

## **Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

***"We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire"***

5 November 2023

NEW YORK/GENEVA/ROME, 5 November 2023 – For almost a month, the world has been watching the unfolding situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory in shock and horror at the spiralling numbers of lives lost and torn apart.

In Israel, some 1,400 people have been killed and thousands have been injured, according to the Israeli authorities. More than 200 people, including children, have been taken hostage. Rockets continue to traumatize families. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced. This is horrific.

However, the horrific killings of even more civilians in Gaza is an outrage, as is cutting off 2.2 million Palestinians from food, water, medicine, electricity and fuel.

In Gaza, according to the Ministry of Health, nearly 9,500 people have been killed, including 3,900 children and over 2,400 women. More than 23,000 injured people require immediate treatment within overstretched hospitals.

An entire population is besieged and under attack, denied access to the essentials for survival, bombed in their homes, shelters, hospitals and places of worship. This is unacceptable.

More than 100 attacks against health care have been reported.

Scores of aid workers have been killed since October 7 including 88 UNRWA<sup>1</sup> colleagues – the highest number of United Nations fatalities ever recorded in a single conflict.

We renew our plea for the parties to respect all their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

We renew our call for the immediate and unconditional release of all civilians held hostage.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) fully supports the statement and the call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire by Principals of the IASC.

Civilians and the infrastructure they rely on – including hospitals, shelters and schools – must be protected.

More aid – food, water, medicine and of course fuel – must enter Gaza safely, swiftly and at the scale needed, and must reach people in need, especially women and children, wherever they are.

We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. It's been 30 days. Enough is enough. This must stop now.

**Signatories:**

- Mr. Martin Griffiths, Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**)
- Ms. Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro, Secretary General, **CARE International**
- Ms. Jane Backhurst, Chair of **ICVA Board** (Christian Aid)
- Mr. Jamie Munn, Executive Director, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (**ICVA**)
- Ms. Anne Goddard, Chief Executive Officer and President a.i., **InterAction**
- Ms. Amy E. Pope, Director General, International Organization for Migration (**IOM**)
- Ms. Tjada D'Oyen McKenna, Chief Executive Officer, **Mercy Corps**
- Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (**OHCHR**)
- Ms. Janti Soeripto, President and Chief Executive Officer, **Save the Children**
- 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**)
- Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (**UNFPA**)
- Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**)
- Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, United Nations Human Settlement Programme (**UN-Habitat**)
- Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, United Nations 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**)

**Transatlantic Civil Servants' Statement on Gaza:**  
**It Is Our Duty To Speak Out**  
**When Our Governments' Policies Are Wrong**

*Released February 2, 2024 [signed by over 800 civil servants]*

Declaration of civil servants regarding Gaza:

Recalling that:

- We have the duty to respect, protect and uphold our constitutions and international and national legal obligations which our democratically elected executives have committed us to;
- We are expected as civil servants to respect, serve and uphold the law while implementing policies, regardless of the political parties in power; that we have done so for our entire careers;
- We have been hired to serve, inform and advise our governments/institutions and we have demonstrated professionalism, expertise, and experience that our governments have relied on over the past decades of our service;
- We have internally expressed our concerns that the policies of our governments/institutions do not serve our interests and called for alternatives that would better serve national and international security, democracy and freedom; reflect the core principles of western foreign policy; and incorporate lessons learned;
- Our professional concerns were overruled by political and ideological considerations;
- We are obliged to do everything in our power on behalf of our countries and ourselves to not be complicit in one of the worst human catastrophes of this century; and
- We are obliged to warn the publics of our countries, whom we serve, and to act in concert with transnational colleagues.

We publicly reiterate our concerns that:

