



DIVISION FOR  
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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intergovernmental organizations  
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*The Bulletin can be found in the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) on the Internet at:*

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### **I. 30 UN human rights experts call on States to reinstate and strengthen support for UNRWA**

*On 2 February, Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967; Ben Saul, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; Cecilia M. Bailliet, Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food; Nicolas Levrat, Special Rapporteur on minority rights; Attiya Waris, Independent Expert on foreign debt, other international financial obligations and human rights; Livingstone Sewanyana, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; Tlaleng Mofokeng, Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; Tomoya Obokata, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Alexandra Xanthaki, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Paula Gaviria Betancur, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Ashwini K.P. Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; Barbara G. Reynolds (Chair), Dominique Day, Bina D'Costa, Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent; Olivier De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; Dorothy Estrada Tanck (Chair), Claudia Flores, Ivana Krstić, Haina Lu, and Laura Nyirinkindi (Vice-Chair), Working group on discrimination against women and girls; Working group on discrimination against women and girls; Pedro Arrojo-Agudo Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation; Carlos Salazar Couto (Chair-Rapporteur), Sorcha MacLeod, Jovana Jezdimirovic Ranito, Chris M. A. Kwaja, Ravindran Daniel, Working Group on the use of mercenaries; Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing; Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education; and Clément Nyaletsossi Voule Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association issued the following [statement](#).*

UN human rights experts today expressed grave concern at the recent harmful decision by some 18 states to suspend funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Australia, Austria, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States have all announced suspension of funding for UNRWA, the experts said.

“These announcements come at an existential moment for over two million Palestinians in Gaza enduring catastrophic living conditions due to Israel’s large-scale military attack that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) considers a plausible genocide,” the experts said.

The decision follows Israel’s allegations against several UNRWA employees of involvement in the Hamas-led attacks on 7 October 2023.

The experts said: “In response to these allegations, and even before conducting its due process investigation, UNRWA announced its decision to terminate these employees’ contracts ‘in the interest of the agency.’ This response reflects UNRWA’s firm commitment to ensuring organisational neutrality, in line with UN principles and values rejecting incitement and all forms of violence.”

“Even if allegations against individuals are proven, based on an impartial and independent investigation, UNRWA as a whole, traditionally providing services to 1.7 million Palestinian refugees and

offering employment to 13,000 locally recruited staff in Gaza, must not be blamed and punished collectively,” the experts said.

They were dismayed by reports suggesting Israel intends to “remove” UNRWA from Gaza. “We condemn in the strongest possible terms any efforts to delegitimise UNRWA as a whole.”

Founded in 1949, UNRWA is the largest UN agency in Gaza and the primary provider of life-saving services and support to millions of Palestinians in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, including food assistance, shelter, healthcare, education, water, sanitation and hygiene.

Approximately 1.7 million people displaced across Gaza—some multiple times, injured and highly traumatised—are currently seeking shelter in or near the vicinity of UNRWA facilities and receiving assistance from the Agency—roughly half of them children.

“We recognise UNRWA’s determination to implement its humanitarian mandate under unprecedented and enormous risks,” the experts said. “More than 150 UNRWA staff have been killed in Israeli bombardments since 7 October 2023—the highest number of UN staff killed in any conflict since the UN was founded in 1945.”

“Multiple UNRWA facilities have been targeted, besieged and demolished by the Israeli military, in apparent violation of the principle of the inviolability of UN premises,” they said.

The experts request states to rally around the Agency and urge UNRWA’s leading donors to maintain their support, especially in anticipation of the complex humanitarian challenges ahead. “We agree with the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee that no other entity has the capacity to deliver the scale and breadth of assistance that 2.2 million people in Gaza urgently need,” the experts said.

“The grossly disproportionate decision to suspend funding by some of the largest donor states defies the basic principle of humanity, and goes against states’ commitment to leave no one behind,” they said. “Denying basic human necessities, life-saving medical care, food, shelter, and antenatal care for pregnant women, is not just indefensible—it is a hindrance to the already complex journey toward peace.”

“At this existential time for over two million people in Gaza, on the brink of famine, UN operations and facilities must be protected,” the experts said, encouraging states to support UNRWA’s mandate and protect it from interference.

With the ICJ alerting the international community to the risk of genocide in Gaza and ordering immediate and effective action to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians, states must do more, including to avoid legal consequences for aiding and abetting, or possible complicity in acts of genocide,” they said. “Instead of castigating the agency that provides critical support for millions of Palestinians in Gaza, states must exhaust all efforts to avert serious violations of international law, including genocide—and this necessitates continued international support of UNRWA’s vital humanitarian services.”

## **II. UN Secretary-General appoints an independent UNRWA Review Group**

*On 5 February, Secretary-General António Guterres appointed an Independent Review Group, as reflected in the following [statement](#).*

The Secretary-General, in consultation with UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, has appointed an independent Review Group to assess whether the Agency is doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches when they are made.

The review will be led by Catherine Colonna, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, who will work with three research organizations: the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden, the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

The Review Group will begin its work on 14 February 2024 and is expected to submit an interim report to the Secretary-General late March 2024, with a final report expected to be completed by late April 2024. The final report will be made public.

This review is in response to a request made by UNRWA Commissioner-General Lazzarini earlier this year.

The Review Group's terms of reference are:

- a. To identify the mechanisms and procedures that the Agency currently has in place to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations or information indicating that the principle may have been breached;
- b. To ascertain how those mechanisms and procedures have, or have not, been implemented in practice and whether every practicable effort has been made to apply them to their full potential, taking into account the particular operational, political and security environment in which the Agency works;
- c. To assess the adequacy of those mechanisms and procedures and whether they are fit for purpose, including in relation to the management of risks and taking into account the particular operational, political and security context in which the Agency works;
- d. To make recommendations for the improvement and strengthening, if necessary, of the mechanisms and procedures that are currently in place or for the creation of new and alternative mechanisms and procedures that would be better fit for purpose, taking into account the particular operational, political and security context in which the Agency works;

The Secretary-General notes that these accusations come at a time when UNRWA, the largest UN organization in the region, is working under extremely challenging conditions to deliver life-saving assistance to the 2 million people in the Gaza Strip who depend on it for their survival amidst one of the largest and most complex humanitarian crises in the world.

This independent external review will take place in parallel with an investigation currently underway by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) into allegations of the involvement of 12 UNRWA personnel in the 7 October attacks. The cooperation of the Israeli authorities, who made these allegations, will be critical to the success of the investigation.

### **III. OCHA Chief warns against further fighting in Rafah**

*On 7 February, Martin Griffiths, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, issued the following [statement](#).*

With the Gaza hostilities entering their fifth month, hope is dwindling for the millions of people affected and the humanitarians striving to assist them.

