



United States Department of State

*Washington, D.C. 20520*

June 27, 2024

The Honorable  
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Sanders:

Thank you for your May 16 letter to Under Secretary Zeya regarding the October 13 strike in southern Lebanon that severely injured six journalists, including Mr. Dylan Collins, and killed Mr. Issam Abdallah.

Our hearts are with the journalists and their families who have lost their lives and suffered injuries over the course of the Israel-Hamas and Israel-Hizballah conflicts. Journalists like Mr. Collins who put their lives on the line to bring stories to the world deserve our admiration. We expect and continue to call on Israel to uphold its stated commitment to human rights, civilian protection, and press freedom. Far too many journalists and other civilians have been killed and injured since the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks.

We have no higher priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas. The Department became aware of the October 13 strike on that same day, and the American Citizen Services section at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut immediately reached out to Mr. Collins to offer assistance. We then worked immediately to gather additional information on reports of the incident, and our spokesperson noted on the day it occurred that “every day, we stand with journalists around the world who do critical work that we all rely on every single day, sometimes in dangerous conditions.” Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on Israel to fully and thoroughly investigate the incident, and as he noted on December 7, “it will be

important to see that investigation come to a conclusion, and to see the results of the investigation.”

On May 16, senior Department of State officials met with Mr. Collins to listen to and better understand his concerns and request for accountability, as well as to offer condolences for the death of his colleague, Mr. Abdallah. We understand the incident remains under investigation in Israel. To date, the Department of State has not received any additional information from the Government of Israel regarding this investigation, but we intend to engage with Israeli officials until we get answers and see appropriate accountability for this incident.

The Department is working collaboratively with our embassies, our consulates, civil society, and media organizations to continue ongoing assessments of this and other incidents as part of various internal processes, which may include but are not limited to the Civilian Harm Incident Response Guidance (CHIRG). As noted in the May 10 National Security Memorandum-20 report, our assessments remain ongoing. We will continually monitor new and relevant information received from parts of the U.S. government, NGOs, and other entities and organizations.

The Department began reviewing this incident in December 2023 and conducted assessments on civilian harm and whether U.S.-origin defense materiel was used. Based on all available information, the civilian harm caused by this incident did not involve U.S.-origin weapons, and instead was likely caused by Israeli-made M339 or M329 tank rounds fired by an Israeli-made Merkava tank, according to an independent investigation by Reuters and TNO.

As the President noted in his statement on World Press Freedom Day 2024, today and every day, the United States stands with journalists around the world who do critical work with immense courage.

We hope this information is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip G. Laidlaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "P" and a long, sweeping tail.

Philip G. Laidlaw  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of Legislative Affairs