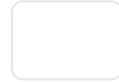


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Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

We continue to follow, with deepening horror, the desperate situation for civilians in Gaza and in Israel.

As we have stressed, civilians must never be used as bargaining chips. Yet, we continue to receive heartbreaking messages of helplessness from people in Gaza, who are moving from house to house, terrified, seeking elusive safety. And civilians continue to be held hostage by Palestinian armed groups – in clear violation of international humanitarian law. We call, again, for their humane treatment and their immediate and unconditional release.

More than 2,700 people, including civilians, have already been killed in both Israel and Gaza. We urge Palestinian armed groups to halt the use of inherently indiscriminate projectiles, which violate international humanitarian law, as well as attacks directed against civilians. And we urge Israel to ensure full respect for international humanitarian and human rights law in any and all military operations. Air strikes and artillery strikes have already led to the destruction of large parts of densely populated neighbourhoods in Gaza, and rhetoric from high-level officials raises concerns that a message is being sent to the members of the Israeli Defense Forces that international humanitarian law has become optional rather than compulsory. It is absolutely crucial that Israeli leaders make it unambiguously clear that military operations must be conducted in full compliance with international law.

Israeli authorities announced a few hours ago that the entire population of Gaza north of Wadi Gaza should relocate to southern Gaza. This order is affecting more than a million Palestinians, including children, older and sick people, forcing them to relocate with little or no transport and with scant guarantees for their safety, amidst continuing hostilities. We echo the Secretary-General's Spokesperson's call for this to be rescinded, avoiding a calamitous situation.

International humanitarian law grants special protection for specifically protected persons and objects, including medical personnel, medical units, medical transport, humanitarian relief personnel and objects, as well as cultural property. The parties to the conflict must respect and protect them in all circumstances.

The "complete siege" announced by Israel is already leading to a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, with estimates that more than 250,000 people in Gaza have already been displaced, the only power station ceasing to operate and a serious shortage of water. No fuel, food, water or medical supplies are being allowed in, placing the entire population of Gaza at risk. Such collective punishment of civilians is strictly prohibited by international law.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk urges all States to insist upon and assist the parties to the conflict in immediately implementing a humanitarian corridor to ensure safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid. We should not look back and regret that we did not do everything in our power to avoid a disaster.

In many countries around the world, there has also been a proliferation of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate speech. The High Commissioner deeply deplores this. We call on political and other leaders to speak out, unequivocally, against such speech, and to take clear measures to stem any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. This is a time for the international community to come together in solidarity, advocating for the protection of all civilians, no matter where, no matter what.

As the High Commissioner stressed this week in the UN General Assembly, it is of the utmost importance that an urgent solution is found to the 56-year-old conflict. We are at the disposal of both Israelis and Palestinians to do what we can to help the region break from this vicious cycle of bloodshed, hatred and polarization. The violence must stop.

ecoi.net description:

Israel and Gaza Strip: More than 2,700 civilians have been killed in armed conflict since 7 October 2023

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State of Palestine

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