

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARTIN GRIFFITHS**

Remarks at the International Humanitarian Conference for the Civilian Population in Gaza

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As prepared for delivery

Excellencies, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to extend my sincere thanks to President Macron for convening this conference today on the intolerable humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The attendance under his leadership of such a broad range of Member States reflects the severity of the situation. And it is a reminder of the intimate connection between war, diplomacy, humanitarian values and the respect for the rights of innocents wherever they may be.

The devastating and growing civilian toll of this conflict is as distressing as it is unconscionable.

We have just heard the disturbing details from my friend and colleague Commissioner-General [Philippe] Lazzarini, under whose brave and inspiring leadership UN operations in Gaza are being conducted.

Over the past few weeks, I have engaged with various leaders, partners, and interlocutors to support humanitarian efforts and negotiate access. I have been to Egypt, Israel, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. I have met with the families of some of the Israeli hostages and spoken to families in Gaza.

The situation is insupportable. To allow it to continue would be a travesty.

Allow me here to share some thoughts on what needs to happen urgently to avoid that travesty.

First: We must have complete respect – by all parties – for international humanitarian law and basic human dignity. This means that civilians must be protected, and their essential needs met, wherever they are in Gaza.

However, the UN cannot be part of a unilateral proposal to push hundreds of thousands of desperate civilians in Gaza into so-called safe zones.

The UN has not been involved in preparing for the arrival of displaced people in any prospective “safe zone” in Gaza.

On behalf of the humanitarian community that I represent, I can tell you that we have serious concerns:

Concerns about the safety of civilians in any so-called safe zones if there is no agreement between all the parties on their establishment.

Concerns that satisfactory conditions do not exist anywhere in Gaza to ensure adequate shelter, food, water, sanitation and health.

And concerns regarding the protection of civilians anywhere in Gaza.

Second: We must be allowed to get essential supplies and humanitarian relief – including fuel – into Gaza safely, without impediment, reliably and at scale.

The modest number of trucks we have so far managed to get in via the Rafah border crossing is wholly inadequate compared to the vast sea of needs. I want to thank the Government of Egypt for facilitating access via Rafah and for consenting to host the UN technical humanitarian team in Al Arish. But we are clear that we need more than one entry point into Gaza. We need to get hundreds of trucks per day into Gaza, not dozens, and be allowed to reach every place people are sheltering.

Third: We need a humanitarian ceasefire.

In plain terms, this is a cessation of fighting for humanitarian purposes to provide some respite from the onslaught, to expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid, and to facilitate the release of hostages. This must be our objective and our priority.

President Macron, Excellencies,

As desperate and appalling as the situation is in Gaza, it is also a warning.

It is a warning that we cannot lose sight of the deteriorating situation in the West Bank, where incidents of violence against Palestinians are increasing and are the worst they have been in years.

And most importantly, it is a warning that we cannot allow a regional escalation of this war.

We are already seeing the signs in exchanges of fire and words between Hezbollah and Israel.

We have seen the signs in rockets fired from Yemen towards Israel. We have seen the massive protests around the world. And every day we see the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiment, rhetoric and acts of violence both in the virtual and in the real world.

War is a virus that catches every chance to expand.

The current conflict is a wildfire that could consume the region – with wide-ranging global impacts – unless we bring it under control.

Unless multilateral and diplomatic efforts can be maximized to ensure the protection of civilians, enhance humanitarian access and secure the release of the hostages so viciously taken on October 7th, I have real fears that this could just be the beginning.

Over the past two years, multilateralism, and the fairness, equality and pursuit of peace that underpin it, have come under significant challenge, not least from the war on Ukraine. Today, it is under significant challenge again.

But it is at the times of greatest challenge that we must defend and act upon our common principles with the strongest conviction.

Multilateralism and committed diplomacy must be the vehicle through which we find a solution for the Palestinian people. Today's conference could be a decisive step on that path, and I want to thank President Macron yet again for bringing us together.

Finally, I want to thank UNRWA and Philippe for what they are doing on the ground in Gaza: for being the thin line between tragedy and safety, between slaughter and humanity. We mourn the loss of the unbearable number of UNRWA staff who have been killed. I pay tribute to all our humanitarian colleagues who have lost their lives, and to those who continue to serve selflessly and bravely.

Thank you.