

Bakari Sellers

Attorney at Law



June 21, 2016

Democratic National Committee
430 S Capitol St SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Governor Dannel Malloy and Mayor Shirley Franklin,

At the outset, I want to thank you for your lifelong commitment to the Democratic Party and your loyal service to the same in accepting the responsibility of leading the Democratic Platform Committee. Every four years we come together as a collective and give our most thoughtful consideration to the ideals and values that define what it means to be a Democrat. In 2016, we do so at an especially critical time in our nation. Never before have the differences between the major parties been perceived to be so stark; so clearly a choice between hope and fear. Never before has this accrued more to our advantage as our pluralistic message of equal opportunity and social justice at home, and enlightened leadership around the world, attracts millions of conscientious Americans to our cause. The platform process affords us the chance to reaffirm to the nation and the world why the Democratic Party should be entrusted with leadership in 2016, and beyond. With you as Platform Committee co-Chairs, I'm certain we will seize the moment.

United States foreign policy in the Middle East is a critical issue our Party must address. Instability is mounting in that already volatile region. Repressive ideologies are on the rise. If the tide is to be reversed cooperation with our allies is imperative. We have no better ally than the state of Israel. As you know, the United States and the Democratic Party have long been advocates for and supporters of a strong, mutually-beneficial U.S.-Israel relationship. Democratic platforms for decades have celebrated this inviolable bond, one based on both shared values and shared interests.

Likewise, Secretary Clinton – as a presidential candidate, Secretary of State, U.S. Senator and First Lady – has long understood and nurtured America's ties with Israel. As she has said, speaking of the U.S.-Israel relationship, "The alliance between our two nations transcends politics." Though not always the focus of attention, it is with Israel that America shares the democratic values that define these two great nations. In the words of the Secretary, "We are both nations built by immigrants and exiles seeking to live and worship in freedom, nations built on principles of equality, tolerance and pluralism." Whether it is Israel's vigorous democracy, its commitment to the rule of law, one of the world's largest pride parades or the fact that almost fifty years ago, it elected a female Prime Minister – as she has said – "in Israel's story, we see our own."

And, as the Secretary has steadfastly supported our alliance with Israel and that democracy's ability to defend itself, so has the Democratic party's platform, year after year. This year should be no different.

Four years ago, this party produced a platform that reflected our historic support for Israel. It stated, "A strong and secure Israel is vital to the United States not simply because we share strategic interests, but also because we share common values." It spoke to "consistent support for Israel's right to defend itself," and efforts to,

“ensure Israel’s qualitative military edge.” Our platform and our candidate have been clear in their support for U.S. security assistance to Israel and to a new and generous ten year Memorandum of Understanding regarding assistance as well as funding of Israel’s anti-missile and anti-rocket systems. As Secretary Clinton said recently, “I hope a new 10-year defense memorandum of understanding is concluded as soon as possible to meet Israel’s security needs far into the future. That will also send a clear message to Israel’s enemies that the United States and Israel stand together united. It’s also why, as president, I will make a firm commitment to ensure Israel maintains its qualitative military edge.”

When it comes to peace between Israel and the Palestinians, our platforms and our candidates have always been clear. The 2012 platform rightly supported “peace between Israelis and Palestinians...producing two states for two peoples,” while reiterating that there could be “no lasting peace unless Israel’s security concerns are met.” Mrs. Clinton could not be more clear, as she has stated, “Israelis deserve a secure homeland for the Jewish people. Palestinians should be able to govern themselves in their own state in peace and dignity and only a negotiated two-state agreement can provide those outcomes.” As the Secretary has said, “...America has an important role to play in supporting peace efforts and as president, I would continue the pursuit of direct negotiations. And let me be clear, I would vigorously oppose any attempt by outside parties to impose a solution, including by the U.N. Security Council.” And, as the Party supports a negotiated peace settlement, it has long included, as it did in the 2012 Platform, a long established policy and reality, “Jerusalem is and will remain the capital of Israel.”

On Iran, previous platforms correctly focused on its nuclear program. The JCPOA is in place and we must do all we can to ensure Iran lives up to its obligations while confronting Iran’s malign activities in the region. As Secretary Clinton recently stated, “Tehran’s fingerprints are on every conflict across the Middle East from Syria to Lebanon to Yemen...[W]e must maintain the legal and diplomatic architecture to turn all the sanctions back on if needed...if we see any indication that they are violating their commitments to seek, develop or acquire nuclear weapons, the United States will act to stop it and that we will do so with force if necessary.” She has been clear, that the U.S. “must also continue to enforce existing sanctions and impose additional sanctions as needed on Iran...for their sponsorship of terrorism, illegal arms transfers, human rights violations and other illicit behaviors”

Since the last platform was approved, anti-Semitism has been on the rise and it has taken a new form -- the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement known as BDS. The BDS movement is an effort to bypass direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and, instead, use economic and political pressure to force unilateral Israeli action on issues that must be resolved through talks. As Secretary Clinton has said, “...we must repudiate all efforts to malign, isolate and undermine Israel and the Jewish people...we have to be unified in fighting back against BDS.”

I believe that the Mideast planks of the previous platform were carefully crafted and have served us well as a party and a country. As Democrats and proud supporters of our presumptive-nominee, we would be well served to stick closely to our previous platform language and ensure that any changes to reflect new developments do nothing to undermine the principles that have given such strength and clarity to our previous platforms.

As the new platform is drafted, we should recognize the important role Israel, the region’s established democracy, plays in a period of uncertainty and instability. As we seek to encourage democracy and build ties with new governments in the Arab world, we should also expand and strengthen our relationship with Israel and

work toward its full integration into the Middle East. Furthermore, we must ensure that as Israel faces new and uncertain challenges, it has the tools and American support to defend itself.

It is for all the aforementioned reasons, best stated by Secretary Clinton herself, that I join the attached signatories, all lifelong Democrats, in asking that unwavering support of the state of Israel be clearly articulated in the 2016 Democratic Party platform.

Again, thank you for your service and leadership. It is an inspiration to us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Sellers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bakari Sellers