- Israel has shown no boundaries in its military operations in Gaza which has resulted in tens of thousands of preventable civilian deaths; and that the deliberate blocking of aid by Israel has led to a humanitarian catastrophe, putting thousands of civilians at risk of starvation and slow death;
- Israel's military operations have not contributed to its goal of releasing all hostages and is putting their well-being, lives and release at risk;
- Israel's military operations have disregarded all important counterterrorism expertise gained since 9/11; and that the operation has not contributed to Israel's goal of defeating Hamas and instead has strengthened the appeal of Hamas, Hezbollah and other negative actors;
- The ongoing military operation will be detrimental not just for Israel's own security but also regional stability; the risk of wider wars is also negatively impacting stated security objectives of our governments;
- Our governments have provided the Israeli military operation with public, diplomatic and military support; that this support has been given without real conditions or accountability; and that when faced with humanitarian catastrophe, our governments have failed to call for an immediate ceasefire and an end to blockages of necessary food/water/medicine in Gaza;
- Our governments' current policies weaken their moral standing and undermine their ability to stand up for freedom, justice, and human rights globally and weaken our efforts to rally international support for Ukraine and to counter malign actions by Russia, China and Iran; and
- There is a plausible risk that our governments' policies are contributing to grave violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and even ethnic cleansing or genocide.

We therefore call on our governments/institutions to:

- Stop asserting to the public that there is a strategic and defensible rationale behind the Israeli operation and that supporting it is in our countries' interests;
- Hold Israel, like all actors, accountable to international humanitarian and human rights standards applied elsewhere and to forcefully respond to attacks against civilians, as we are doing in our support to the Ukrainian people; this includes demanding immediate and full implementation of the recent order of the International Court of Justice;

- Use all leverage available - including a halt to military support - to secure a lasting ceasefire and full humanitarian access in Gaza and a safe release of all hostages; and
- Develop a strategy for lasting peace that includes a secure Palestinian state and guarantees for Israel's security, so that an attack like 7 October and an offensive on Gaza never happen again.

**Coordinated by civil servants in:**

- European Union institutions and bodies
- The Netherlands
- United States

**Also endorsed by civil servants in:**

- Belgium
- Canada
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Italy
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom

**Rafah, Gaza: Urgent Statement from Chief Executives of humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations**

Rafah, Gaza: Urgent statement from Chief Executives of humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations | ActionAid International

17 February 2024

We are appalled by the harrowing developments in Rafah, Gaza's most populated area where 1.5 million people are sheltering as their last resort - over half a million of them children. If Israel launches its proposed ground offensive, thousands more civilians will be killed and the current trickle of **humanitarian aid risks coming to a complete halt. If this military plan is not stopped immediately**, the consequences will be catastrophic.

With significant damage to over 70 per cent of civilian infrastructure, many areas in Gaza have been reduced to rubble and are uninhabitable. Most hospitals are non-functional or only partially operational and are completely overwhelmed. There is little food, clean water, shelter, or sanitation. People are living in the most inhumane conditions, many of them out in the open. It defies belief that the Israeli military has forcibly displaced the majority of the population from their homes into Rafah - with six times as many people than before now squeezed into the area - and then announced plans to attack it.

The Israeli government's strategy of systematic and repeated forcible transfer of the civilian population has led to the forced displacement of more than three quarters of the population, many of whom left without adequate shelter or homes to return to. Collectively punishing civilians by denying them adequate shelter, food, clean water and other essentials needed for their survival and obstructing humanitarian relief consignments destined to alleviate starvation may amount to grave breaches of the obligations of an occupying power under International Humanitarian Law, constituting war crimes.

Last month, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, mandated Israel to take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance in Gaza. Not only has this not happened, the situation on the ground has deteriorated further. Israel's airstrikes in Rafah killed at least 100 Palestinians in a single day, defying both international calls for moderation and potentially the ICJ order. Over 1.5 million people trapped in Rafah have nowhere safe to go, and many have already been displaced multiple times. All of the Israeli supposed-safe spaces have been compromised, without exception, further proof that there was never truly anywhere safe in Gaza.

Our call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire is more urgent than ever as Israel's relentless bombardment and siege have decimated Gaza and left the Palestinian civilian population starving, facing famine, and with diseases rife while obstructing attempts to alleviate their suffering. The Israeli military offensive has made it virtually impossible for our collective agencies to meaningfully and effectively deliver humanitarian work, compromising not only safety but also the very principles guiding our humanitarian efforts. Rafah has been the primary entry point for aid and bombardment will then prevent any assistance from getting through.

The silence, and at times material support of Israel's military by powerful nations, signals distressing complicity in Gaza's deepening crisis. Whether through the transfer of weapons, diplomatic obstruction of resolutions, or silence, such actions have effectively granted Israel impunity. The harrowing situation in Gaza underscores the urgent need for governments worldwide to stop the supply of arms and ammunition used in these atrocities. We also call for a permanent ceasefire to protect civilian lives and release of hostages and unlawfully detained Palestinians, and full, unhindered access for humanitarian aid and workers.