More than half of Gaza's population is now crammed in Rafah, a town of originally 250,000 people right on Egypt's doorstep. Their living conditions are abysmal — they lack the basic necessities to survive, stalked by hunger, disease and death.

As the war encroaches further into Rafah, I am extremely concerned about the safety and well-being of families which have endured the unthinkable in search of safety.

More than 27,500 people in Gaza have already been killed over the past four months, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health. Further fighting in Rafah risks claiming the lives of even more people. It also risks further hampering a humanitarian operation already limited by insecurity, damaged infrastructure and access restrictions.

To put it simply: This war must stop.

#### **IV. UN Human Rights High Commissioner warns Israeli extensive destruction near Gaza border “grave breach” of Geneva conventions, possible war crime**

*On 8 February, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk issued the following [statement](#).*

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are reportedly destroying all buildings within the Gaza Strip that are within a kilometre of the Israel-Gaza fence, clearing the area with the objective of creating a “buffer zone”. I stress to the Israeli authorities that Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits destruction by the Occupying Power of property belonging to private persons “except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations”.

Destructions carried out to create a “buffer zone” for general security purposes do not appear consistent with the narrow “military operations” exception set out in international humanitarian law. Further, extensive destruction of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly, amounts to a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and a war crime.

Since late October 2023, my Office has recorded widespread destruction and demolition by the IDF of civilian and other infrastructure, including residential buildings, schools and universities in areas in which fighting is not or no longer taking place. Such demolitions have also occurred in Beit Hanoun in North Gaza, As Shujaiyeh in Gaza City, and An Nuseirat Camp in Middle Gaza. Demolitions have been reported from other areas as well, with reports of destruction of many residential buildings and blocks taking place in Khan Younis in recent weeks.

Israel has not provided cogent reasons for such extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure. Such destruction of homes and other essential civilian infrastructure also entrenches the displacement of communities that were living in these areas prior to the escalation in hostilities, and appears to be aimed at or has the effect of rendering the return of civilians to these areas impossible. I remind the authorities that forcible transfer of civilians may constitute a war crime.

#### **V. No child in Gaza is free from fear, pain and hunger, says the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**

*On 8 February, Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Ann Skelton delivered the following [press statement](#).*

No child should grow up in fear, pain and hunger. Yet, today, no child in Gaza is free from fear, pain and hunger. In fact, they will be considered lucky if they can even survive this war and have the chance to grow up.

According to the latest UN figures, 27,585 Palestinians have been killed and 66,978 injured since the 7<sup>th</sup> of October last year. More than 7,000 are estimated to be buried under rubble, raising the total number of casualties to more than 100,000 people. Many of them are children.

Some of them have lost their lives, others have lost their limbs, their parents, siblings, and friends. All children living in the Gaza Strip have lost their childhood. They are traumatized, and will forever live with a permanent impact on their mental health.

More than ten children per day, on average, have lost one or both legs in Gaza since the conflict erupted four months ago, according to Save the Children. UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, estimates that at least 17,000 children are unaccompanied or separated from their parents, and almost all of Gaza's 1.2 million children are in need of mental health and psychosocial support.

These children also need attention and action from the international community.

The ruling of the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024 found that South Africa's claim that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza to be "plausible," and ordered Israel to "take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of article II of the Convention" , including killing members of the group; to "prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide"; and to "enable the provision of... humanitarian assistance".

The Committee – again – urgently appeals for an immediate ceasefire, the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid and the immediate release of all hostages, in particular children and their caregivers. In this regard, we echo the "grave concern about the fate of the hostages" expressed by the International Court of Justice, and we echo also its call for their "immediate and unconditional release."

In view of the colossal humanitarian needs faced by more than two million people in the Gaza enclave, the Committee urges all donor States who have suspended their funding or future funding to UNRWA, to reconsider their decision immediately and provide sufficient funds to ensure that all urgent aid can be provided to all, to each and every child.

Furthermore, we call for massive psycho-social support to children and families to relieve the traumatic and long-lasting effects of the war, including Israeli children that were victims of or witnesses to the attacks and those whose family members have been taken hostage.

We also emphasise our grave concern about the situation of children living in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, who are facing arbitrary arrests, extra-judicial killing, and violence committed by occupying forces and settlers.

We call upon the State of Israel to immediately comply with the ruling of the International Court of Justice. We also call on all States to take action to end the conflict by establishing an immediate ceasefire, resuming peace negotiations and restoring funding to UNRWA without delay.

The State of Israel was on the list of States to be reviewed during this session, the CRC was to have reviewed Israel, but unfortunately the Israeli Government decided to postpone its participation.

The Committee deeply regrets that it has not had the opportunity to review Israel when time is of the essence. The rights of children living under the State of Israel's effective control are being gravely violated at a level that has rarely been seen in recent history.

We look forward to an interactive dialogue with the State delegation from Israel, which is now scheduled for the Committee's September session. In the meantime, the Committee will send Israel an additional list of issues on the situation of children in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 7 October 2023.

## **VI. UNICEF calls on the parties to refrain from military escalation in Rafah**

*Below is the [statement](#) by UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell issued on 8 February.*

UNICEF is urgently calling on the parties to refrain from military escalation in Rafah Governorate in Gaza where over 600,000 children and their families have been displaced – many of them more than once.

An escalation of the fighting in Rafah, which is already straining under the extraordinary number of people who have been displaced from other parts of Gaza, will mark another devastating turn in a war that has reportedly killed over 27,000 people – most of them women and children.

Thousands more could die in the violence or by lack of essential services, and further disruption of humanitarian assistance. We need Gaza's last remaining hospitals, shelters, markets and water systems to stay functional. Without them, hunger and disease will skyrocket, taking more child lives.

I appeal to all parties to the conflict to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law. That includes taking the utmost care to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure, to meet civilians' essential needs and facilitate rapid, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access. Military operations in densely populated residential areas can have indiscriminate effects.

We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, and the safe and immediate release of all hostages – especially children – who have suffered so much.

A humanitarian ceasefire will save lives. It will allow for the expansion of the humanitarian response, and help provide the best protection for children whose lives and futures are hanging in the balance.”

## **VII. UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide horrified at the situation in Middle East**

*On 9 February, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, issued the following [statement](#).*

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, reiterates that she remains horrified at the situation in the Middle East and at the unbearable loss of life in the region, with allegations of violations of international law.

Special Adviser Wairimu Nderitu reiterates her 15 October statement and early warning call – reiterated in several other public engagements – for a humanitarian ceasefire, full compliance with international law and prioritization of protection of civilians and for the intensification of diplomatic efforts to put an end to this crisis. She emphasizes that “civilians should never pay the price of a conflict for which they bear no



responsibility. Their most basic rights must be protected and preserved, and their humanitarian needs must be met”.

