Israel. The American nonprofit sponsoring the delegation, [Rebuilding Alliance](#), will urge members of Congress to make calls to the State Department and the Israeli Embassy today to stop the bulldozers.

Sen. Feinstein personally met with the delegation on Tuesday, Sept. 22, listened to their stories, asked the Palestinian children from Susiya and Umm al Kheir to sit in her desk chair, and gave them hugs. On Friday, Sept. 25th, Sen. Feinstein tweeted: "Plain and simple: Israel should not destroy these Palestinians' homes. It will only inflame an already difficult situation."

Sen. Feinstein's support follows her [July letter written to Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) in which she wrote: "Instead of taking action to demolish the village, the ICA [Israeli Civil Administration] should reexamine its decision to deny Susiya's petition for a master plan so that the area's Palestinian villagers can live in peace and with legal certainty."

The Palestinian village of Susiya, located near the city of Hebron in the south of the occupied West Bank, is currently home to 55 families who hold title to their land. Half of the homes in Susiya and all of the community's public structures are located in Area C where, according to the Oslo Accords, Israel was to hold only temporary control over planning and zoning. In 2013, as part of an extensive town planning program funded by the British, French and Belgians, Susiya submitted a professionally developed master plan to Israel's occupation authorities who rejected it, arguing that the villagers would be better off living somewhere else. With the help of the non-governmental organization Rabbis for Human Rights, the villagers petitioned the High Court of Israel to allow reconsideration of their master plan. Due to U.S. and international outcry, demolitions were forestalled. Negotiations with the Israeli army are now underway.

"When my family was forced from our homes in 1986, along with everyone in our village, we were devastated," said Fatma Nawaje, founder and Executive Director of the Rural Women's Association of the South Hebron Hills. "Our neighborhood never recovered. Don't let this happen again. We ask Americans to hear our story and urge their members of Congress to press Israel to recognize our right to plan our future on the land we own, just like people in towns everywhere else in the world."

It is nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain permits from Israeli authorities to build in Area C, part of Israel's policy of restricting the growth of Palestinian

population centers there while expanding Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. According to a new UN report, [Under Threat: Demolition Orders in Area C of the West Bank](#), the Israeli Army's Civil Administration has over 11,000 demolition orders currently pending against Palestinian homes, schools, barns, and water cisterns.

"We're especially concerned because on June 9th the High Court of Israel denied the right of Palestinian villages in the West Bank's Area C to plan their own communities, leaving all decisions on zoning and planning to Israeli occupation authorities with no direct Palestinian representation when it comes to the future of their towns," said Donna Baranski-Walker, Executive Director of Rebuilding Alliance. "Palestinian families are being denied building permits and issued demolition orders without any way to stop this. However, when Congress calls, the Israeli Embassy listens. Calls from Congress stop bulldozers. This summer, the outcry for Susiya including from members of Congress and the U.S. State Department, stopped the Israeli Army from demolishing their village in July. All that's needed is for constituents to ask their Senators and Representatives to make these calls, urgently, on their own behalf as constituents."

***Rebuilding Alliance is dedicated to rebuilding war-torn communities and bringing the world together to make them safe. Visit [our website here](#) for more information.***

### III. NGO Monitor analysis of Rebuilding Alliance

October 8, 2015

#### Rebuilding Alliance (RA)

- Website: <http://www.rebuildingalliance.org/>
- [Founded in 2003](#); operates in the United States as well as the West Bank.