States bear legal and moral responsibilities to protect civilians, prevent war crimes and uphold international law. We urge all States to consider that their inaction or continued support not only deepens the tragedy but also implicates them. We call upon them to do everything in their power to prevent further military offensives and forge a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza.

**Signatories:**

Ana Alcalde	Acting Secretary General, <b>ActionAid International</b>
Dr Agnès Callamard	Secretary General, <b>Amnesty International</b>
Charlotte Slente	Secretary General, <b>Danish Refugee Council</b>
Manuel Patrouillard	CEO, <b>Handicap International-Humanity &amp; Inclusion</b>
Amitabh Behar	Executive Director, <b>Oxfam International</b>
Rob Williams,	CEO, <b>War Child Alliance</b>

# Joint statement against the mass forced displacement of Palestinians

20 February 2024 - ActionAid Media Centre

We, the undersigned organisations, are appalled over the mass forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza resulting from Israel's devastating military assault.

Almost 2 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced within Gaza, with reports indicating Israeli plans for mass displacement outside of Gaza itself. This humanitarian catastrophe must be addressed urgently within the framework of international law and human rights principles.

**Forced displacement, as observed in Gaza, violates international humanitarian law**, notably Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the forcible transfer of protected persons by an occupying power. Israel's actions, including the issuance of "evacuation" orders covering vast areas of Gaza, have resulted in the displacement of an estimated 85% of Gaza's population.

Families have been displaced multiple times, exacerbating the already dire situation. The lack of safe routes and clear destinations for displaced persons raises concerns about their right to return and constitutes forcible transfer.

**We remain horrified about the prospect of a full ground invasion in Rafah**, which would be utterly catastrophic for the more than 1.5 million people currently staying in Rafah, including more than one million displaced people seeking shelter there. People in Rafah have nowhere to go, as the north and middle areas of Gaza are under daily bombardments.

Reports<sup>1</sup> of Israeli plans to permanently relocate Palestinians from Gaza to other territories, such as the Sinai Peninsula or third countries, are alarming.

In response to these grave concerns, we call upon governments around the world to do everything in their power to:

- Actively pursue an immediate, permanent, and unconditional ceasefire.
- Ensure Israel's compliance with its obligations under international law and protective measures ordered by the International Court of Justice.
- Reject and prevent any initiatives that contribute to permanent or protracted forced displacement of Palestinians and ensure the safe return for all displaced Palestinians within Gaza once hostilities cease.
- Facilitate immediate humanitarian access to Gaza, including essential aid and supplies, to meet the needs of the civilian population, especially vulnerable groups.
- Fully adhere to their fundamental legal obligation under the Geneva Conventions and customary international law to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

We urge the international community to take decisive action to address the plight of Palestinians in Gaza and uphold their rights under international law.

# Signatories

1. ActionAid
2. Action Against Hunger
3. Action for Humanity
4. Amnesty International UK
5. Caabu (Council for Arab-British Understanding)
6. CAFOD
7. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
8. Christian Aid
9. Eurochild
10. Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS)
11. Handicap International - Humanity & Inclusion
12. Interpal
13. INTERSOS
14. Islamic Relief UK
15. Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights
16. Médecins du Monde - International Network
17. Medical Aid for Palestinians - MAP
18. Movement for Peace - MPDL
19. Plan International
20. SAFERWORLD
21. Sadaka, The Ireland Palestine Alliance
22. The Global Legal Action Network (GLAN)
23. Trócaire
24. War Child
25. War on Want
26. Welfare Association



Open Letter: HI and 61 other NGOs urge MPs to support the motion for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza

**Open Letter | London, 20th February 2024, 12:00 GMT**

Dear Members of Parliament,

As humanitarian, human rights and campaigning agencies, many of us with teams operating in Gaza and the West Bank, we are writing to draw your urgent attention to the critical situation in Gaza. As you may be aware, there will be a vote tomorrow (Wednesday 21 February 2024) in the House of Commons regarding this matter. **We, along with 71% of the UK public**, urge you to support the motion for an immediate and permanent ceasefire to benefit everyone in Israel and Palestine, facilitate the provision of adequate humanitarian assistance, and the release of hostages, and curtail the risk of regional conflict amid multiple strikes in several countries.

