

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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Briefing to the Security Council on Gaza

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[AS DELIVERED]

Thank you, Mr. President,

The suffering endured in Gaza over the past 22 months has been nothing short of soul-searing.

Our shared humanity demands that this unacceptable catastrophe is brought to an immediate end.

Mr. President,

I will address three matters today:

First, I am extremely concerned over the prolonged conflict and reports of atrocities and further human toll that is likely to unfold following the Government of Israel's decision to expand military operations in Gaza.

This marks a grave escalation in a conflict that has already inflicted unimaginable suffering.

Now, for over 670 days, Palestinians in Gaza have endured daily killings and injuries. More than 61,000 people have been killed, including over at least 18,000 children, and 151,000 have been injured, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health.

Meanwhile, 50 hostages are believed to remain in Gaza – with those still alive held in inhumane and appalling conditions.

Thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, remain in Israeli detention – many held without charge or trial, or the required safeguards.

A grim milestone has also been crossed in our sector, the humanitarian community: Over 500 humanitarian workers have been killed in Gaza since hostilities escalated, including at least 167

women. Smear campaigns against aid operations continue unabated. And as we approach World Humanitarian Day, we must insist on the protection of all aid workers.

Mr. President,

Second, humanitarian conditions are beyond horrific. We have frankly run out of words to describe it. Whatever lifelines remain are collapsing under the weight of sustained hostilities, forced displacement and insufficient levels of life-saving aid.

Hunger-related deaths are rising, especially among children with severe malnutrition. Since the escalation of hostilities in October 2023, the health authorities in Gaza have documented the deaths of 98 children from severe acute malnutrition – 37 alone since 1 July – just over a month ago. So, this is no longer a looming hunger crisis – this is starvation, pure and simple.

Each day brings harrowing images of men, women, and children killed and injured while desperately seeking assistance. The situation is untenable, especially for older people, people with disabilities, children without parental care, and widowed women.

Gaza lies in ruins. Almost everyone in Gaza has been forcibly displaced at some point over the past two years and at least once. Palestinians in Gaza have been forced into an area that amounts to less than 14 per cent of the territory, in areas that are not safe and are lacking basic services or shelter. Further expansion of military operations will make these conditions even worse.

Families in Gaza are living in insecure and overcrowded conditions, many without shelter. Eleven per cent of some 6,500 households surveyed recently by humanitarian partners were reported to be living out in the open. No organization – UN or otherwise – has been able to bring shelter supplies into Gaza since 2 March. The lack of adequate shelter is particularly worrisome, as we know that winter will soon be upon us.

Given the scale of repeated displacement and current living conditions, preventing the entry of emergency shelter supplies defies the obligation to allow humanitarian relief for the population in need.

The humanitarian system has effectively collapsed. Hospitals are not protected, doctors have been killed or detained, and facilities are working without sufficient medical supplies.

Water and sanitation infrastructure are failing, and social cohesion is unraveling.

How are the people in Gaza expected to survive in these conditions?

Mr. President,

My third point: The recent military ‘tactical pauses’ have enabled some positive changes in humanitarian operations.

Limited amounts of fuel have been allowed in, and on 5 August, Israeli authorities approved a mechanism for the gradual resumption of controlled commercial goods into Gaza. This has resulted in different types of food returning to markets and a slight decrease in some prices.

Our teams on the ground caution us that despite these developments, meaningful change for the population remains elusive, as humanitarian conditions remain largely unchanged.

Security conditions have remained volatile. Fighting has continued. Crossing arrangements have remained inadequate. Humanitarian missions, though less frequently denied outright, can still take over 18 hours, with teams stranded on dangerous roads.

Extreme desperation is driving people to take the humanitarian aid in transit – but this need not be the case.

We've seen that when assistance is rapidly and significantly scaled up, incidents of looting and insecurity decline, and trust begins to be rebuilt.

The United Nations has the plan and systems in place to respond. We've said this before, and we will say it again and again: let us work.

To assist all those in need, at scale, we must have predictable access – and the movement of life-saving goods must be more effectively facilitated.

It is equally critical that all humanitarian partners on the ground, including international humanitarian organizations, are allowed to deliver life-saving services. Registration processes for non-governmental organizations that the Government of Israel introduced earlier this year are concerning and risk further undermining operational capacity and continuity.

Mr. President,

Echoing the Secretary-General, I remain deeply concerned about the ripple effects of the expansion of Gaza military operations on the West Bank, where military operations, settler violence and home demolitions persist at unprecedented and alarming rates. A year ago, the International Court of Justice determined that Israel must bring its unlawful presence, policies and practices to an end as rapidly as possible.

Developments in the West Bank worsen an existing humanitarian situation that sadly remains less visible – not because it is less severe, but because global attention has been drawn elsewhere.

Mr. President, Council members, and, indeed, the international community listening,

States – all those with any influence – must look within our bruised collective conscience and summon the courage to do what is necessary to end this inhumanity and pain. It is also what international law demands.

Civilians must be protected and their essential needs must be met.

Hostages must be released unconditionally.

Arbitrarily detained Palestinians must be freed.

Israel must agree to and facilitate humanitarian relief operations, both into and within the Gaza Strip, to reach the population in need. The International Court of Justice's provisional measures in the case on the application of the Genocide Convention in Gaza remain in place, including the demand that Israel take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance.

Life and dignity should be respected for all. International humanitarian law serves as a compass for conduct in war, and is designed to ensure a minimum of humanity.

The parties and all States must honour their commitment to this.

The suffering must stop.

Mr. President, thank you.