The Special Adviser echoes the 26 January statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General taking note of the Order of the International Court of Justice of 26 January 2024 indicating provisional measures in the case concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), in which the Court ordered Israel, inter alia, in accordance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention, “to take all measures within its power” in relation to Palestinians in Gaza to prevent the commission of acts within the scope of Article II of the Convention, including killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group’s destruction and imposing measures intended to prevent births, as well as to “ensure with immediate effect that its military forces do not commit any of the above-described acts”. Furthermore, the Court indicated “that Israel must take all measures within its power to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to members of the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip”. In this connection, neither the Secretary-General nor the Special Adviser take a position in relation to ongoing judicial proceedings before the Court.

Echoing the words of the Secretary-General, the Special Adviser reiterates that violations of international humanitarian law can never justify the collective punishment of the people in Gaza. “Civilians must be protected at all times on both sides,” Special Adviser Wairimu Nderitu reminded. The Special Adviser also calls all relevant actors to strengthen their resolve to find solutions to end this conflict. This requires first and foremost ensuring the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructures in accordance with international law. And includes the safe return of all hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza as well investigating acts of sexual violence reportedly committed in the context of the attacks of 7 October 2023 and their aftermath.

The Special Adviser also echoes the Secretary-General’s concern over the spillover effects seen in the West Bank and across the region and urges the immediate de-escalation of tensions. “Inflammatory remarks, dehumanizing rhetoric and hate speech can only contribute to ignite further violence and reduce the space for ending the conflict. Political leaders have a special responsibility to refrain from using such hateful narratives and implement all possible measures to defuse ongoing tensions.”

The Special Adviser also reiterates her concern at the impact this conflict continues to have across the world. “It is essential that all efforts are put in place for communities to co-exist peacefully and for all grievances to be addressed constructively and peacefully, as much in the region itself as in all the countries and regions where the ongoing hostilities continue having an impact.”

#### **VIII. UN Human Rights High Commissioner says the world must not allow a full-fledged military incursion into Rafah**

*On 12 February, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, issued the following [statement](#).*

A potential full-fledged military incursion into Rafah – where some 1.5 million Palestinians are packed against the Egyptian border with nowhere further to flee – is terrifying, given the prospect that an extremely high number of civilians, again mostly children and women, will likely be killed and injured.

Not so long ago, I had flagged the unimaginable suffering faced by Palestinians in Gaza. Today, sadly, given the carnage wrought so far in Gaza it is wholly imaginable what would lie ahead in Rafah. Beyond the pain and suffering of the bombs and bullets, this incursion into Rafah may also mean the end of the

meager humanitarian aid that has been entering and distributed with huge implications for all of Gaza, including the hundreds of thousands at grave risk of starvation and famine in the north. My Office has repeatedly warned against actions that violate the laws of war. The prospect of such an operation into Rafah, as circumstances stand, risks further atrocity crimes.

Israel must comply with the legally binding orders issued by the International Court of Justice, and with the full span of international humanitarian law. Those who defy international law have been put on notice. Accountability must follow.

The world must not allow this to happen. Those with influence must restrain rather than enable. There must be an immediate ceasefire. All remaining hostages must be released. And there must be renewed collective resolve to reach a political solution.

### **IX. OCHA Chief warns military operations in Rafah could lead to slaughter, end fragile humanitarian operation**

*On 13 February, Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, issued the following [statement](#).*

The scenario we have long dreaded is unraveling at alarming speed.

More than half of Gaza's population – well over 1 million people – are crammed in Rafah, staring death in the face: They have little to eat, hardly any access to medical care, nowhere to sleep, nowhere safe to go.

They, like the entire population of Gaza, are the victims of an assault that is unparalleled in its intensity, brutality and scope. More than 28,000 people – mostly women and children – have been killed across Gaza, according to the Ministry of Health.

For more than four months, humanitarian workers have been doing the near-impossible to assist people in need, despite the risks they themselves were facing and the traumas they were enduring. But no amount of dedication and goodwill is enough to keep millions of people alive, fed and protected – while the bombs are falling and the aid is choked off.

Add to this the widespread despair, the breakdown of law and order, and the defunding of UNRWA. The consequences are humanitarian workers who are shot at, held at gunpoint, attacked and killed. I have said for weeks now that our humanitarian response is in tatters.

Today, I'm sounding the alarm once again: Military operations in Rafah could lead to a slaughter in Gaza. They could also leave an already fragile humanitarian operation at death's door.

We lack the safety guarantees, the aid supplies and the staff capacity to keep this operation afloat.

The international community has been warning against the dangerous consequences of any ground invasion in Rafah. The Government of Israel cannot continue to ignore these calls.

History will not be kind. This war must end.

## **X. UN Palestinian Rights Committee Bureau warns against Rafah operation**

*On 14 February, the Bureau of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following [statement](#).*

The Bureau of the Committee strongly condemns the threats of an Israeli invasion into the city of Rafah, the last refuge of about 1.5 million forcibly displaced Palestinians in the Gaza Strip who are staring death in the face without access to food, medical care, and safe shelter. The Bureau reiterates its calls for an immediate ceasefire and a halt to any plans for a military incursion into Rafah, which will endanger the lives of countless civilians, many of whom are women and an estimated 600,000 children who have already been displaced multiple times.

Rafah is a crucial lifeline for humanitarian operations in Gaza. An Israeli offensive will halt the provision of humanitarian aid to besieged Palestinian civilians, who, after months facing bombings, disease, and hunger now confront the fear and terror of a looming military onslaught. This is the latest threat to Palestinian civilians in war of collective punishment, potentially involving acts of genocide.

The Bureau fully supports South Africa's urgent follow-up request to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for further provisional measures to avert an Israeli military offensive in Rafah, which would violate the ICJ's Order of 26 January 2024 issued in the context of the Genocide Convention. It calls on Israel to comply with and prevent further breaches of the Court Order.

The UN system and the international community must persist in preventing further mass atrocities, harm, deprivation, forced displacement of Palestinian civilians and further destruction in Gaza and Rafah specifically. Prompt action by all concerned must counteract Israel's amply documented violations of international humanitarian law, including efforts to ensure protection of the Palestinian civilian population, in accordance with international law and the relevant UN resolutions.

The Bureau once again makes an urgent call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, a halt to the forced displacement of the Palestinian people, unhindered access to humanitarian aid and the unconditional release of all hostages in Gaza and all Palestinian prisoners arbitrarily detained in Israel.