In Gaza, the ongoing conflict has resulted in unfathomable death and destruction. At least 28,576 [1] Palestinians have been killed, while thousands remain missing under the rubble of destroyed buildings. The humanitarian situation is dire. For 136 days [2] the UN and NGOs have warned of a shortage of medical supplies and clean water, overcrowded shelters, widespread food insecurity, and a collapsing healthcare system and spread of diseases among the displaced civilians, resulting in catastrophic health indicators and urgent humanitarian needs. Nearly every child is at imminent risk of starvation and malnutrition, women resort to using scraps of tent in place of period products and go weeks without showering, and surgeons are operating on patients without sufficient anaesthesia. Unexploded ordnance resulting from the bombardment poses a serious risk both to civilians and humanitarian aid workers.

Humanitarian response agencies need to **not only restore but significantly scale up the delivery of vital health, education, mental health, protection, and livelihoods services**. This includes vital programming to support the unique and urgent needs of women and men, boys and girls, mainstreaming inclusion of people with disabilities, older people, and others disproportionately affected by the crisis. **This is not possible under bombardment. We need a lasting ceasefire, not pauses.** Without a lasting ceasefire, humanitarian organisations cannot re-establish principled operations on the necessary scale, and there will be further loss of life.

It is imperative that the UK Government takes immediate action to support an immediate and permanent ceasefire, for which there is growing international consensus. The protection of civilians is paramount and a requirement under international humanitarian law.

An immediate and permanent ceasefire will halt the cycle of violence, facilitate the release of all hostages, allow for the restoration of essential services, allow for international humanitarian assistance to reach those in need, and provide an opportunity for dialogue and negotiation towards a lasting peace that benefits everyone in the region.

**We cannot afford to delay any longer.** Private diplomacy and cautious statements are not enough - stronger action and accountability needs to be applied or the humanitarian catastrophe will likely surpass even the horrors we have seen over the last four months. We urge you to support the motion for an immediate ceasefire.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your support and swift action.

Yours sincerely,

[1] Figures as of 20 February 2024  
[2] Figures as of 20 February 2024

Signed:

1. Action Against Hunger
2. Action For Humanity
3. ActionAid UK
4. Age International
5. Amnesty International UK
6. Amos Trust
7. Bond
8. Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu)
9. CAFOD
10. CARE International UK
11. Christian Aid
12. Climate Action Network UK (CAN-UK)
13. Convivencia Alliance
14. Development Initiatives
15. Elrha
16. Embrace the Middle East
17. European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
18. Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS)
19. Greenpeace UK
20. Humanity & Inclusion UK
21. Inminds Human Rights Group
22. International Alert
23. International Health Partners (IHP)
24. International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)
25. International Rescue Committee UK
26. Islamic Relief UK
27. Jewish Network for Palestine
28. Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights
29. Mercy Corps
30. Mines Advisory Group (MAG)
31. Minority Rights Group
32. Muslim Aid
33. Muslim Community Helpline
34. Muslim Hands
35. Na'amod
36. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
37. Omega Research Foundation
38. Oxfam GB
39. Peace Direct
40. Peacemaker Trust
41. Penny Appeal
42. Plan International UK
43. Protection Approaches
44. Quakers in Britain
45. Resistance Kitchen
46. Sabeel-Kairos UK
47. Saferworld
48. Save the Children UK
49. Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)
50. Scotland's International Development Alliance
51. Stamp Out Poverty
52. Tearfund
53. Trócaire
54. The UK Committee for UNICEF

(UNICEF UK)

55. UK-Palestine Mental Health Network

56. United Nations Association - UK

(UNA-UK)

57. War Child

58. War on Want

59. Welfare Association

60. Womankind Worldwide

61. Women for Women International

62. Women's Platform

Open Letter: 62 NGOs urge MPs to support the motion for an immediate and permanent ceasefire | Humanity & Inclusion UK ([humanity-inclusion.org.uk](http://humanity-inclusion.org.uk))

## STATEMENT BY PRINCIPALS OF THE INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE: CIVILIANS IN GAZA IN EXTREME PERIL WHILE THE WORLD WATCHES ON TEN REQUIREMENTS TO AVOID AN EVEN WORSE CATASTROPHE

**NEW YORK/GENEVA/ROME, 21 February 2024** – In the less than five months that followed the brutal 7 October attacks and the ensuing escalation, tens of thousands of Palestinians – mostly women and children – have been killed and injured in the Gaza Strip. More than three quarters of the population have been forced from their homes, many multiple times, and face severe shortages of food, water, sanitation and healthcare – the basic necessities to survive.

