



Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell on her visit to Gaza

14 November 2023



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GAZA, 15 November 2023 – “Today I visited the Gaza Strip to meet with children, their families and UNICEF staff. What I saw and heard was devastating. They have endured repeated bombardment, loss and displacement. Inside the Strip, there is nowhere safe for Gaza’s one million children to turn.

“The parties to the conflict are committing grave violations against children; these include killing, maiming, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access – all of which UNICEF condemns.

“In Gaza, more than 4,600 children have reportedly been killed, with nearly 9,000 reportedly injured.

“Many children are missing and believed buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings and homes, the tragic result of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Meanwhile, newborn babies who require specialized care have died in one of Gaza’s hospitals as power and medical supplies run out, and violence continues with indiscriminate effect.

“At the Al Naser hospital in Khan Yunis, I met with patients and displaced families seeking shelter and safety. A 16-year-old girl told me from her hospital bed that her neighborhood had been bombed. She survived but doctors say she will never be able to walk again.

“In the hospital’s neonatal ward, tiny babies were clinging to life in incubators, as doctors worried how they could keep the machines running without fuel.

“During my time in Gaza, I also met with UNICEF staff who are continuing to deliver for children amidst the danger and devastation. They shared their own heartbreaking stories with me of the impact of the war on their children, of family members killed, and of how they have been displaced many times over.

“Many people, including our staff and their families, are now living in overcrowded shelters with very little water, food or decent sanitation – conditions which could lead to disease outbreaks.

“The risk to humanitarian actors inside Gaza cannot be overstated. More than 100 UNRWA staff have been killed since October.

“UNICEF and our partners are doing everything we can, including bringing in desperately needed humanitarian supplies. But diesel fuel has practically run out, causing some hospitals and health centers to stop functioning. Without fuel, desalination plants cannot produce drinking water and humanitarian supplies cannot be distributed.

“The intermittent opening of Gaza’s border crossings to shipments of humanitarian supplies is insufficient to meet the skyrocketing needs. And with winter around the corner, the need for fuel could become even more acute. When I left Gaza today, the rain was pounding down, adding to the misery.

“I am here to do whatever I can to advocate for the protection of children. I once again call on all parties to ensure that children are protected and assisted, as per international humanitarian law. Only the parties to the conflict can truly stop this horror.

“I also call on the parties to implement an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, to safely release all abducted and detained children, and to ensure that humanitarian actors have safe, sustained and unimpeded access to reach those in need with the full range of lifesaving services and supplies.”

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