

Open letter from Palestinian civil society organizations ahead of the Cairo Peace Summit: Unconditional humanitarian aid must be allowed to enter immediately, in sufficient quantity, and be distributed equitably to all civilians across Gaza

Date: 21 October 2023

Today, world leaders meet in Cairo against the backdrop of a context of violence and repression by Israel against the Palestinian people that has not been seen in decades. With this letter we wish to address you about the dire, man-made humanitarian catastrophe that is currently plaguing more than two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

On 7 October 2023, Israel launched a large-scale retaliatory military offensive on Gaza aimed at reducing it into [rubble](#). Since then, the Israeli military has indiscriminately targeted Gaza's 2.3 million civilian population, infrastructure, residential and commercial buildings, mosques, churches, and medical facilities as part of total warfare on the population. Between 7 October and 20 October 2023 at 16:00 p.m., the Palestinian Ministry of Health reported the killing of at least 4,137 Palestinians and the injury of 13,000 in Gaza. Hundreds of deaths are still unaccounted for, as many Palestinians still lie under the rubbles.

In parallel to incessant air, sea, and land attacks, on 9 October, Israel also imposed a total blockade and closure on Gaza—an illegal collective punishment against the 2.3 million civilian population. The Israeli Minister of Defense [stated](#): "We are imposing a complete siege on [Gaza]. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel – everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly." Then, on 13 October, the Israeli military demanded over one million civilians—around half of Gaza's population—in northern Gaza to evacuate their homes towards areas south of Wadi Gaza.

Palestinian organizations have already warned about Israel's breach of the prohibition to use [starvation as a weapon of warfare](#) against Gaza's civilian population, as well as how the 'evacuation order' issued by the Israeli military on 13 October may amount to the [war crime of forcible transfer](#). Since 13 October until today, Israel has continued to bombard the entire Gaza Strip, including the southern districts of Rafah, Khan Younis and Deir al Balah, where most Palestinians sought shelter. Therefore, it is evident that there is [nowhere safe in Gaza](#), further suggesting that Israel's 'evacuation order' was indeed intended to forcibly displace hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and bring them closer to the border with Egypt. Eight UN independent experts [stated](#) that "[t]he complete siege of Gaza coupled with unfeasible evacuation orders and forcible population transfers, is a violation of international humanitarian and criminal law" and "unspeakably cruel."

Thousands of Palestinians were also unwilling or unable to follow Israel's 'evacuation order' and therefore remained in northern Gaza. Many cited the danger, the lack of adequate shelters and facilities in southern Gaza; the lack of transportation to reach the south; and the reported attacks against civilian convoys on the Salah-al-Din Road, as the main reasons behind their decisions to remain in northern Gaza. Notably, the order to evacuate does not absolve Israel from its obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law, as it continues to bear obligations to protect civilians and civilian objects in northern Gaza.

The United Nations' Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator [stated](#) that around 100 trucks of humanitarian supplies per day are needed to meet the needs of the more than two million residents of Gaza. Accordingly, [reports](#) that a US-brokered agreement was reached to allow only 20 trucks containing food, water and medical aid—but no fuel—to pass through Rafah crossing raise major concerns. Notably, before 7 October, on an ordinary day, around 500 trucks were entering Gaza—350 from Kerem Shalom and 150 from Rafah crossings.

Gaza's humanitarian emergency is purely man-made and, as such, can be halted before it reaches a point of no return. On 19 October, eight UN independent experts [warned](#) that "[t]here is an ongoing campaign by Israel resulting in crimes against humanity in Gaza. Considering statements made by Israeli political leaders and their allies [...] there is also a risk of genocide against the Palestinian People."

The international community must assume its responsibilities and use its leverage to urge Israel to restore water and electricity supplies to Gaza's civilian population and allow humanitarian aid and relief to enter Gaza and be adequately delivered across all Gaza districts, including northern Gaza and Gaza City. This must be done by adhering to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence, impartiality and humanity.

Accordingly, our organizations call on the international community, particularly the Arab Republic of Egypt, as well as all United Nations humanitarian agencies actively involved in the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza, to:

1. Ensure the entry and delivery, without impediment, of sufficient quantities of humanitarian aid and relief—including the entry and delivery of food, water, fuel, and medical supplies—to satisfy the most urgent needs of Gaza's civilian population;
2. Ensure that the delivery of humanitarian aid and relief will not be conditioned or limited to Gaza's southern districts. Humanitarian aid must reach all areas, including Gaza's northern districts, and be distributed equitably to all Gaza residents, hospitals, and other civilian facilities, in places of their choice;
3. Call to restore the supply of water and electricity to Gaza's civilian population;
4. Call for an immediate ceasefire guaranteed by the UN and ensure UN protection for the 2.3 million Palestinian civilians in Gaza living under Israeli military occupation and closure;

5. Call for the protection of aid and humanitarian workers and facilities and the respect for the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence that underscore humanitarian action globally.

Signatories:

Palestinian Nongovernmental Organizations Network – PNGO (132 Organizations)

Coalition for Accountability and Integrity Palestine (AMAN)

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights

Community Action Center – Al-Quds University, Jerusalem

Bisan Center for Research and Development

Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)

Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)

Palestinian Counseling Center

MA'AN Development Center

Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC)

Sharek Youth Forum

Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)

Filastiniyat

Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership & Rights Activation (PYALARA)

The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy -
MIFTAH

The Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy (PIPD)

Center for Defense of Liberties & Civil Rights "Hurriyat"

Faisal Hussein Foundation

The Society of Saint Yves

Sabeel

Al-Haq

Women's Studies Center

Health Work Committees