

Call for Action: Urgent Humanitarian Response for Gaza

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MR. MARTIN GRIFFITHS, UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS & EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR

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Thank you very much indeed for this opportunity to speak. Thank you, Your Majesty [King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein of Jordan], Mr. President [Abdel Fattah Al Sisi of Egypt], Honorable Secretary-General, excellencies, and friends of the people of Palestine.

I want to add my thanks to Jordan, Egypt and the Secretary-General for convening us here today in response to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and my appreciation to you all, for your participation.

As I have said, as we have all said many times in the past nine months, what we witnessed since October 7th last year is a stain on our humanity. I can only therefore echo the call to action so powerfully expressed by His Majesty King Abdullah, by His Excellency President Sisi, and of course the Secretary-General in their opening remarks.

I can only reiterate the crucial importance of acting swiftly and decisively to pull Gaza and its people back from the abyss that they know so well.

This morning, we met in three separate working groups to discuss and identify concrete priority tasks for this urgent action. It is my privilege today to convey the outcomes of those working groups to this high-level segment.

During these productive discussions, we heard from our co-hosts Jordan and Egypt, UN agencies, NGOs, Red Cross, Red Crescent Movement partners, as well as donors and Member States.

The first working group considered the humanitarian needs and the requirements for getting humanitarian assistance into Gaza at scale and with the predictability required. The mechanism mandated by the UN Security Council, and mentioned by the Secretary-General, in resolution 2720 for channeling aid to Gaza, needs additional support to be fully operational inside Gaza, and I pay tribute to my colleague Sigrid Kaag, the Senior Humanitarian Coordinator, for her efforts.

All crossings, as the working group pronounced, must be open and functioning in full capacity. Entry requirements for humanitarian supplies and personnel must be streamlined. Safe, conducive and enabling conditions for humanitarian aid workers have to be ensured for the effective reception and provision of aid to civilians in need throughout Gaza, and the UN Flash Appeal for Gaza must be fully funded. According to the United Nations and partners, \$2.5 billion are estimated to be needed to provide aid for the people of Gaza from April until December 2024. This roughly provides for \$930 million for food and nutrition, \$400 million for health and medicine, \$700 million for shelter and sanitation. And I should add that today we heard from Jordan an extrapolation of \$300 million dollars per month for essential commodities for the people in Gaza, a figure that was echoed by Egypt, and Jordan and Egypt both proposed additional estimations of \$500 million for an optimal capacity for the flow of aid from these generous countries to benefit the people of Gaza.

The second working group recognized the need for an immediate and permanent ceasefire – hardly a new call – and discussed means to overcome the significant challenges to the protection of civilians, and the access, delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance to, within and throughout Gaza. And the lack of supplies, equipment, rampant insecurity, and the utter devastation, including damage to roads and other essential infrastructure, was also well noted. And there was, of course, consensus on this devastation. There was a unanimous horror at the vast toll of death, injury destruction, displacement, serial displacement, trauma and deprivation suffered by the people of Gaza in just nine months, as well as the horrendous toll on humanitarian, and including United Nations, workers, of course, from UNRWA in particular, which exceeded the death toll across the whole world in the past 12 years combined. What is clear to us is that while we will, as humanitarians, continue to find concrete solutions to the challenges to aid delivery, we need a fundamental shift in our operating environment, which needs to ensure safe, conducive and enabling conditions for humanitarian aid workers, and we need our operations to go from being obstructed to being facilitated. So of course, we call on the parties to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law. We reaffirm the essential role of UNRWA, whose staff and premises have been and continue to be and will be the backbone of the humanitarian operation.

This working group stressed the need for these immediate measures to facilitate the delivery of aid: number one, a functioning mechanism for operational coordination and notification; number two, full access for basic equipment for safety and security of humanitarian staff; number three, passable roads and clearance of explosive ordnance; number four, unimpeded passage to distribute aid and access communities across Gaza; and finally, sufficient and predictable flows of fuel and prioritized aid, if you wouldn't mind.

The third working group, the last, looked at the opportunities for supporting early recovery priorities in Gaza, recognizing the immense scale of destruction in Gaza – homes, schools, places of worship, water systems, etc. All participants in that working group agreed that planning for early recovery, even at this stage, surreal as this may seem, was vital to restoring dignity, rights and hope among a traumatized population that has lost almost everything. Participants commended the initial recovery planning underway by the United Nations Country Team, including UNRWA as well as the World Bank, the Palestinian Authority and other partners, and pledged to support their initiatives. The participants once again reaffirmed the vital role UNRWA plays in the early recovery phase, especially in education, health and psychosocial support. They stress the critical importance in the early recovery phase of the removal of unexploded ordnance, and the tons of rubble and debris, and we have seen recently statements by the United Nations about the extraordinary destruction of structures across Gaza, provision of shelter, rehousing solutions, rehabilitation of food production, livelihood opportunities, support to the private sector – all of this must be included in plans for the reconstruction of Gaza that should start as soon as is humanly possible.

Let us be clear, however, that with all this, and none of this new, the only way to fully and effectively address the humanitarian needs in Gaza is, very simply, an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Your Majesty, Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, our collective humanity is still at work. Acting on the outcomes of this conference, it is our solemn task, I suggest, to harness some of that humanity, meet our responsibilities, and bring finally an end to the travesty that has brought such misery to the people of Gaza. I ask your support in all the follow-up actions that have been identified.

Thank you very much.