



Displaced residents in Gaza wait in long lines for food aid amid severe shortages, as conflict and access restrictions push thousands to the brink of starvation. Photo: WHO

Conditions in Gaza 'unfit for human survival,' acting UN relief chief tells Security Council

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Briefing to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Gaza by Joyce Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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As delivered

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, Members of the Security Council, thank you for this opportunity to brief you on the catastrophic situation in Gaza.

Thank you also to our colleagues from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Food and Agriculture Organization. We unequivocally share the serious concerns they have expressed today.

Since the escalation of this conflict in October 2023, we have briefed this Council on no fewer than 16 occasions.

We have condemned the death, destruction and dehumanization of civilians in Gaza who have been driven from their homes, stripped of their sense of place and dignity, forced to witness their family members killed, burned and buried alive.

Injured children have had the words 'Wounded Child, No Surviving Family,' penned on their arms.

Most of Gaza is now a wasteland of rubble. What distinction was made, and what precautions were taken, if more than 70 per cent of civilian housing is either damaged or destroyed?

Essential commercial goods and services including electricity have been all but cut off. This has led to increasing hunger, starvation and now, as we have heard, potentially famine. We are witnessing acts reminiscent of the gravest international crimes.

Mr. President, the latest offensive that Israel started in North Gaza last month is an intensified, extreme and accelerated version of the horrors of the past year.

Shelters, homes and schools have been burned and bombed to the ground.

Numerous families remain trapped under rubble, because fuel for digging equipment is being blocked by the Israeli authorities and first responders have been blocked from reaching them.

Ambulances have been destroyed. And hospitals have come under attack.

Supplies to the north are being cut off and people are being pushed further south.

The daily cruelty we see in Gaza seems to have no limits. Beit Hanoun has been besieged for more than one month. Yesterday, food and water reached shelters, but today, Israeli soldiers forcibly displaced people from those same areas.

People under siege now tell us they are afraid that they will be targeted if they receive help.

As I brief you, Israeli authorities are blocking humanitarian assistance from entering North Gaza, where fighting continues, and around 75,000 people remain with dwindling water and food supplies.

Conditions of life across Gaza are unfit for human survival. Food is insufficient. Shelter items – needed ahead of winter – are in extremely short supply. Violent armed lootings of our convoys have become increasingly organized along routes from Kerem Shalom, driven by the collapse of public order and safety.

Many food assistance kitchens have been forced to close. In October, daily food distribution shrunk by nearly 25 per cent compared to September.

These are not logistical problems – they can be solved with the right political will. The Israeli military's announcement that the Kissufim crossing into central Gaza has opened cannot come soon enough.

However, our capacity to respond is being undermined, including by the Israeli Knesset legislation to ban UNRWA activities starting in January. If implemented, this bill will be another devastating blow to efforts to provide life-saving aid and avert the threat of famine. No other organization can fill these gaps.

Mr. President, we also remain concerned about the deteriorating situation of Palestinians in the West Bank. Israeli forces continue to employ lethal tactics that appear to defy law enforcement standards. And they are causing damage to water and sewage networks, and other infrastructure.

The demolition of Palestinian-owned homes also continues. On 5 November, nine homes were demolished in the Silwan area outside Jerusalem's Old City, displacing 42 people, nearly half of them children, to make way for an illegal settlement-related project.

Israeli settlers continue attacks on Palestinians and their property, with more than 160 incidents related to the olive harvest documented in October alone, the majority resulting in casualties or property damage.

Movement restrictions are making civilian access to essential services, particularly health care, increasingly challenging in refugee camps and in Area C, where humanitarian partners are scaling up to support communities in meeting needs.

Mr. President, the most basic requirements of humanity are being disregarded.

These are requirements that Members of this Council, and indeed all Member States, set out in international humanitarian and human rights law. They must be respected.

Constant care must be taken to spare civilians throughout military operations.

Civilians must be allowed to seek protection elsewhere, and they must be guaranteed the right to voluntarily return, as international law demands. Reports indicating that people would not be allowed to return should be of grave concern to this Council.

Parties must ensure that civilians' essential needs are met and must facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need, wherever they are.

Hostages and those arbitrarily detained must be released immediately, and in the interim, they must be treated humanely and allowed visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Indiscriminate rocket fire towards Israel must stop. There must be accountability for international crimes. The provisional orders of the International Court of Justice in the case on the application of the Genocide Convention in the Gaza Strip and the determinations in its Advisory Opinion of July 2024 must be implemented now.

Mr. President, now is the time for Member States to use their leverage to prevent and stop violations of international humanitarian law – through diplomatic and economic pressure, responsible arms transfers and combating impunity.

Now is the time for the Security Council to use its powers under the UN Charter to ensure compliance with international law and full implementation of its resolutions.

Thank you.