

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MEDIA STAKEOUT MARKING SIX MONTHS SINCE 7 OCTOBER 2023

New York, 5 April 2024

This Sunday marks six months since Hamas launched its abhorrent terror attacks in Israel.

The 7th of October is a day of pain for Israel and the world.

The United Nations, and I personally, mourn with Israelis for the 1,200 people, including many women and children, who were killed in cold blood.

Nothing can justify the horror unleashed by Hamas on October 7th.

I once again utterly condemn the use of sexual violence, torture, injuring and kidnapping of civilians, the firing of rockets towards civilian targets, and the use of human shields.

And I call for the unconditional release of all the hostages still held by Hamas and other armed groups. Until then, they must be treated humanely with visits and assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I have met with many of the family members of those being held captive and even former hostages themselves.

I carry their anguish, uncertainty and deep pain with me every day.

Dear members of the media,

Over the last six months, the Israeli military campaign has brought relentless death and destruction to Palestinians in Gaza – with more than 32,000 people reportedly killed and more than 75,000 injured – the vast majority women and children.

Lives are shattered. Respect for international humanitarian law is in tatters.

During my visit to the Rafah crossing 10 days ago, I met veteran humanitarians who told me categorically that the crisis and suffering in Gaza is unlike any they have ever seen.

Meanwhile – as I saw on my way to the Rafah crossing -- long lines of trucks loaded with humanitarian aid continued to face obstacle after obstacle.

When the gates to aid are closed, the doors to starvation are opened.

More than half the population – over a million people – are facing catastrophic hunger.

Children in Gaza today are dying for lack of food and water.

This is incomprehensible, and entirely avoidable.

Nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

I am also deeply troubled by reports that the Israeli military's bombing campaign includes Artificial Intelligence as a tool in the identification of targets, particularly in densely populated residential areas, resulting in a high level of civilian casualties.

No part of life and death decisions which impact entire families should be delegated to the cold calculation of algorithms.

I have warned for many years of the dangers of weaponizing Artificial Intelligence and reducing the essential role of human agency.

AI should be used as a force for good to benefit the world; not to contribute to waging war on an industrial level, blurring accountability.

In its speed, scale and inhumane ferocity, the war in Gaza is the deadliest of conflicts – for civilians, for aid workers, for journalists, for health workers, and for our own colleagues.

Some 196 humanitarian aid workers – including more than 175 members of our own UN staff – have been killed.

The vast majority were serving UNRWA, the backbone of all relief efforts in Gaza.

Others include colleagues from the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme – as well as humanitarians from Doctors without Borders, the Red Crescent, and just a few days ago World Central Kitchen.

An information war has added to the trauma -- obscuring facts and shifting blame.

Denying international journalists entry into Gaza is allowing disinformation and false narratives to flourish.

We honour all humanitarian workers who have been killed in this conflict, and pledge to remember their commitment and sacrifice.

Following this week's appalling killing of seven humanitarian workers from World Central Kitchen, the Israeli government has acknowledged mistakes and announced some disciplinary measures.

But the essential problem is not who made the mistakes, it is the military strategy and procedures in place that allow for those mistakes to multiply time and time again.

Fixing those failures requires independent investigations and meaningful and measurable change on the ground.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, the United Nations was informed by the Israeli government of its intention to allow a substantial increase in humanitarian aid distributed in Gaza.

I sincerely hope that these intentions are effectively and quickly materialized because the situation in Gaza is absolutely desperate.

Dramatic humanitarian conditions require a quantum leap in the delivery of life-saving aid -- a true paradigm shift.

I repeat my urgent appeals for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages, the protection of civilians, and the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid.

Last week, the Security Council called for just that. And in December, the Council demanded accelerating the delivery of life-saving aid under a UN mechanism.

All those demands must be implemented. Failure would be unforgivable.

Six months on, we are at the brink: of mass starvation; of regional conflagration; of a total loss of faith in global standards and norms.

It's time to step back from that brink – to silence the guns – to ease the horrible suffering -- and to stop a potential famine before it is too late.

Thank you.

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