The Committee Bureau reaffirms its longstanding call for a just and peaceful resolution to the question of Palestine in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions to end the Israeli occupation, realize the rights of the Palestinian people, including self-determination and return, and achieve the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

## **XI. Israel's symbolic entry "ban" must not distract from atrocity crimes in Gaza says a UN human rights expert**

*On 15 February, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Francesca Albanese, issued the following [statement](#).*

Since Israel's 2008 detention and deportation of then UN Special Rapporteur Richard Falk, the State of Israel has prevented the entry of all UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. Israel's recent announcement to 'officially ban' my entry is therefore symbolic and misleading.

Israel's announcement must not serve as a diversion from the situation in Gaza, which Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths has qualified as 'an

assault that is unparalleled in its intensity, brutality and scope’ and that the International Court of Justice has said plausibly constitutes genocide. In just over four months, the Israeli army has killed over 28,500 Palestinians in Gaza, 70% of them women and children, while some 10,000 people are missing, presumed dead under the rubble. Nearly 70,000 are injured, many maimed for life, and some 1.7 million people—75% of the population—have been displaced, while the entire civilian population is at risk of starvation. Daily, relentless massacres, the latest ones inflicted in the non-existent “safe zones” in Rafah, where over 1.4 million Palestinians are struggling to survive, are being committed in flagrant defiance of the [\*provisional measures\*](#) ordered by the International Court of Justice.

Israel claims that the ban follows my comments concerning the context in which Hamas’ attacks on 7 October took place. My comments were prompted by the French President’s description of the attacks as ‘the largest anti-Semitic massacre of our century’. I have strongly and consistently condemned these heinous attacks as war crimes, which cannot be justified in any way, and for the fear and distress they have spread among Israelis. I continue to express my sorrow and solidarity with the victims, including the hostages still held captive, and with Jewish communities worldwide. I also call for accountability for these crimes.

While my condemnation of the attacks is unequivocal, I also felt compelled to challenge a persistent misinterpretation of the root causes of the 7 October attacks, particularly in Western countries: that the attacks were primarily motivated by anti-Semitism. As prominent Holocaust and anti-Semitism scholars have warned, this assumption is both false and dangerous as it evades the critical underpinnings of the conflict and disavows the role of Israel in fuelling it. These scholars have recently argued that ‘appealing to the memory of the Holocaust obscures our understanding of the antisemitism Jews face today, and dangerously misrepresents the causes of violence in Israel-Palestine.’ So, while anti-Semitism could have played a role in the attacks at an individual level for some, their main determinants are to be found elsewhere.

Context does matter. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated: ‘It is important to also recognise the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation’.

Fundamentally, no crime ever justifies another crime. There is no justification for the horrific attacks of 7 October. However, the ‘56 years of suffocating occupation’ referred to by the Secretary-General is the very context that fuels the hatred and violence that endangers Israelis and Palestinians alike. This context is obscured by the framing of 7 October as primarily driven by anti-Semitism.

In line with the Code of Conduct for Special Procedures Mandate Holders, since the early days of my mandate, I have sought to establish formal relations with the State of Israel that would enable me to fulfil the task entrusted to me by the Human Rights Council. Unfortunately, Israel has responded with hostility and slander that is often amplified by politically aligned organisations and media.

As a Member State of the United Nations, Israel is obligated to respect international law and uphold the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Charter, which enshrine rights and freedoms for all human beings. Regrettably, the Israeli government consistently undermines the leading promoters and defenders of the rule of law, humanitarian protection and human rights, including the UN Secretary-General, the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms and independent experts, UNRWA, OCHA and the International Court of Justice.

The primacy of the rule of law forms the foundation of the United Nations' existence and mission—and Israel, like any other State, is called upon to abide by these standards. This includes the facilitation of my access to the territory it has occupied for 56 years.

Although a long and challenging endeavour, respecting international law and ending the system of apartheid that Israel imposes on the Palestinians is the only way to achieve lasting peace, human security and regional stability—for no one can be safe until everyone is safe.

## **XII. OHCHR is concerned by the pattern of Israeli raids on Gaza medical facilities**

*On 15 February, the spokesperson of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights delivered the following press [statement](#).*

We are deeply worried by the reports that Israeli forces have today raided the Nasser Medical Complex in the south of the occupied Gaza Strip, less than a week after they raided Al Amal Hospital in western Khan Younis.

The raid comes after a week-long siege which cut off medical, food and fuel supplies.

Israeli forces reportedly ordered the transfer of all patients, including those in intensive care and nursery units, to a different building, exposing patients to grave risks, including the risk of death for the most vulnerable. There are unconfirmed reports of detention as well as targeting of those trying to leave the hospital.

The raid appears to be part of a pattern of attacks by Israeli forces striking essential life-saving civilian infrastructure in Gaza, especially hospitals. Our Office has documented similar raids in Gaza City, North Gaza, Middle Gaza and in Khan Younis, with serious consequences for the safety of patients, medical and other staff, as well as civilians sheltering in these facilities.

With nearly 70,000 people reportedly injured during this conflict, and a nearly collapsed health system due to attacks on facilities and restrictions on essential humanitarian supplies, the impact on civilians is appalling.

Medical facilities are protected infrastructure under international humanitarian law. They are entitled to special protection and must not be the object of attack nor be used outside their humanitarian function for acts harmful to the enemy. Even if Israel contends that a medical facility has lost its protection as a result of being used for acts harmful to the Israeli forces, it must nevertheless comply with the principles of precautions and proportionality. Furthermore, Israel, as the occupying power, has the duty to ensure and maintain medical facilities and services in all of the occupied territory, including the Gaza Strip.

## **XIII. ICJ denies South Africa's request for additional provisional measures**

*On 16 February, the International Court of Justice issued a decision reflected in the following [press release](#).*

In the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), the Court, having duly considered South Africa's letter dated [12 February 2024](#) and Israel's observations thereon received on 15 February 2024, took the following decision, which was communicated to the Parties today by a letter from the Registrar:

“The Court notes that the most recent developments in the Gaza Strip, and in Rafah in particular, ‘would exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences’, as stated by the United Nations Secretary-General (Remarks to the General Assembly on priorities for 2024 (7 Feb. 2024)).

This perilous situation demands immediate and effective implementation of the provisional measures indicated by the Court in its [Order of 26 January 2024](#), which are applicable throughout the Gaza Strip, including in Rafah, and does not demand the indication of additional provisional measures.

The Court emphasizes that the State of Israel remains bound to fully comply with its obligations under the Genocide Convention and with the said Order, including by ensuring the safety and security of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.”