- An American non-profit (501c3) “[dedicated](#) to rebuilding war-torn communities and making them safe.” Focuses solely on promoting the Palestinian narrative and cause.
- [According to its website](#), RA “believe[s] construction is the best response to destruction, that rebuilding projects ease trauma, build trust, strengthen peacemakers, advance law, and press officials forward in tangible ways.”
- Political Advocacy: Promotes destructive anti-Israel [BDS \(boycotts, divestment and sanctions\) campaigns](#) and is a [member](#) of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation.
- [Regularly lobbies](#) the U.S. Congress and State Department, promoting the Palestinian narrative of victimization and Israeli aggression.
- From June 22-26, 2015, RA travelled to Washington D.C., together with [Jewish Voice for Peace \(JVP\)](#), calling on “elected representatives to stand for peace and stand against the demolition of [Susiya](#),” disregarding the ruling of the Israeli Supreme Court that the village was built illegally, without permits or approved plans. (Under the Oslo framework, Israel is responsible for planning and construction in Area C, which is where Susya is located.)
  - JVP is highly active in anti-Israel BDS campaigns and considers itself the “[Jewish wing of the Palestinian solidarity movement](#),” seeking to create “[a wedge](#)” within the American Jewish community over support for Israel, while working toward the goal of eliminating U.S. economic, military, and political aid.
- Joined a 2015 “#OpenGaza” speaking tour with [Gaza Community Mental Health Programme \(GCMHP\)](#) and [Physicians for Human Rights- Israel \(PHR-I\)](#), which sought to “describe the dire situation of physical and psychological health in Gaza through a lens of personal experience.” An RA coordinator “help[ed] the audience learn a how to contact Congress to press for a tangible and immediate way... to work on the big policy goal of ending the blockade of Gaza,” altogether omitting that the purpose of the blockade is to prevent the illegal flow of weapons to Hamas and other terrorist groups that will later be used to target Israeli civilians.
  - Under the guise of medical expertise and scientific fact, [GCMHP](#) and [PHR-I](#) both make factually inaccurate claims based on fundamental methodological flaws, unverifiable information and skewed statistics.
- Publishes a [blog](#) with entries in both Hebrew and English, accusing Israel of “state terrorism,” “ethnic cleansing,” and “land theft.”
- [Executive Director Donna Baranski-Walker](#) authored a February 23, 2011 [article](#) in *The World Post* in light of Poland assuming the presidency of the European Union, maintaining that Poland “displays a blatant disregard for international law in her decision to meet [Israeli officials in Jerusalem] instead of in Tel Aviv.” The article echoes calls for Poland to “[c]ancel arms trade... because these weapons are used by the Israeli military against civilians”; “[p]romote an EU arms embargo on Israel” and “[s]end independent observers to monitor Israel’s human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.”

- Baranski-Walker signed a 2008 [“Mother’s Day” petition](#) to “boycott [] Israeli settlement-builder [Lev] Leviev,” claiming that “the only way to end the suffering of Palestinian mothers and their families is to boycott Israeli companies like Leviev’s that profit from the illegal activities of land confiscation and settlement construction.”
- RA was reportedly the “only American NGO to [send cargo](#) on the MV Rachel Corrie, one of the ships in the Freedom Flotilla that included the Mavi Marmara.” The flotilla sought to trigger a confrontation with the Israeli military by attempting to breach the blockade of Gaza.
- [Honored](#) former UN official Richard Falk, who has been widely denounced for his extreme anti-Israel and antisemitic beliefs, as well as the parents of [International Solidarity Movement \(ISM\)](#) activist Rachel Corrie, who was killed in a confrontation with the Israeli army, at its 2010 annual “Peacemakers” awards dinner.
- Baranski-Walker has connections to [known antisemite Paul Larudee](#) and his Free Gaza Movement and has advocated to Congress on his behalf, [saying](#): “I care about the Free Gaza Movement and the Americans, Internationals, Israelis, and Palestinians who worked together to steer their boats through international waters to break the siege of Gaza last month. My friend and Representative Lee’s constituent, Paul Larudee, was on one of those boats. It is important to recognize their nonviolent activism and urge an end to the collective punishment of 1.4 million people in Gaza and speak out against using blockades and siege as tools of diplomacy.” (emphasis added)
- Collaborates on projects and shares information with its partners, which include highly biased and politicized NGOs active in the Arab-Israeli conflict such as, [Yesh Din](#), [Bimkom](#), [Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center](#), [Combatants for Peace](#), and others.
- Funding: [2014 total revenue](#) of \$267,661 (accessed October 8, 2015). In order to raise funds, the group [has participated](#) in a [number](#) of Microsoft’s “[Youth Spark](#)” [competitions](#) that provides matching grants between organizations in the U.S. and “teams in Palestine” order to facilitate “educational, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities” for children and youth.