The health system continues to be systematically degraded, with catastrophic consequences. As of 19 February, only 12 out of 36 hospitals with inpatient capacity are still functioning, and only partially. There have been more than 370 attacks on health care in Gaza since 7 October.

Diseases are rampant. Famine is looming. Water is at a trickle. Basic infrastructure has been decimated. Food production has come to a halt. Hospitals have turned into battlefields. One million children face daily traumas.

Rafah, the latest destination for well over 1 million displaced, hungry and traumatized people crammed into a small sliver of land, has become another battleground in this brutal conflict. Further escalation of violence in this densely populated area would cause mass casualties. It could also deal a death blow to a humanitarian response that is already on its knees.

There is no safe place in Gaza.

Humanitarian workers, themselves displaced and facing shelling, death, movement restrictions and a breakdown of civil order, continue efforts to deliver to those in need. But faced with so many obstacles – including safety and movement restrictions – they can only do so much.

No amount of humanitarian response will make up for the months of deprivation that families in Gaza have endured. This is our effort to salvage the humanitarian operation so that we can provide, at the very least, the bare essentials: medicine, drinking water, food, and shelter as temperatures plummet.

For this, we need:

1. An immediate ceasefire.
2. Civilians and the infrastructure they rely on to be protected.
3. The hostages to be released immediately.
4. Reliable entry points that would allow us to bring aid in from all possible crossings, including to northern Gaza.
5. Security assurances and unimpeded passage to distribute aid, at scale, across Gaza, with no denials, delays and access impediments.
6. A functioning humanitarian notification system that allows all humanitarian staff and supplies to move within Gaza and deliver aid safely.
7. Roads to be passable and neighborhoods to be cleared of explosive ordnance.
8. A stable communication network that allows humanitarians to move safely and securely.
9. UNRWA<sup>[1]</sup>, the backbone of the humanitarian operations in Gaza, to receive the resources it needs to provide life-saving assistance.
10. A halt to campaigns that seek to discredit the United Nations and non-governmental organizations doing their best to save lives.

Humanitarian agencies remain committed, despite the risks. But they cannot be left to pick up the pieces.

We are calling on Israel to fulfil its legal obligation, under international humanitarian and human rights law, to provide food and medical supplies and facilitate aid operations, and on the world's leaders to prevent an even worse catastrophe from happening. **ENDS**

**Signatories:**

- Martin Griffiths, Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro, Secretary General, **CARE International**
- Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- Jane Backhurst, Chair, ICVA (**Christian Aid**)
- Jamie Munn, Executive Director, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
- Tom Hart, Chief Executive Officer and President, **InterAction**
- Amy E. Pope, Director General, International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Tjada D'Oyen McKenna, Chief Executive Officer, **Mercy Corps**
- Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Janti Soeripto, President and Chief Executive Officer, **Save the Children**
- Paula Gaviria Betancur, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (**SR on HR of IDPs**)
- Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Michal Mlynár, Executive Director a.i., United Nations Human Settlement Programme (**UN-Habitat**)
- Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, **UN Women**
- Cindy McCain, Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)
- Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (**WHO**)

**[1]** The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) fully supports the statement.

22 February 2024

**His Excellency Mr. Dennis Francis, President of the General Assembly, New York**

**Dear Mr. President,**

On 7 December 2023, I sent you a letter stating that the situation in Gaza was limiting UNRWA's ability to implement its mandate, with grave humanitarian and political implications. It is with profound regret that I must now inform you that the Agency has reached breaking point, with Israel's repeated calls to dismantle UNRWA and the freezing of funding by donors at a time of unprecedented humanitarian needs in Gaza. The Agency's ability to fulfil the mandate given through General Assembly resolution 302 is now seriously threatened.

