

# Lisa Doughten's remarks to the Security Council on behalf of Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths

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Briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

New York, 30 October 2023

As delivered

Thank you, Mr. President.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Martin Griffiths, who is currently on mission in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The events that have unfolded since 7 October have been nothing short of devastating and heartbreaking.

We do not forget the 1,400 people killed and thousands more injured and taken in the brutal Hamas attack. Indiscriminate rocket-fire continues from Gaza into populated areas of Israel, causing more civilian casualties and displacement and trauma.

We deplore that 230 people [remain] held hostage in Gaza. All hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. We welcome all diplomatic efforts to secure their release, and demand that, in the interim, they be treated humanely and be allowed to receive visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

As you have just heard from [UNRWA] Commissioner-General [Philippe] Lazzarini, the situation for the more than two million people trapped in the Gaza Strip is catastrophic.

They have now endured a siege and continuous bombardment for 23 days. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, more than 8,000 people have been killed – 66 per cent of whom are said to be women and children. Tens of thousands more have been injured.

The scale of the horror people are experiencing in Gaza is really hard to convey. People are becoming increasingly desperate, as they search for food, water and shelter amid the relentless bombing campaign that is wiping out whole families and entire neighborhoods.

In their desperation, people have resorted to breaking into UN warehouses in search of food and water. Dehydration is an increasing concern, as is the possibility of the spread of disease and other health concerns due to unsafe water and breakdown in sewage treatment services.

More than 1.4 million people are internally displaced in Gaza, and hundreds of thousands of children, women and men are crammed into overcrowded shelters and hospitals. Many of these people have moved south in search of safety. But the reality is that nowhere is safe and we simply don't have enough essential supplies to provide for the survival of internally displaced people at this scale.

As we heard from [UNICEF] Executive Director [Catherine] Russell, the health care system is in tatters. Patients lie on the floors and in corridors. Surgeons are operating without anesthesia. Out of an estimated 50,000 pregnant women, 5,500 are due to deliver within the next 30 days. For the 1,000 patients dependent on dialysis and the 130 premature babies in incubators, life hangs by a thread as hospital backup generators run on fumes. Some 9,000 cancer patients are not receiving adequate care.

We are deeply concerned by allegations of military installations in the close vicinity of hospitals and the request by Israeli authorities for hospitals, including Al Quds and Shifa, to be evacuated – there is nowhere safe for these patients to go, and for those on life support and babies in incubators, moving would almost certainly be a death sentence.

Mr. President,

The provision of humanitarian relief is extremely complex and challenging due to the bombardment, the destruction of infrastructure and – as we have said repeatedly – the lack of fuel. We mourn the loss of 64 UNRWA colleagues and other humanitarian staff who have been tragically killed, and we extend our deepest condolences to their families and colleagues.

We have the utmost admiration for the bravery, selflessness and commitment of humanitarian workers who are delivering aid to those in need in this perilous environment.

Mr. President,

We welcome the agreement that has allowed us to get some relief into Gaza via the Rafah border crossing. But these deliveries are a drop in the ocean compared to the vast scale of needs.

It is imperative that we are able get humanitarian supplies and relief into Gaza safely, reliably, without impediment, and at the scale required. In particular, [it is] urgent for us to replenish fuel supplies, which are vital for powering most essential services, including hospitals and water desalination plants, and to transport humanitarian relief inside Gaza.

And more than one entry point into Gaza is indispensable if we are to make a difference – Kerem Shalom, between Israel and Gaza, is the only crossing equipped to rapidly process a sufficiently large number of trucks.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, scores of civilians have been killed and incidents of settler violence have increased, causing hundreds of civilians to be displaced. Likewise, the violence and closure of checkpoints has impeded access to essential services and food distribution. The permits of some 150,000 to 175,000 Palestinians from the West Bank working in Israel and settlements are now suspended. The situation is causing significant damage to the West Bank economy and Palestinian institutions.

We have very real fears about what lies ahead. The current situation may pale in comparison with what is to come. There is a genuine risk that this war could escalate further and spillover into [the] wider region. We must take urgent collective action to prevent this.

Mr. President,

In light of all that has been described today, what we are calling for is for the parties to agree to pause the fighting on humanitarian grounds. It would provide the required calm and safety for hostages to be released, and for the UN to replenish supplies, relieve exhausted personnel, and resume assistance throughout Gaza wherever civilians are in need. It would also provide much-needed respite to civilians who are living under unimaginably traumatic conditions.

But with or without a pause in the fighting, I reiterate that all parties – on all sides – must respect international humanitarian law. This means allowing relief in and taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, including humanitarian and medical workers, facilities and assets. And this applies whether civilians move or they stay.

We are relying on the responsibility of every Member State here and across the UN to use all of their influence to ensure that the rules of war are respected and that as far as is possible, civilians are spared further suffering.

Thank you, Mr. President.