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#### **XIV. When mothers have to bury at least 7,700 children, very basic principles are challenged, CEDAW says**

*On 16 February, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) issued the following [statement](#).*

On this 125<sup>th</sup> day of the war in Gaza, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) appeals for an immediate and sustained ceasefire to halt violence and loss of lives, and destruction of infrastructure and property and a return to a constructive peace dialogue to agree on actions to bring about lasting peace and security that involves the leadership and decision-making of both Israeli and Palestinian women.

The Committee deplores the high toll of victims and calls upon all parties to the conflict to abide by the rule of law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law and reaffirm their commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Convention) and its preamble, General Recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations of the Committee, as well as Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security.

The Committee is deeply concerned about the plight of the more than one million Palestinian women and girls who have been forcibly displaced multiple times. As of 12 February 2024, UN Women reports that at least 28,340 Palestinians were killed in Gaza, and 70 per cent of those killed are said to be women and children. 67,984 Palestinians have been injured. The Convention’s very principles are challenged when mothers are put in a situation of burying at least 7,729 children. As stated by UNFPA, an estimated 5,500 women are due to give birth within the next month, more than 180 delivering every day, and an estimated 840 women may experience pregnancy- or birth-related complications. The Committee condemns the inexorable march of death, disease, and destruction in the Gaza Strip.

The Committee calls on Israel to comply with the [order](#) of provisional measures of the International Court of Justice to “take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts” of violence, “prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide”, and “to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance”.

The Committee calls upon Israel to allow the provision of medical personnel, medicines, water, food, fuel, shelter, and clothes to all civilians and provide a special focus on women’s and girls’ special needs, such as sexual and reproductive health services and sanitary and hygiene products. The clock is ticking fast

towards famine and an outbreak of epidemics. The lives and health, physical and mental, of the women and girls of Gaza are severely compromised.

The Committee deplores that women are among the first victims of conflict-related violence and stresses that they are leading forces for peace. It reaffirms its profound commitment to women's leadership and decision-making at this moment of conflict and in all evolving processes in peace-building. The Committee strongly calls for reforms in the security architecture of all parties to guarantee parity with a starting minimum quota of 30 per cent for women's representation at decision-making levels around the negotiation table and in the entire peace-building continuum. Women must stop paying for the cost of war.

The Committee recognizes that the continuing war and siege cause grievous harm to all women and girls, including pregnant women and women with disabilities. This constitutes a major humanitarian, human rights and public health crisis and a stain on our collective conscience.

The Committee calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli hostages held captive by Hamas. It also calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Palestinians, including women and girls, who are arbitrarily arrested and detained by Israeli forces.

The Committee warns against any pending and potential military offenses and incursions into the already limited land space of Rafah where hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced persons, predominantly women and children, are seeking refuge.

The Committee appeals to the Security Council to claim an immediate and total cessation of the war in Gaza to ensure lasting peace and security in the region.

#### **XV. US vetoes Algerian Security Council resolution demanding immediate ceasefire in Gaza**

*On 20 February, the Security Council met to consider agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question." A draft resolution reproduced below contained in document [S/2024/173](#) was not adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council. The meeting record is available [here](#).*

##### **Algeria: draft resolution**

*The Security Council,*

*Reaffirming* the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

*Recalling* all its relevant resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question,

*Recalling* also the Order delivered on 26 January 2024 by the International Court of Justice indicating provisional measures to Israel in the case concerning the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (South Africa v. Israel) in relation to the right of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip to be protected from all acts within the scope of Article II and Article III of the Convention,

*Recalling* further the letter dated 6 December 2023 of the Secretary-General, under Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, addressed to the President of the Security Council ([S/2023/962](#)),

*Reiterating* its demand that all parties to the conflict comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular with regard to the conduct of hostilities and the protection of civilians and civilian objects, and recalling the obligation to respect and protect humanitarian relief and medical personnel as well as medical infrastructure, medical transports and the wounded and sick, and to refrain from depriving the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip of essential goods and services indispensable to their survival and humanitarian assistance, consistent with international humanitarian law and international human rights law,

*Reaffirming* the obligations of all parties regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance, and its demand that they allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, full, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip,

*Welcoming* the appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag, as Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza pursuant to its resolution 2720, underscoring the need to provide her team with the resources and support necessary to fulfil her mandate, and emphasizing the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to civilians in the Gaza Strip,

*Reaffirming* its strong concern for the disproportionate and grave effect that the conflict is having on the civilian population, with particular impact on the lives and well-being of children, women, and persons with disabilities as well as other civilians in vulnerable situations,

*Expressing* grave concern over the dire and urgently deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the adverse conditions of life for and suffering of the Palestinian civilian population,

*Expressing* also grave concern over the impact of the situation in Gaza on regional and international peace and security,

*Emphasizing* the imperative of accountability for all violations of international law,

*Stressing* that the Gaza Strip constitutes an integral part of the territory occupied in 1967, and reiterating the vision of the two-state solution, with the Gaza Strip as part of the Palestinian State,

1. *Demands* an immediate humanitarian ceasefire that must be respected by all parties;
2. *Reiterates* its demand that all parties scrupulously comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular including with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian objects, and in this regard deplores all attacks against civilians and civilian objects, as well as all violence and hostilities against civilians, and all acts of terrorism;
3. *Rejects* forced displacement of the Palestinian civilian population, including women and children, in violation of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and demands an immediate end to any such violations;
4. *Demands* the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access to address medical needs of all hostages, and further demands that the parties comply with their obligations under international law in relation to all persons they detain and respect their human rights;
5. *Reiterates* its call for the full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access into and throughout the entire Gaza Strip and for the urgent, continuous and sufficient provision of humanitarian assistance at



scale to the Palestinian civilian population, including by facilitating the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip, including border crossings, in accordance with international humanitarian law and its relevant resolutions;

6. *Demands* the implementation of its resolutions [2712 \(2023\)](#) and [2720 \(2023\)](#) in full;

7. *Reiterates* its unwavering commitment to the vision of the two-State solution where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, consistent with international law and relevant UN resolutions, and in this regard stresses the importance of unifying the Gaza Strip with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority;

8. *Emphasizes* the importance of preventing further escalation in the region, and, in this regard, calls on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and calls on all those with influence on the parties to work toward this objective;

9. *Decides* to remain actively seized of the matter.

## **XVI. WFP pauses food deliveries to the North of Gaza**

*On 20 February, the UN World Food Programme issued the following [press release](#)*

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) is pausing deliveries of life-saving food aid to northern Gaza until conditions are in place that allow for safe distributions.

The decision to pause deliveries to the north of the Gaza Strip has not been taken lightly, as we know it means the situation there will deteriorate further and more people risk dying of hunger. WFP is deeply committed to urgently reaching desperate people across Gaza but the safety and security to deliver critical food aid - and for the people receiving it - must be ensured.

