

# Briefing by UN's Relief Chief to the Security Council

31 Jan 2024

## Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordination

### Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

31 January 2024

As prepared for delivery

Mr. President,

Thank you for this opportunity to update the Council today.

Each day that passes only deepens the misery and suffering of people in Gaza.

The number of people killed in Gaza has reportedly now surpassed 26,000, and the number of injured reportedly more than 65,000, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health. The vast majority are women and children.

Just 14 of the 36 hospitals in Gaza are functional, and those only partially. They face severe shortages of medical staff and supplies.

Fierce fighting has continued in the vicinity of the Nasser and Al-Amal hospitals in Khan Younis, jeopardizing the safety of medical staff, the wounded and the sick, as well as the thousands of internally displaced persons seeking refuge there.

This intense fighting around Khan Younis continues to drive thousands of people into Rafah, which is already hosting over half of Gaza's population of 2.2 million people.

Across Gaza, over 60 per cent of housing units are reportedly destroyed or damaged.

We now estimate that some 75 per cent of the total population are displaced. Their living conditions are abominable and worsening by the day.

Heavy rains are flooding the makeshift tent camps, forcing children, parents and the elderly to sleep in the mud.

Food insecurity continues to mount.

And clean water is almost completely inaccessible.

With little public health support available, preventable diseases are rife, and will continue to spread.

Mr. President,

As I mentioned in my briefing to the Council a couple of weeks ago, the further spread of hostilities southwards – along with the increasing deprivation and desperation of people there - can only be expected to increase the pressure for mass displacement into neighbouring countries. Some Palestinians in Gaza have already been able to leave through Egypt.

In the meantime, there are also seriously injured or sick patients unable to receive care in Gaza and for whom medical evacuations should be swiftly facilitated.

This is in line with international humanitarian law, which in certain circumstances encourages arrangements for the evacuation of the wounded and sick, persons with disabilities, older persons, children and pregnant women.

I want to emphasize once again that any persons displaced from Gaza must be guaranteed the right to voluntarily return, as international law demands.

Mr. President,

I know the Council heard yesterday from Under-Secretary-General Kaag, the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator, regarding her efforts to expedite the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza.

The ability of the humanitarian community to reach the people of Gaza with relief remains grossly inadequate.

This is not for want of trying.

Despite the hazardous conditions on the ground, we are distributing food items to shelters and supporting the remaining bakeries.

We are delivering medicines and medical supplies and helping to relocate patients.

And we are delivering water, hygiene kits and cleaning kits, tents, tarpaulin sheets, and blankets.

But all in quantities that are far from adequate.

If the people of Gaza are to receive anything approaching the amount of humanitarian assistance they need and deserve, urgent steps must be taken.

First, we need to be able to deliver and distribute supplies safely. This means we need significantly improved security assurances.

Second, we need to establish a predictable flow of supplies.

Finally, we need rapid and unimpeded access.

Humanitarian supplies must be able to enter Gaza via multiple points, from Egypt and Israel. This would help clear bottlenecks and speed up delivery of supplies.

We continue to face the frequent rejection for entry of much needed items into Gaza by Israel, for unclear, inconsistent and often unspecified reasons.

We must also have access to civilians in need across Gaza.

At present, our access to Khan Younis, the Middle Area and North Gaza is largely absent.

Jamie McGoldrick, Deputy Special Coordinator/Resident Coordinator /Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim, is leading efforts to scale up operations in critical areas. His efforts depend on security assurances and the facilitation of both entry and movement of personnel and critical supplies.

And we will of course be working closely with Under-Secretary-General Kaag on efforts to expedite the entry of assistance into Gaza.

Mr. President,

The breadth of the humanitarian community – including UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent – is collaborating to ensure that aid reaches people in need to the greatest extent possible.

At the heart of what we have been able to do has been UNRWA.

UNRWA has provided shelter. It has provided food and water. It has provided medical assistance.

All this, even as its own staff are being killed, injured and displaced.

I am appalled that some UNRWA employees were allegedly involved in the attack in Israel on 7 October. These allegations must be addressed.

UNRWA has taken swift action, and an investigation is underway.

But UNRWA's lifesaving services to over three-quarters of Gaza's residents should not be jeopardized by the alleged actions of a few individuals.

Likewise, UNRWA's support for Palestinians in need in the West Bank, where we have significant concerns over the worsening situation, as well as in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, must also be safeguarded.

To put it bluntly and simply: Our humanitarian response for the Occupied Palestinian Territory is dependent on UNRWA being adequately funded and operational.

UNRWA is playing an indispensable role in terms of distribution, warehousing, logistics and human resources, with 3,000 staff responding to the current crisis.

Decisions to withhold funds from UNRWA must be revoked.

Mr. President,

In closing, I reiterate my demand for compliance with international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and the infrastructure they depend on.

Hospitals, medical personnel and patients must be protected. Food sources, water infrastructure, homes and shelters must be protected.

I reiterate my call for the immediate release of all hostages and their humane treatment.

And I reiterate my call for a ceasefire.

I urge this Council to do everything in its power to bring this tragedy to an end.

Thank you.