

# Humanitarian Coordinator's remarks to Member States on the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

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## Remarks by Lynn Hastings, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory

*New York, 3 November 2023 (as delivered)*

Excellencies, I can only share Under-Secretary-General [for Humanitarian Affairs Martin] Griffiths' alarm about this unfolding humanitarian tragedy.

Without a let-up in hostilities in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the situation will only continue to deteriorate.

As Martin mentioned, 240 hostages remain captive. I repeat that they must be released immediately and without condition. We welcome all diplomatic efforts to secure their release, and demand that, in the interim, they are treated humanely and be allowed to receive visits from the [International Committee of the Red Cross] ICRC.

In Gaza, the humanitarian impact has been catastrophic. It continues to deepen as Israeli strikes intensify. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, close to 9,000 people in Gaza have now been killed and more than 22,000 injured. More than two-thirds of those are estimated to be children and women.

The number of displaced in Gaza stands now at an estimated 1.5 million, with more than 690,000 sheltering in [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] UNRWA facilities, and other places people hope are safe, including hospitals, churches and schools. The reality is – nowhere is truly safe. On 2 November, yesterday, four UNRWA shelters hosting nearly 20,000 IDPs were hit; and as a result, at least 23 people were killed, and dozens more injured. Since the start of hostilities, nearly 50 UNRWA facilities have been damaged and, as Martin mentioned, at least 72 staff killed.

For the twenty-second consecutive day, Gaza remains under a full electricity blackout, following Israel's halt of the electricity and fuel supply to Gaza. Meanwhile, the backup generators that are essential for so many services, including hospitals, water desalination plants, food production facilities have been relying on to maintain power are one by one grinding to a halt as fuel supplies run out.

The health system is overwhelmed with an influx of injuries, combined with severe shortages of supplies, personnel, electricity and water. Since the start of the hostilities, 40 per cent of hospitals in Gaza – that's 14 of 35, which I think Martin mentioned – and nearly 71 per cent of primary health care clinics – that's 51 of 72 – have shut down.

Only one of the three water supply lines from Israel is operational. Many people still only have access to brackish or saline groundwater, if at all.

Access to food is becoming increasingly a concern. People are braving airstrikes to line up outside bakeries to obtain bread, a number of which have closed down due to a lack of fuel. Cooling chains for perishable goods have broken down, and there is a complete closure of shops and food processing facilities.

The agreement to use the Rafah crossing from Egypt to get essential humanitarian supplies into Gaza has provided a little relief to people living in these appalling conditions.

And while we welcome this important development, these deliveries, which are the result of extensive negotiations, cannot cover the significant rise in humanitarian need. And most crucially, these recent deliveries do not include fuel – fuel that is essential as I've said for powering the services that people need for survival.

I have to highlight that humanitarian assistance is not enough to sustain a population of 2.2 million people.

For civilians across Gaza to get access to adequate food, water, medical care and other essential supplies, we must be able to scale up deliveries of all these goods, and we must be able to replenish fuel supplies.

We pledge to do our part to ensure these deliveries increase and continue. But in no crisis does the humanitarian community work alone. The private sector, the NGOs, they must be protected. And it will also be important to open other crossings for these purposes.

It is also imperative that the parties respect their obligations under international law, and our collective responsibility to use all our influence to ensure they do so. Sanity, humanity, and international law must prevail. Humanitarian ceasefires will ease the epic human suffering and make humanitarian access easier and safer.

Next week, the Humanitarian Country Team will issue the updated Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The costs of meeting the needs of the entire population of Gaza and 500,000 people in the West Bank until the end of the year are estimated to be \$1.2 billion.

Our ability to implement even part of this plan depends of course on many things: funding, our ability to scale up, efficient verification mechanisms that take into account security issues, access to sufficient fuel, and the use of other crossings and humanitarian partners having safe and sustained access to all people in need.

I want to end by, again, repeating and expressing my utmost admiration for the bravery and extraordinary commitment of those delivering life-saving and humanitarian services. And of course, again [pay] tribute to the over 70 UNRWA colleagues who have tragically been killed.

I do want to highlight that this includes the staff at UNRWA, many of whom are displaced themselves and who continue to support the most vulnerable despite UNRWA still facing a very significant fiscal deficit, which means most of these staff, or maybe all of these staff, their salaries are still in doubt. And this is at a time when we expect UNRWA and their staff to carry almost the entire burden of this crisis on their shoulders.

Thank you.