In just over four months in Gaza there have been more children, more journalists, more medical personnel, and more UN staff killed than anywhere in the world during a conflict. Over 150 UNRWA premises have been hit by bombardment or shelling, killing over 390 people, and injuring over 1300. Many reports of UN premises being used by Hamas combatants or by the Israeli army are circulating on social media. The last remaining hospitals are collapsing, and doctors amputate children's limbs without anesthetic, which puts pain at a new level for children, their parents, and medical personnel. According to UN experts, famine is imminent.

It is in this context that on 26 January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a legally binding provisional ruling that regarding Palestinians in Gaza, Israel must "take all measures within its power to prevent the Commission of all acts within the scope of Article II"<sup>1</sup> of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as well as "immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip"<sup>2</sup>.

In the week preceding the ruling of the ICJ, the Israeli authorities informed me that 12 of UNRWA's 30,000 agency-wide staff were allegedly involved in the horrific attack on 7 October. As Commissioner General, I immediately dismissed the concerned staff, thus terminating their contractual connection to UNRWA. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) was seized of the matter and the Secretary-General launched an independent review of how UNRWA upholds neutrality principles – the conclusions and recommendations are expected by the end of April 2024. I continue to call on the Government of Israel to cooperate with the OIOS investigation to independently establish the truth. To date, no evidence has been shared by Israel with UNRWA.

**His Excellency**

**Mr. Dennis Francis**

**President of the General Assembly New York**

In reaction to the allegations against UNRWA staff, 16 donor countries announced the pausing or temporary suspension of their contributions to UNRWA, totaling US \$ 450 million, pending reassurances on the Agency's response and strengthening of its oversight mechanisms. I have cautioned donors and host countries that without new funding, UNRWA operations across the region will be severely compromised from March.

As a humanitarian and human development agency, UNRWA does not have counterintelligence, police, or criminal justice capacities. Like all UN entities worldwide, UNRWA must rely on host governments, or in this case on Israel as the occupying power, for these capacities. With a view to supporting its neutrality, UNRWA systematically shares its staff list with the host governments in its five fields of operation, and in the case of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, also with the Israeli authorities. When we have detected cavities that could be tunnels under our premises, we have consistently informed the Israeli authorities, protested to the de facto authorities, and listed the concerns in my reports to the General Assembly.

**Mr. President,**

Since the ICJ ruling, there has been a concerted effort by some Israeli officials to deceptively conflate UNRWA with Hamas, to disrupt UNRWA's operations, and to call for the dismantling of the Agency:

- The Israeli Land Authority has demanded that UNRWA vacate its Kalandia Vocational Training Center in East Jerusalem (assigned to UNRWA by Jordan in 1952) and pay a "usage fee" of over US \$ 4.5 million.
- A Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem has taken steps to evict UNRWA from its HQ of 75 years in East Jerusalem.
- Visas for most international staff, including those in Gaza, have been limited to one or two months.
- The Minister for Finance has stated that he will revoke UNRWA's tax exemption privileges.
- Customs authorities have suspended shipment of UNRWA goods.
- An Israeli bank has blocked an UNRWA account.
- Hundreds of UNRWA local staff have been refused access to Jerusalem since October to reach UNRWA's HQ, schools, and health centers.
- A Bill has been tabled at the Knesset to exclude UNRWA from UN privileges and immunities.
- A second Bill, first tabled in 2021, seeks "to implement Basic Law: Jerusalem Capital of Israel, by preventing any activity by UNRWA in Israeli territory".
- On 31 January 2024, the Prime Minister said UNRWA was "in the service of Hamas".
  - Many Israeli officials have called for donors to cease funding UNRWA, which undermines education, health, and other services essential to Palestine Refugees' human rights.

These actions and statements harm UNRWA's operations, create staff security risks, and obstruct the Agency's General Assembly mandate. UNRWA, like any UN entity, cannot operate without the support of host States.

**Mr. President,**

I fear we are on the edge of a monumental disaster with grave implications for regional peace, security, and human rights. In the short term, dismantling UNRWA will undermine UN efforts to

address Gaza's humanitarian crisis and worsen the crisis in the West Bank, depriving over half a million children of education and deepening resentment and despair. In the longer-term, it will end UNRWA's stabilizing role that is widely acknowledged, including by senior Israeli civilian and military officials and key donors, as vital to the rights and security of Palestinians and Israelis. It will also weaken prospects for a transition and a political solution to this long-standing conflict.