Deliveries resumed on Sunday after a three-week suspension following the strike on an UNRWA truck and due to the absence of a functioning humanitarian notification system. The plan was to send 10 trucks of food for seven straight days, to help stem the tide of hunger and desperation and to begin building trust in communities that there would be enough food for all.

On Sunday, as WFP started the route towards Gaza City, the convoy was surrounded by crowds of hungry people close to the Wadi Gaza checkpoint. First fending off multiple attempts by people trying to climb aboard our trucks, then facing gunfire once we entered Gaza City, our team was able to distribute a small quantity of the food along the way. On Monday, the second convoy's journey north faced complete chaos and violence due to the collapse of civil order. Several trucks were looted between Khan Younes and Deir al Balah and a truck driver was beaten. The remaining flour was spontaneously distributed off the trucks in Gaza city, amidst high tension and explosive anger.

In December, the Integrated Phase Classification report compiled by 15 agencies including WFP warned of the risk of famine in northern Gaza by May unless conditions there improved decisively. At the end of January, after delivering food to the north, we reported on the rapid deterioration of conditions. In these past two days our teams witnessed unprecedented levels of desperation.

The latest reports confirm Gaza's precipitous slide into hunger and disease. Food and safe water have become incredibly scarce and diseases are rife, compromising women and children's nutrition and immunity and resulting in a surge of acute malnutrition. People are already dying from hunger-related causes.

A report issued Monday by UNICEF and WFP, based on recent data, finds that the situation is particularly extreme in the Northern Gaza Strip. Nutrition screenings conducted at shelters and health centres in the north found that 15.6 per cent - or 1 in 6 children under 2 years of age - are acutely malnourished.

WFP will seek ways to resume deliveries in a responsible manner as soon as possible. A large-scale expansion of the flow of assistance to northern Gaza is urgently needed to avoid disaster. To achieve this, WFP needs significantly higher volumes of food coming into the Gaza strip from multiple routes, additionally, crossing points to the north of Gaza must open. A functioning humanitarian notification system and a stable communication network are needed. And security, for our staff and partners as well as for the people we serve, must be facilitated.

Gaza is hanging by a thread and WFP must be enabled to reverse the path towards famine for thousands of desperately hungry people.

## **XVII. Civilians in Gaza in extreme peril while the world watches on, warns the Inter-Agency Standing Committee**

*On 21 February, the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) issued the following [statement](#).*

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, 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.

*Signatories:*

- Mr. Martin Griffiths, Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**)
- Ms. Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro, Secretary General, **CARE International**
- Dr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**)
- Ms. Jane Backhurst, Chair, ICVA (**Christian Aid**)
- Mr. Jamie Munn, Executive Director, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (**ICVA**)
- Mr. Tom Hart, Chief Executive Officer and President, **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**)
- Mr. Michal Mlynár, Executive Director a.i., United Nations Human Settlement Programme (**UN-Habitat**)
- 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**)

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

### **XVIII. UNRWA on the edge of a “monumental disaster” warns the Agency’s Chief**

*On 22 February, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini addressed the following [letter](#) to the President of the General Assembly, Dennis Francis.*

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.

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.

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#### **XIX. UN Special Coordinator briefs the Security Council on the Middle East situation**

*On 22 February, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland delivered the following [remarks](#) at the Security Council.*

As we approach 140 days of devastating war, there is still no end in sight. No end to the trauma of those impacted by the horrors unleashed on 7 October. No end to the suffering and desperation of the people in Gaza. No end to the regional turmoil.

I was in Gaza this week to see first-hand the unfolding tragedy and to meet with our tireless and brave teams on the ground who face impossible challenges to deliver life-saving assistance to Palestinian civilians in the Strip. What I saw was shocking and unsustainable.

I am deeply concerned about a possible full-scale Israeli military operation in the densely populated Rafah area, where some 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering and where we have the only points of entry of humanitarian goods.

I cannot stress enough how urgently we need a deal that will bring about a humanitarian ceasefire and the release of hostages. I reiterate my call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and for a humanitarian ceasefire.

In the meantime, I will continue to urge all concerned – including Israeli authorities – to address the key impediments to our humanitarian response on the ground. We need more safety measures, greater security and the tools and access points to scale up aid, particularly in the north of the Strip.

I am also continuing my extensive engagements in the region and internationally, to both support all efforts toward a ceasefire and bring about a more common understanding and coordinated approach to addressing the complex humanitarian, security and political crises affecting not only Gaza, but the whole of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel and the region.

I am convinced that there is no time to lose in laying the framework for Gaza's recovery and for a long-term political resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including by advancing meaningful, irreversible steps towards a two-State solution.

According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, from 18 January through 16 February, 4,327 Palestinians were killed and over 7,000 injured in fighting and Israeli operations in the Strip, bringing the total Palestinian fatalities in the war to more than 28,000, many women and children.

The IDF has said that over 10,000 Palestinian fatalities are militants.

In addition to the approximately 1,200 fatalities on 7 October in Israel, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported 235 security forces personnel killed in Gaza since ground operations began. Of the 253 hostages kidnapped on 7 October, some 134 are believed to be still held hostage by Hamas, 112 have been freed, and 11 bodies recovered. 160 UN staff have been killed in Gaza – the largest single loss of life in the history of the Organization.

Battles have continued across Gaza, including a campaign in Khan Younis that began in late January and, more recently, intensified airstrikes in the densely populated Rafah area.

Hospitals, schools and other protected sites continue to be severely impacted by military operations. The IDF has said that its forces are targeting Hamas fighters and equipment, as well as large-scale tunnel networks under these and other civilian infrastructure, used for military purposes.

On 15 February, the IDF entered Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis following days of shelling and sniper fire that killed 13 Palestinians. During a multi-day operation, the IDF arrested over 100 Palestinians, including health workers, who they said were involved in militant activity including the 7 October Hamas attack in Israel. While the World Health Organization evacuated some 50 critical patients including children,

more than 100 patients remained behind and seven have reportedly died after generators were shut down. Israeli forces said they were acting on information that Hamas held hostages in the facility and were actively using the facility for military purposes.

Palestinian armed groups continued to fire indiscriminate rockets from Gaza towards Israel, albeit at reduced frequency and range.

Let me return in more detail to where I started this briefing: the desperate humanitarian situation in Gaza.

IDPs face acute shortages of food, water, shelter and medicine. Communicable diseases are rising amid unsanitary conditions; and over 2 million people face extreme food insecurity, with women and children at greatest risk. This desperation and scarcity has led to a near total breakdown in law and order.

