

Humanitarian Coordinator Muhannad Hadi briefing the Security Council on the situation in Gaza

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[AS DELIVERED]

Mr. President, Excellencies,

The asks of the United Nations have been repeated by the Secretary General and UN Principals time and again since 7 October:

1. A ceasefire
2. The ability to provide aid to the Palestinians in Gaza in line with the Humanitarian principles
3. An immediate and unconditional release of hostages

The asks are neither new nor impossible.

Allow me to begin by sharing some voices from Gaza.

"In my shelter, I hear women cry all night for help."

"We wake up every day just to search for food and water."

"As a mother I am forced to witness my child starve and cry all night long."

"We want the war to stop and dream of the day that we can go back to our homes in the North."

"I went 4 months without taking a shower."

"We have to cut our hair due to lice and lack of shampoo and hygiene material"

These are just some of the things that women told me when I met them in Deir al Balah in Gaza on the 9th of July.

All of them spoke about the lack of safety, dignity, privacy, in overcrowded camps.

Many women said that they had suicidal thoughts.

And their deep suffering – especially as parents, is that they cannot protect their children.

And that is the duty of all parents to their children.

Thousands of these children have sustained horrific injuries such as third-degree burns, amputated limbs, and profound mental trauma.

Sadly, many of the amputations would not have been necessary if adequate medical care had been available.

The children who die often do so slowly and painfully.

The ones who survive will have longlife disabilities and sad futures.

Six hundred and twenty-five thousand children have been deprived of an entire school year of education.

Needless to say that a child without an education is a child without a future.

Children wander around IDP [internally displaced people] sites 24/7, often unaccompanied, exposed to huge risks and further injuries from playing in rubble filled with unexploded ordnance.

They are also at risk of contracting dangerous diseases such as polio from mountains of garbage and rivers of sewage that flow through IDP settlements.

Mr. President,

Everyone in Gaza is exposed to risks of injury and disease.

Those who survive the bombs and bullets still face the threat of hunger, unsanitary conditions and lack of healthcare.

People with existing medical conditions, such as cancer, kidney failure or diabetes, are not getting the treatment they need.

And more than tens of thousands of patients require immediate Medevac.

Mr. President,

The overcrowding of IDP sites has increased community tensions and violence, including gender-based violence.

As a result of the war, there is no public order anymore.

What public order can we expect from two million people, who are constantly forced to move around a devastated strip of narrow land, during heavy fighting?

And without public order there will never be accountability and protection.

Protection is urgently needed for the civilian population in Gaza, but also for humanitarian operations. Humanitarian staff and assets must be protected from all forms of violent attacks.

Mr. President,

Among the destruction of social fabric and infrastructure, the UN and NGOs are sparing no effort to provide life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable.

We know what needs to be done to aid the people in Gaza, but there is a gulf between what should be done, and what humanitarians can do.

The commitment or willingness of the aid workers is not an issue, it's the inability to achieve the mandate, and that is beyond our control.

My predecessors and colleagues – early in this conflict – warned about a lack of an enabling environment.

Almost ten months into this crisis, a safe enabling environment for the provision of humanitarian assistance still does not exist in Gaza.

As one of my colleagues put it: "it's as if our kneecaps were smashed, yet they told us to jump."

UNRWA has been shouldering the burden of this crisis.

The campaign against UNRWA, attacks against its premises, and legislative efforts to declare UNRWA as a terrorist organization to end its operations – is utterly unacceptable and endangers our operations.

As the Secretary General said before, UNRWA is the backbone of our operations in Palestine.

Mr. President,

Today the UN is not in a position to provide the necessary assistance to the people in Gaza, let alone to scale up, unless specific factors are in place.

The enabling factors required for humanitarian operations are not new.

First and foremost, we need protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure including protection of all humanitarian staff and assets.

It is the responsibility of the warring parties to protect humanitarian actors.

Duty of care of all humanitarian staff is one of our biggest concerns.

Today, the risks inside Gaza are unacceptable.

To mitigate these risks, we need systems and equipment, among other things.

Second, the unhindered and safe reception, dispatch and delivery of all humanitarian assistance must be immediately ensured.

Current procedures in place for getting aid and fuel consignments from crossings to people in need are cumbersome, dangerous and costly.

All crossings must be utilized simultaneously, with streamlined procedures, including Rafah crossing.

Rafah must also be re-opened for the medical evacuation of patients, and the movement of people, humanitarian workers, goods and fuel.

In order to expedite the delivery of aid, we have been asking that our trucks are allowed to drive directly from Egypt and Jordan to the humanitarian destinations inside Gaza.

Aid should not wait.

We have also repeatedly asked for all checkpoints within Gaza to be open simultaneously, to enable movement from the north to the south, and vice versa.

Third, there should be no limitations on the amount and type of humanitarian items that can go into Gaza. Today, we are still struggling to bring in certain medical devices and supplies plus spare parts to repair civilian infrastructure.

Fourth, without visas for all UN staffers and NGOs, workers won't be able to carry out their duties.

The list of pre-requisites is long.

Humanitarian aid alone cannot sustain a population that lacks all basic services and utilities, especially not under the prevailing conditions in Gaza.

Whatever shape the conflict may take in the near future, humanitarians must be able to safely access populations in need wherever they are in Gaza, and throughout the Strip.

In closing, Mr. President, I would like to reiterate that the United Nations, and our partners in Gaza, will never give up.

We will continue to provide desperately needed assistance. But we will need a safe enabling environment to do so.

The human impact of this conflict cannot be overstated.

The impact will haunt us, all of us, not for years, but for generations to come.

We need a ceasefire, the ability to deliver aid to the Palestinians in line with humanitarian principles, and the immediate and unconditional release of hostages.

And all parties must fulfill their obligations under international humanitarian law.

This includes protecting civilians, ensuring their basic needs are met, allowing them to leave for safer areas and allowing them to return, as soon as circumstances allow.

Thank you.