Calls today by the Government of Israel for UNRWA's closure are not about the Agency's neutrality. Instead, they are about changing the long-standing political parameters for peace in the occupied Palestinian territory set by the General Assembly and the Security Council. They seek to eliminate UNRWA's role in protecting the rights of Palestine Refugees and acting as a witness to their continuing plight. UNRWA's mandate embodies the promise of a political solution. Two weeks before the 7 October attacks, the Israeli Prime Minister presented to the General Assembly a map of a future Israel that encompassed all of Palestine; whereas UNRWA's mandate to provide services to Palestine Refugees within this same area is an obstacle to that map becoming a reality.

For decades, in an untenable arrangement, UNRWA as a humanitarian agency has been left to fill the vacuum resulting from an absence of peace or even a peace process. I believe that the General Assembly now faces a fundamental decision. Will the parameters of peace for Palestinians and Israelis be wiped away by obstructing UNRWA's mandate and defunding the Agency outside of any political agreement and consultation with Palestinians?

Or will this moment of great crisis be used as a catalyst for peace; in which case I urge the General Assembly to provide the political support necessary to sustain UNRWA and the premise of resolution 302 or to create the basis for UNRWA to transition immediately into a long-overdue political solution that can bring peace to Palestinians and Israelis.

Should the General Assembly opt to continue to sustain UNRWA in the best interests of Palestine Refugees, then I further appeal for a solution that closes the gap between UNRWA's mandate and its funding structure, which relies upon voluntary contributions that make it vulnerable to wider political considerations, such as UNRWA faces now.

I finally appeal to the General Assembly to bring human rights and international law back to the center of multilateral action, beginning with the catastrophic situation in Gaza that has worsened by every measure in recent weeks.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration. ■

Sincerely yours,

Philippe Lazzarini



## Calling all Global Development Professionals to Collectively and Unapologetically Raise Our Voices For Ceasefire

[GlobalDev4Palestine - Petition and Signatures \(google.com\)](#) accessed 26 February 2024

**We work in global development.**

**We support justice and liberation.**

**We are done being silent.**

**We demand a ceasefire now.**

## Join us in taking action. Petition

As global development and humanitarian assistance professionals, we jointly call for a permanent and enduring ceasefire, condemn the unfolding genocide, and call for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

We are choosing to speak up as individuals because many of our political and organizational leaders have remained silent in the face of genocide. Because our shared humanity and actions extend beyond the organizations we work for. And most importantly, because we are not alone - we are in the global majority. We are in solidarity with all individuals, communities, and movements around the world who are calling for a permanent ceasefire and end to the occupation.

As international development and humanitarian assistance professionals, we see the global and local impact of violence and war firsthand. We know that a building that is destroyed in a second by a bomb will take years to rebuild. We know that preventing violence at its root creates a safer world for children, families, and communities. We know that many of the psychosocial support, empowerment, and 'resilience' programs we work on are merely a bandage after the type of violence has been unleashed - bomb after bomb - in Gaza. We know that the amount of money our governments spend on military aid to bomb innocent people far surpasses the amount of money they spend on emergency aid and reconstruction, and programming. For example, the 2021 U.S. government military budget was 10 times greater than the entire USAID budget, at \$408 billion to \$41 billion.

We have witnessed Western governments - primarily the United States, UK, EU, Canada and Australia - expand their support and funding for the Israeli military machine, helping to increase the profits reaped by defense companies. We bear witness to the killing of Palestinians with the death tolling rising every single hour, nearly [half of them children](#), and [over 100 humanitarian aid workers](#) - these are our friends and colleagues and co-workers; the starvation and dehydration of 2.3 million Palestinians; the forced displacement of 1.8 million people (and counting); homes, schools, hospitals and the health system flattened; and communities shattered - that no amount of "aid" will ever be able to put back together.

And while we watch in horror the genocide in Gaza unfold, the violence and terror of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, has also heightened, including increasing numbers of people who are being arrested and administratively detained without charge or trial.

We have also witnessed willful and/or forced silence from most sector leaders. This is especially disappointing in the case of organizations and leaders who have jumped on the "decolonizing" trend in the global development discourse, but have been blatantly silent in the face of actual colonization and often siding with the occupiers.