Essential services have been heavily impacted by the fighting. Eighty-four percent of health and education facilities are either damaged or destroyed. Over 62 percent of all roads and electricity feeder lines are unusable.

My Deputy and Humanitarian Coordinator has a plan to deliver the essentials – food, shelter, medicine and water/sanitation – but, our capacity to deliver depends on coordinated humanitarian movements, effective deconfliction with the parties and Israeli approvals for essential communications equipment and armored vehicles – all of which provide the minimum conditions for staff to work safely.

This must be improved – UN convoys and compounds must not be hit and our equipment needs clearance—fast.

Keeping Gaza on a drip-feed not only deprives a desperate population of life-saving support, it drives even greater chaos on the ground and further impedes humanitarian delivery.

On 20 February, WFP announced that it was forced to pause deliveries to northern Gaza following multiple security incidents. Convoy movements had only just resumed two days earlier following a three-week suspension in the wake of a strike on a UN truck.

For this reason, I renew our appeal to open additional access points to the northern part of Gaza to increase the flow of aid, reduce congestion in the south and relieve some of the pressure on the population and the staff seeking to deliver.

Israel has provided information that 12 UNRWA staff were involved in the brutal attacks against Israelis on 7 October. These allegations are appalling, and such acts must be condemned. The Secretary-General and UNRWA took swift action, including terminating employment of the ten active staff members and launching internal and independent investigations. Nevertheless, key donors have suspended aid amounting to over half of the Agency's forecasted income for 2024. While we address the very serious allegations at hand, we must recognize that UNRWA remains the backbone of humanitarian response on the ground. I reiterate the SG's appeal to donors to guarantee the continuity of UNRWA operations – not only for Gaza, but for the stability of the region.

Turning to the occupied West Bank, 27 Palestinians, including eight children, were killed by Israeli security forces – the majority in the context of Israeli operations in Area A, often including armed exchanges with Palestinians.



On 30 January, an undercover IDF unit killed three Palestinians inside a hospital in Jenin, one of whom was a patient. The IDF said that the three, who were claimed as members by armed groups, were planning an attack against Israelis.

During the reporting period, three Israelis, including one woman, were killed in Palestinian shooting attacks in the occupied West Bank and in Israel, including two at a bus stop on 16 February by a Palestinian who was also killed at the scene.

In today's early hours, a deadly terror attack by three Palestinians on Israeli commuters near the Maale Adumim settlement outside Jerusalem is yet another reminder of the boiling tension on the ground.

Settler attacks against Palestinians and their property also continued.

On 1 February U.S. President Biden issued an Executive Order imposing sanctions on "persons undermining peace, security and stability in the West Bank." Four Israeli settlers have been sanctioned under the order, while the UK and France have also announced sanctions against settlers.

Settlement activity also continued as Israeli authorities published tenders for approximately 420 housing units in Area C settlements.

On 14 February, after an extended legal battle, Israeli authorities demolished the home of a prominent community leader in al-Bustan, in occupied East Jerusalem, citing the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

I am concerned that if the violence in Gaza does not end, and tensions and restrictions remain high in the West Bank, including at the Holy Sites in East Jerusalem, the Holy month of Ramadan risks becoming another volatile marker rather than a time of contemplation and healing.

I also remain deeply concerned about the economy in the West Bank and the PA's fiscal crisis.

In this context, I welcome Norway's announcement on 18 February that an arrangement was reached with the parties to facilitate a partial transfer of the monthly clearance revenues, not including the amount Israel says the PA transfers to Gaza.

I am also encouraged that the Palestinian Prime Minister announced several judicial, security, administrative and financial reforms last month, but more remains to be done.

In the international arena, on 26 January, the International Court of Justice issued provisional measures in the case of South Africa vs. Israel on the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip.

I welcome the recent visit of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to gather information on reports of sexual violence in the context of the 7 October attacks.

I remain gravely concerned over the serious risk for a further regional escalation.

Across the Blue Line, exchanges of fire between Israel and Hizbullah continue to intensify, with several civilian casualties reported in recent days. Approximately 100,000 Israelis and over 87,000 Lebanese are displaced from their communities.

Firing from Syria towards the Israeli-occupied Golan and strikes by Israel against targets in Syria also continued, including Syrian claims of Israeli strikes on locations in Damascus and Homs.

On 28 January, three U.S. soldiers were killed and over 40 injured in a drone attack on a U.S. military outpost in the northern part of Jordan. U.S. forces responded with strikes on targets in Syria and Iraq. Houthi forces continued to launch attacks against vessels in the Red Sea, with strikes reported against Houthi targets in Yemen.

Attacks against international shipping routes must cease immediately. I urge all relevant actors to take steps to immediately de-escalate.

The scale of the emergency we are facing is staggering and could quickly spiral out of control in the region.

I appeal for a collective, coordinated and comprehensive response to not only address the immediate crisis before us in Gaza, but to help restore a political horizon for Palestinians and Israelis, alike, while promoting greater stability and peace in the region.

To do this, we urgently need a deal to achieve a humanitarian ceasefire and the release of hostages.

We need to create the space for moving forward through dialogue rather than violence.

Ultimately, the only long-term solution for Gaza is political. While taking into account Israel's legitimate security concerns, there must be a clear path toward restoring a single, effective Palestinian governance across the OPT, including in Gaza. International support to strengthening and reforming the Palestinian Authority to improve domestic and international legitimacy will be crucial.

To create the conditions for this to work, there must also be a timebound steps within a political framework to end the occupation and establish a two-State solution in line with relevant UN resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

These efforts must coalesce and accelerate if we are to emerge from this nightmare onto a trajectory that can provide Palestinians and Israelis with a chance of lasting peace.

## **XX. 34 UN Human rights experts call for halt of arms exports to Israel**

*On 23 February, Ben Saul, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; Margaret Satterthwaite, Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers; Cecilia M. Bailliet, Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; Claudia Mahler, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons; Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education; Livingstone Sewanyana, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; Surya Deva, Special Rapporteur on the right to development; Attiya Waris, Independent Expert on foreign debt, other international financial obligations and human rights; Ashwini K.P., Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; Olivier De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; Paula Gaviria Betancur, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Tomoya Obokata, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Carlos Salazar Couto (Chair-Rapporteur), Sorcha MacLeod, Jovana Ježdmirovic Ranito, Chris M. A. Kwaja, Ravindran Daniel, Working Group on the use of mercenaries; Robert McCorquodale (Chair-Rapporteur), Fernanda Hopenhaym (Vice-Chair), Pichamon Yeophantong, Damilola Olawuyi, Elzbieta Karska, Working Group on business and human rights; Barbara G. Reynolds (Chair), Dominique Day, Bina D'Costa, Working Group of Experts on People*

*of African Descent; Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing; Dorothy Estrada Tanck (Chair), Claudia Flores, Ivana Krstić, Haina Lu, and Laura Nyirinkindi, Working group on discrimination against women and girls; and Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967; Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Fabián Salvioli, Special Rapporteur on truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence issued a statement reflected in the following [press release](#).*

Any transfer of weapons or ammunition to Israel that would be used in Gaza is likely to violate international humanitarian law and must cease immediately, UN experts warned today.

