The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, in its general and abiding concern for the human rights of all people created in God’s image, and the welfare of the world’s children in particular, today announces its support for the Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act, introduced in Congress earlier this year by Representative Betty McCollum (D-MN).

This bill, known as HR 2407, seeks to promote justice, equality and human rights for children globally by prohibiting any U.S. foreign aid dollars from contributing to "the military detention, interrogation, abuse, or ill-treatment of children in violation of international humanitarian law."

The bill amends Section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2378d) commonly known as the “Leahy Law” to ensure that no U.S. taxpayer funding goes toward the military detention, interrogation, abuse, or ill-treatment of children by any country, including Israel.

Currently, there are two separate legal systems within the West Bank, civilian law which is applied to Israeli settlers and Israeli military law which applies to Palestinians. Approximately, 2.9 million Palestinians, nearly 45% of which are minors under the age of 18 live in the West Bank.

Around 700 Palestinian children a year are arrested and prosecuted in Israel’s military court system. Human Rights Watch, in its World Report 2018, reported that Israeli Security Forces detained Palestinian children “often using unnecessary force, questioned them without a family member present, and made them sign confessions in Hebrew, which most did not understand”.

Human Rights Watch documented, in a July 2015 report titled “Israel: Security Forces Abuse Palestinian Children”, that such detentions also included the use of chokeholds, beatings, and coercive interrogation on children between the ages of 11 and 15 years.

The Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem issued a report in 2018 describing the treatment of Palestinian children under Israeli military occupation: “Every year, hundreds of Palestinian minors undergo the same scenario. Israeli security forces pick them up on the street or at home in the middle of the night, then handcuff and blindfold them and transport them to interrogation, often subjecting them to violence en route. Exhausted and scared—some having spent a long time in transit, some having been roused from sleep, some having had nothing to eat or drink for hours—the minors are then interrogated. They are completely alone in there, cut off from the world, without any adult they know and trust by their side, and without having been given a chance to consult with a lawyer before the interrogation. The interrogation itself often involves threats, yelling, verbal abuse and sometimes physical violence. Its sole purpose is to get the minors to confess or provide information about others.”
As Rabbis and Jews who believe that all people are created in God’s image we are appalled and distraught over the treatment of children as described in these reports. While we fully support Israel’s right to defend itself against terrorists, we believe that the detention and interrogation of children is a very last resort only in the most urgent cases. It should never be a normal course of action.

We call on members of the US Congress to pass HR2407 and protect the lives of Palestinian children living under occupation and children across the world.