

Informal Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip

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As prepared for delivery

Mr. President, Excellencies,

Thank you for this opportunity to brief Member States on the latest humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

As you know, fierce hostilities continue across Gaza, from the air, sea, and now on the ground.

Casualties continue to mount, with the dead reportedly exceeding 11,000 people – the majority of them children and women. The actual total, however, is likely much higher as figures have not been updated for five days due to a collapse of communication networks in Gaza.

More than 41,000 housing units have been destroyed or severely damaged – amounting to around 45 per cent of the housing stock in Gaza. The nature and scale of civilian harm is characteristic of the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in such a densely populated area. I am reminded that tomorrow marks the first anniversary of the adoption of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. There is no greater reminder of the importance of its universal endorsement and implementation.

And more than 1.5 million Gazans are estimated to be internally displaced. Many of them have fled southwards in search of relative safety, only to be now told to relocate – many of them for the second time, westward.

Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands remain in the north, where the fiercest fighting and bombardment is taking place.

There is little to no medical care available in northern Gaza. Out of 24 hospitals with in-patient capacity in the north, only one, Al Ahli in Gaza city, is presently operational and admitting patients.

Eighteen hospitals have shut down and evacuated since the start of hostilities.

Another five hospitals, including Shifa, are providing extremely limited services to patients who have already been admitted. These hospitals are not reliably accessible because of insecurity, do not have electricity or essential supplies, and are not admitting new patients.

We have all seen the fighting in and around the Shifa hospital in recent days. It behooves me once again to make clear that, under international humanitarian law, all parties must protect civilians and civilian objects. To ensure the wounded and sick receive medical care, hospitals have specific protection. This means they must not be used to shield military objectives from attack. It also means that even if hospitals lose their protection, warnings and other precautions must be implemented to avoid civilian harm, and, of course, disproportionate attacks are strictly prohibited.

Across Gaza, but particularly in the north, food and water supplies are running perilously low, and the lack of fuel means that communications and other essential functions such as water desalination are progressively dropping offline.

Across the border, civilians in Israel endure deep pain of their own as they mourn the brutal killing of 1,200 people. New details of the horrors of 7 October emerge each day. Rockets continue to be fired into populated areas and tens of thousands of people are displaced. Nearly 240 hostages, from babies to octogenarians, face their 41st day of captivity. They must be released immediately and without condition. In the interim, they must be treated humanely and be allowed to receive visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

My colleagues from the other UN Agencies and Departments Mr. Philippe Lazzarini (UNRWA), Dr. Tedros (WHO), Mr. Achim Steiner (UNDP), Mr. Volker Turk (OHCHR), Ms. Cindy McCain (WFP), Dr. Natalia Kanem (UNFPA), and Ms. Lana Wreikat (UNICEF) who join us today will provide further detail on the horrendous situation on the ground.

But it is without doubt a humanitarian crisis that, by any measure, is intolerable and cannot continue. In many respects, international humanitarian law appears to have been turned on its head.

In this regard, we welcome the resolution 2712 (2023) adopted by the Security Council on Wednesday, reaffirming that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations. This joins, of course, the strong position set out by the General Assembly in its resolution on 26 October on the protection of civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel.

This morning, I want to set out what we at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs see as the necessary requirements for the humanitarian response.

There are ten points, all of which are standard practice for humanitarians. Most are underpinned by obligations under IHL to take constant care to spare civilians and to meet their essential needs, including by facilitating the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief.

One: We must be able to move from ad hoc delivery of assistance to a continuous flow of aid. People in need, and humanitarian organisations, require certainty that aid will arrive.

Two: More crossing points into Gaza for aid and commercial deliveries of essentials. Addressing the scale of needs across Gaza from a single crossing point in the South is logistically impossible. At the very least, we need permission to use the crossing point at Kerem Shalom, through which 60 per cent of goods were delivered before the hostilities began in October.

Three: Fuel. As we have highlighted repeatedly, fuel is critical for the onward distribution of aid throughout Gaza, and for the functioning of vital services. In other words, it is essential for keeping people alive. In the past few days, UNRWA has been allowed to receive 24,000 litres of fuel for two days of aid distribution within Gaza. This is welcome but is a fraction of what is needed to meet the minimum of our humanitarian responsibilities in Gaza: to do so, the requirement is ten times this - or 200,000 litres - per day.

Four: We need to have the security assurances and additional facilities to establish relief distribution hubs, particularly in the south of Gaza. These will be locations where people know they can access aid, and as jumping off points for the comprehensive delivery of aid.

Five: Safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian organisations to deliver aid throughout Gaza. This requires the facilitation of access, and assurances for the security of humanitarian personnel and assets.

Which brings me to **Six:** An improved humanitarian notification system. This aims to ensure that the parties have the information they need to meet their obligations to protect and facilitate humanitarian operations.

Seven: Civilians must be allowed to move to safer areas, and, when circumstances allow, to voluntarily return to their residences.

This connects directly to **eight:** We need to expand the number of shelters for displaced civilians across Gaza. Hundreds of thousands have so far taken shelter in UNRWA facilities. These shelters and the heroic efforts of UNRWA have been the buffer between survival and tragedy for so many of these people. But these facilities are overcrowded, overburdened and overwhelmed. We need to expand the number of locations and facilities, particularly in the south where hundreds of thousands of civilians continue to arrive.

Nine: Funding. Humanitarian operations cannot proceed without the money to fund them. The emergency appeal for Gaza amounts to \$1.2 billion. So far we have received around \$132 million. To do our job, to reach all those people in need, we need the funds to do so.

Ten: A humanitarian ceasefire. Call it what you will, but the requirement, from a humanitarian point of view, is simple. Stop the fighting to allow civilians to move safely. Do it for as long as possible, to facilitate an unimpeded humanitarian response. Give the people of Gaza a breather from the terrible, terrible things that have been put on them these last few weeks. And, without condition, release all the hostages.

We need the full leverage of the UN Membership to achieve these objectives. We are not asking for the moon. We are asking for the basic measures required to meet the essential needs of the civilian population and stem the course of this crisis.

For as dire as the situation is in Gaza, it could get far worse.

I have real concerns that if we do not take action now, this is a conflict that could spread its tendrils further into other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and drag the region into a conflagration with even more catastrophic consequences.

Thank you.