

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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REMARKS AT RAFAH BORDER CROSSING

Rafah Crossing, 23 March 2024

Every year going back to since I served as High Commissioner for Refugees, I have undertaken a solidarity mission during the holy month of Ramadan to shine a light on Muslim communities in distress.

This Ramadan, I have come to the Rafah crossing to spotlight the hardship and pain of Palestinians in Gaza – and the obstacles to easing their plight.

This morning, I met with injured Palestinian civilians and their families at the General Hospital in Al Arish, and was extremely moved by their stories, experiences and all the hardships they have endured, and by the generosity and solidarity of Egypt and the Egyptian people.

I say again: nothing justifies the horrific attacks by Hamas on October 7th.

And nothing justifies the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

Now more than ever, it is time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

It is time to silence the guns.

Palestinians in Gaza -- children, women, men – remain stuck in a non-stop nightmare.

Communities obliterated. Homes demolished. Entire families and generations wiped out. With hunger and starvation stalking the population.

Ramadan is a time for spreading the values of compassion, community, and peace.

It is monstrous that after so much suffering over so many months, Palestinians in Gaza are marking Ramadan with Israeli bombs still falling, bullets still flying, artillery still pounding, and humanitarian assistance still facing obstacle upon obstacle.

Fasting with you on Ramadan, I am deeply troubled to know so many people in Gaza will not be able to have a proper Iftar.

Here from this crossing, we see the heartbreak and heartlessness of it all.

A long line of blocked relief trucks on one side of the gates.

The long shadow of starvation on the other.

That is more than tragic. It is a moral outrage.

Any further onslaught will make everything worse.

Worse for Palestinian civilians. Worse for the hostages. And worse for all people of the region.

All this demonstrates that it's more than time for an immediate ceasefire, I say it again.

It's time for an ironclad commitment by Israel for total, unfettered access for humanitarian goods throughout Gaza.

And in the Ramadan spirit of compassion, it's time for the immediate release of all hostages. I also urge every member of the United Nations to support our life-saving work led by the backbone of all Gaza relief operations, UNRWA.

We look forward to continuing to work with Egypt to streamline the flow of aid, and deeply appreciate the full Egyptian engagement in support of the Gaza people.

And I want Palestinians in Gaza to know: You are not alone.

People around the world are outraged by the horrors we are all witnessing in real time. I carry the voices of the vast majority of the world who have seen enough. Who have had enough. And who still believe that human dignity and decency must define us as a global community.

It's our only hope.

It's time to truly flood Gaza with life-saving aid.

The choice is clear: either surge or starvation.

Let's choose the side of help – the side of hope – and the right side of history.

I will not give up. And all of us must not give up in doing all we can for our common humanity to prevail in Gaza and around the world.

Thank you.

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