This is the moment in which all of our talk - all of our discussions, all the workshops we've attended, all the pithy tweets - meets action. Today, we are saying that we will not just speak about belonging, creating safe spaces, listening to local leaders, localization, and supporting decolonization. Words alone

are not enough. We commit ourselves to action against colonization and colonial violence that is happening live before our very eyes. The truth is, we all have been silent for too long. And, therefore, complicit.

We recognize that we - especially those of us who are from Western/Global North organizations and those of us who are “expats” - explicitly benefit from war, violence, occupation, and apartheid. As calls grow for international aid to be brought to Gaza, it is our Western-based organizations that will win lucrative contracts to promote “aid” and “response” in Gaza - after a war that our [Western] political leaders allowed to happen. And we also know that the majority of the funding in those grants and contracts will go to Western organizations rather than Palestinian organizations and movements. We are the ones who will see new job postings open up. Already, we are hearing international development leadership speak about a “good budget year” for 2024 and exploring ways to staff up “the Middle East” or “stabilization” teams to make sure our organizations are “positioned” for success. Yet again, we are watching as we create a war, and then reward ourselves with work to fix the problem.

We recognize that the silence of development organizations about Palestine is reflective of the development industry’s fundamental contradiction, in which the political and economic agendas of “Western/Global North” governments and corporations supersede the rights and self-determination of individuals and communities in the places where development programs are being funded.

We acknowledge the problematic nature of the concept of an ‘international development’ led by Western organizations and nations, and point to the current reality in Palestine as an illustration of the hypocrisy of Western leadership: we will bomb your lands, extract its resources, then pay our own people to step in and provide “aid” in support of “development.” This pattern of structural violence and extraction has occurred in Iraq, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Guatemala, Pakistan, and numerous other countries and now unfolds in real time in Gaza.

We also acknowledge that the violence in Palestine is interconnected with broader, transnational struggles for justice and liberation. The partnerships between police forces in the United States and the Israeli military connect the struggle for Black liberation in “donor” countries with the Palestinian struggle in “donor-funded” countries. We recognize that the ongoing extractive strategies of imperialism, colonization, and capitalism that have fueled slavery, caused genocides of Indigenous people worldwide, and accelerated the climate crisis and depletion of natural resources from countries in the Global South are also fueling today’s genocides and violence in not just Palestine, but also multiple other places, including Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Yemen, and Haiti.

Further, we acknowledge that our sector’s silence enables dangerous new precedents for future contexts. The international community’s silence in the face of the forced displacement of ethnic Armenians from the Karabakh/Artsakh region has set a precedent for the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. We recognize that nearly endless drone bombings of Pakistan by the U.S. normalized the use of drones in war making at scale. As such, any impunity afforded to the state of Israel as it bombs hospitals, schools, churches, mosques, and refugee camps will set a precedent for future violence and humanitarian crises that our sector will then be tasked with ‘aiding,’ ‘developing’ and ‘empowering’ thereafter.

We are signing this letter in recognition of the impact of structural violence and colonialism, in support of liberation for Palestine, and in support of a broader systemic analysis of our entire sector. We are signing as individuals because we are not waiting for our organizations, funders, and other ‘sectoral leaders’ to “lead.” At a minimum, we cannot sit by and silently witness yet another cycle of bandaging over a war with promises of post-war development. As international development professionals, we have a responsibility to stand up and speak out on human rights and address the root causes of human suffering and injustices.

And we know that together, we can create a movement where we can collectively build a liberated world in which all people are safe from violence - for Palestinians and all of us.

Today, to respond to the urgency of this moment as we witness a genocide, we call for:

- An immediate and sustained ceasefire - not a pause for humanitarian assistance, not a pause for a few days, not a pause for a genocide, but a permanent ceasefire in Gaza;
- An end to foreign military support (e.g. from the US, etc) for Israel that fuels these endless cycles that puts profits ahead of lives;

▪ Holding our organizations and the clients we work for accountable for the policies, actions, and language that profits from war, and enables the degradation and dehumanization of Palestinians; Standing in support of our peers and colleagues who are and have spoken up in support of Palestine and are facing the consequences for their words and actions; and Continuing our ongoing, long-term learning and unlearning about the complicity of the development and aid sector as a continuation of colonial structures.

\*Note - by signing our petition, you agree to having your name shared publicly via our website: <https://bit.ly/GlobalDev4Pal>.