Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee: Stop the assault on Palestinians in Gaza and on those trying to help them

1 November 2024

NEW YORK/GENEVA/ROME – We, the leaders of 15 United Nations and humanitarian organizations, urge, yet again, all parties fighting in Gaza to protect civilians and call on the State of Israel to cease its assault on Gaza and on the humanitarians trying to help.

The situation unfolding in North Gaza is apocalyptic. The area has been under siege for almost a month, denied basic aid and life-saving supplies while bombardment and other attacks continue.

Just in the past few days, hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, most of them women and children, and thousands have once again been forcibly displaced.

Hospitals have been almost entirely cut off from supplies and have come under attack, killing patients, destroying vital equipment, and disrupting life-saving services. Health workers and patients have been taken into custody. Fighting has also reportedly taken place inside hospitals.

Dozens of schools serving as shelters have been bombed or forcibly evacuated. Tents sheltering displaced families have been shelled, and people have been burned alive.

Rescue teams have been deliberately attacked and thwarted in their attempts to pull people buried under the rubble of their homes.

The needs of women and girls are overwhelming and growing every day. We have lost contact with those we support and those who provide lifesaving essential services for sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence.

And we have received reports of civilians being targeted while trying to seek safety, and of men and boys being arrested and taken to unknown locations for detention.

Livestock are also dying, croplands have been destroyed, trees burned to the ground, and agrifood systems infrastructure has been decimated.

The entire Palestinian population in North Gaza is at imminent risk of dying from disease, famine and violence.

Humanitarian aid cannot keep up with the scale of the needs due to the access constraints. Basic, life-saving goods are not available. Humanitarians are not safe to do their work and are blocked by Israeli forces and by insecurity from reaching people in need.

In a further blow to the humanitarian response, the polio vaccination campaign has been delayed due to the fighting, putting the lives of children in the region at risk.

And this week, the Israeli Parliament adopted legislation that would ban UNRWA and revoke its privileges and immunities. If implemented, such measures would be a catastrophe for the humanitarian response in Gaza, diametrically opposed to the United Nations Charter, with potential dire impacts on the human rights of the millions of Palestinians depending on UNRWA's assistance, and in violation of Israel's obligations under international law.

Let us be very clear: There is no alternative to UNRWA.

The blatant disregard for basic humanity and for the laws of war must stop.

International humanitarian law, including the rules of distinction, proportionality and precautions, must be respected. IHL obligations do not depend on reciprocity. No violation by one party ever releases the other from its legal obligations.

Attacks against civilians and what remains of civilian infrastructure in Gaza must stop.

Humanitarian relief must be facilitated, and we urge all parties to provide unimpeded access to affected people. Additionally, commercial goods must be allowed to enter Gaza.

The wounded and sick must receive the care they need. Medical personnel and hospitals must be spared. Hospitals should not turn into battlegrounds.

Unlawfully detained Palestinians must be released.

Israel must comply with the provisional orders and determinations of the International Court of Justice.

Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups must release the hostages immediately and unconditionally and must abide by international humanitarian law.

Member States must use their leverage to ensure respect for international law. This includes withholding arms transfers where there is a clear risk that such arms will be used in violation of international law.

The entire region is on the edge of a precipice. An immediate cessation of hostilities and a sustained, unconditional ceasefire are long overdue.

Signatories:

- Ms. Joyce Msuya, Acting Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Ms. Nimo Hassan, MBE, Chair, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
- Mr. Jamie Munn, Executive Director, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
- Ms. Amy E. Pope, Director General, International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Ms. Abby Maxman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Oxfam
- Ms. Paula Gaviria Betancur, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (SR on HR of IDPs)
- Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Ms. Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat)
- Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- Ms. Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women
- Ms. Cindy McCain, Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)
- Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO)

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