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Secretary-General's Press Conference on the Middle East

The Secretary-General

Very good morning.

The nightmare in Gaza is more than a humanitarian crisis.

It is a crisis of humanity.

The intensifying conflict is shaking the world, rattling the region and, most tragically, destroying so many innocent lives.

Ground operations by the Israel Defense Forces and continued bombardment are hitting civilians, hospitals, refugee camps, mosques, churches and UN facilities – including shelters.

No one is safe.

At the same time, Hamas and other militants use civilians as human shields and continue to launch rockets indiscriminately towards Israel.

I reiterate my utter condemnation of the abhorrent acts of terror perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October – and repeat my call for the immediate, unconditional and safe release of hostages held in Gaza.

Nothing can justify the deliberate torture, killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians.

The protection of civilians must be paramount.

I am deeply concerned about clear violations of international humanitarian law that we are witnessing.

Let me be clear: No party to an armed conflict is above international humanitarian law.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press,

Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children. Hundreds of girls and boys are reportedly being killed or injured every day.

More journalists have reportedly been killed over a four-week period than in any conflict in at least three decades.

More United Nations aid workers have been killed than in any comparable period in the history of our organization.

I salute all those who continue their life-saving work despite the overwhelming challenges and risks.

The unfolding catastrophe makes the need for a humanitarian ceasefire more urgent with every passing hour.

The parties to the conflict -- and, indeed, the international community -- face an immediate and fundamental responsibility: to stop the inhuman collective suffering and dramatically expand humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Today, the United Nations and our partners are launching a \$1.2 billion humanitarian appeal to help 2.7 million people -- that's the entire population of the Gaza Strip and half a million Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Some life-saving aid is getting into Gaza from Egypt through the Rafah crossing. But the trickle of assistance does not meet the ocean of need.

And let's be clear: the Rafah crossing alone does not have the capacity to process aid trucks at the scale required.

Just over 400 trucks have crossed into Gaza over the past two weeks -- compared with 500 a day before the conflict. And crucially, this does not include fuel.

Without fuel, newborn babies in incubators and patients on life support will die.

Water cannot be pumped or purified.

Raw sewage could soon start gushing onto the streets, further spreading disease.

Trucks loaded with critical relief will be stranded.

The way forward is clear.

A humanitarian ceasefire. Now.

All parties respecting all their obligations under international humanitarian law. Now.

This means the unconditional release of the hostages in Gaza. Now.

The protection of civilians, hospitals, UN facilities, shelters and schools. Now.

More food, more water, more medicine and of course fuel -- entering Gaza safely, swiftly and at the scale needed. Now.

Unfettered access to deliver supplies to all people in need in Gaza. Now.

And the end of the use of civilians as human shields. Now.

None of these appeals should be conditional on the others.

And for all of this, we need more funding -- now.

In addition, I remain gravely concerned about rising violence and an expansion of the conflict. The occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is at a boiling point.

Let us also not forget the importance of addressing the risks of the conflict spilling over to the wider region.

We are already witnessing a spiral of escalation from Lebanon and Syria, to Iraq and Yemen.

That escalation must stop.

Cool heads and diplomatic efforts must prevail.

Hateful rhetoric and provocative actions must cease.

I am deeply troubled by the rise in antisemitism and anti-Muslim bigotry.

Jewish and Muslim communities in many parts of the world are on high alert, fearing for their personal safety and security.

Emotions are at a fever pitch. Tensions are running high.

The images of suffering are heart breaking and soul crushing.

But we must find a way to hold on to our common humanity.

I think of civilians in Gaza – the vast majority women and children -- terrified by the relentless bombardment.

I join the UN family in mourning 89 of our UNRWA colleagues who have been killed in Gaza – many of them together with members of their family.

They include teachers, school principals, doctors, engineers, guards, support staff and a young woman named Mai.

Mai did not let her muscular dystrophy or her wheelchair confine her dreams. She was a top student, became a software developer and devoted her skills to working on information technology for UNRWA.

I am so deeply inspired by her example.

I think of all those tortured and killed in Israel nearly one month ago and the hostages – abducted from their homes, their families, their friends while simply living their lives.

Ten days ago, I met with some of the family members of those hostages.

I heard their stories, felt their anguish and was deeply moved by their compassion.

I will never relent in working for their immediate release. This is essential in itself and central to solving many other challenges.

One mother movingly shared with me her desolation over her abducted son, Hersh.

She also spoke outside the Security Council – and on the subject of confronting hatred, she said:

“When you only get outraged when one side’s babies are killed, then your moral compass is broken and your humanity is broken.”

Even in her utter despair, she stood before the world and reminded us:

“In a competition of pain, there is never a winner.”

We must act now to find a way out of this brutal, awful, agonizing dead end of destruction.

To help end the pain and suffering.

To help heal the broken.

And to help pave the way to peace, to a two-state solution with Israelis and Palestinians living in peace and security.

Thank you.

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