

31 October 2023

New York/Kathmandu

Secretary-General's statement on the situation in Gaza

I am deeply alarmed by the intensification of the conflict between Israel and Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza. This includes the expansion of ground operations by the Israel Defense Forces accompanied by intense air strikes, and the continued rocket fire towards Israel from Gaza.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the current fighting from the outset. Protection of civilians on both sides is paramount and must be respected at all times.

I repeat my utter condemnation of the acts of terror perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October. There is never any justification for the killing, injuring and abduction of civilians. I appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of those civilians held hostage by Hamas.

I condemn the killing of civilians in Gaza and I am dismayed by reports that two-thirds of those who have been killed are women and children.

I mourn and honour the United Nations colleagues who have tragically been killed in the bombardment of Gaza over the past three weeks. My heart goes out to the families of our colleagues who lost their lives in service.

International humanitarian law establishes clear rules that cannot be ignored. It is not an a la carte menu and cannot be applied selectively.

All parties must abide by it, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution.

With too many Israeli and Palestinian lives already lost, this escalation only increases the immense suffering of civilians.

The level of humanitarian assistance that has been allowed into Gaza up to this point is completely inadequate and not commensurate with the needs of people in Gaza, compounding the humanitarian tragedy.

I reiterate my call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and for unimpeded humanitarian access to be granted consistently, safely and to scale in order to meet the urgent needs created by the catastrophe unfolding in Gaza.

I remain deeply concerned about the risk of a dangerous escalation beyond Gaza and urge all leaders to exercise utmost restraint to avoid a wider conflagration.

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