“All States must ‘ensure respect’ for international humanitarian law by parties to an armed conflict, as required by 1949 Geneva Conventions and customary international law,” the experts said. “States must accordingly refrain from transferring any weapon or ammunition – or parts for them – if it is expected, given the facts or past patterns of behaviour, that they would be used to violate international law.”

“Such transfers are prohibited even if the exporting State does not intend the arms to be used in violation of the law – or does not know with certainty that they would be used in such a way – as long as there is a clear risk,” they said.

The experts welcomed the decision of a Dutch appeals court on 12 February 2024 ordering the Netherlands to halt the export of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel. The court found that there was a “clear risk” that the parts would be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law, as “there are many indications that Israel has violated the humanitarian law of war in a not insignificant number of cases”.

The Dutch court pointed to the extensive civilian casualties, including thousands of children; the destruction of 60% of civilian homes and extensive damage to hospitals, water and food supplies, schools and religious buildings; widespread severe hunger; and the displacement of 85% of Palestinians in Gaza. It also highlighted evidence of the prolific use of imprecise “dumb bombs”; deliberate, disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks; failures to warn civilians of attacks; and incriminating statements by Israeli commanders and soldiers.

Over 29,313 Palestinians have been killed and 69,333 injured in Gaza since 7 October 2023, the majority being women and children. “Israel has repeatedly failed to comply with international law,” the experts said.

The experts noted that States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty have additional treaty obligations to deny arms exports if they “know” that the arms “would” be used to commit international crimes; or if there is an “overriding risk” that the arms transferred “could” be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law. European Union member states are further bound by EU arms export control law.

“The need for an arms embargo on Israel is heightened by the International Court of Justice’s ruling on 26 January 2024 that there is a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza and the continuing serious harm to civilians since then”, the experts said. The Genocide Convention of 1948 requires States parties to employ all means reasonably available to them to prevent genocide in another state as far as possible. “This necessitates halting arms exports in the present circumstances”, the experts said.

The experts welcomed the suspension of arms transfers to Israel by Belgium, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and the Japanese company Itochu Corporation. The European Union also recently discouraged arms exports to Israel.

The experts urged other States to immediately halt arms transfers to Israel, including export licenses and military aid. The United States and Germany are by far the largest arms exporters and shipments have increased since 7 October 2023. Other military exporters include France, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

The experts noted that arms transfers to Hamas and other armed groups are also prohibited by international law, given their grave violations of international humanitarian law on 7 October 2023, including hostage-taking and subsequent indiscriminate rocket fire.

The duty to “ensure respect” for humanitarian law applies “in all circumstances”, including when Israel claims it is countering terrorism. Military intelligence must also not be shared where there is a clear risk that it would be used to violate international humanitarian law.

“State officials involved in arms exports may be individually criminally liable for aiding and abetting any war crimes, crimes against humanity or acts of genocide,” the experts said. “All States under the principle of universal jurisdiction, and the International Criminal Court, may be able to investigate and prosecute such crimes.”

The experts stressed that the duty to “ensure respect” additionally requires all States to do everything reasonably in their power to prevent and stop violations of international humanitarian law by Israel, particularly where a State has influence through its political, military, economic or other relations. Measures could include:

- Diplomatic dialogue and protests;
- Technical assistance to promote compliance and accountability;
- Sanctions on trade, finance, travel, technology or cooperation;
- Referral to the Security Council and the General Assembly;
- Proceedings at the International Court of Justice;
- Support for investigations by the International Criminal Court or other international legal mechanisms;
- National criminal investigations using universal jurisdiction and civil suits; and
- Requesting a meeting of the parties to the Geneva Conventions.

Most of these measures are also relevant to fulfilling the duty to prevent genocide.

Arms companies contributing to the production and transfer of arms to Israel and businesses investing in those companies bear their own responsibility to respect human rights, international humanitarian law and international criminal law. “They have not publicly demonstrated the heightened human rights due diligence required of them and accordingly risk complicity in violations”, the experts said.

“International law does not enforce itself,” the experts said. “All States must not be complicit in international crimes through arms transfers. They must do their part to urgently end the unrelenting humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.”

## **XXI. UN Palestinian Rights Committee Bureau calls for solidarity and support to UNRWA**

*On 28 February, the Bureau of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following [statement](#).*

The Bureau of the Committee reaffirms its unwavering support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its indispensable mission, in accordance with its General Assembly mandate to ensure the well-being, protection and development of the Palestine refugees pending a just solution to their plight on the basis of resolution 194 (III) of 1948. Following the letter from UNRWA's Commissioner-General to the President of the UN General Assembly on 22 February 2024, the Bureau expresses its grave concerns about the catastrophic conditions in Gaza and the hindrances to UNRWA's mandate implementation.

The Bureau recognizes UNRWA's role as a lifeline for Palestine refugees for the past 75 years, offering not just essential services but a sense of hope and stability amidst protracted crisis and injustice. Throughout nearly five months of Israel's war on Gaza, UNRWA has stood as the humanitarian entity with the capacity for large-scale aid delivery to the more than 1.9 million Palestinians displaced, the majority of whom are sheltering at its own facilities, and to facilitate also the work of other humanitarian entities. Recent reports of malnutrition, threats of famine, the spread of disease, and limited access to essential health care among Palestine refugees highlight the urgent need for increased support to UNRWA to implement the Provisional Measures ordered by the International Court of Justice.

The Bureau, therefore, strongly appeals to donors who have suspended funding to UNRWA to reverse such decisions, which severely jeopardize the Agency's humanitarian and stabilizing efforts across the region, particularly in the war-torn Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Bureau supports the Secretary-General's decision to task an independent investigation into allegations that some UNRWA staff may have been involved in the attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 and expects Israel's full cooperation with the UN Office for Internal Oversight's investigation.

The demonization of the Agency must stop. The Agency's role extends beyond humanitarian efforts – it symbolizes the international community's commitment to justice, human rights, peace, and refugee rights. Supporting UNRWA means standing with the Palestinian people until the achievement of a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in accordance with UN resolutions and international law.

The Bureau once more reiterates its urgent appeal for an immediate and lasting ceasefire in Gaza, an end to the forced displacement of Palestinians, and unobstructed access to humanitarian assistance.