



**H.E. Ambassador Marcos ALONSO-ALONSO**

Permanent Representative of Spain to the EU

**H.E. Ambassador Elena COMEZ CASTRO**

Permanent Representative of Spain to the COPS

Brussels

Jerusalem, 16 October 2023

Subject: Urgent Appeal Ahead of the European Council Meeting on October 17th - Addressing the Humanitarian Situation in Gaza

Your Excellencies Mr. Alonso & Ms. Castro,

We are writing to you with an urgent appeal regarding the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, which has reached critical and unprecedented levels. The situation demands immediate attention and decisive action to protect civilians and uphold international law.

As you are aware, following rockets and a ground incursion into Israel from Palestinian armed groups on 7 October, Israeli forces have been heavily bombarding Gaza over the past 9 days, at a rate close to 1,000 bombs per day (according to the Israeli Airforce). So far more than 2,670 have been killed more than 50% of which are women and children. 64,283 residential units have been destroyed along with 16 medical facilities sustaining considerable damage, including 3 hospitals that have been fully damaged, all resulting in more than 600,000 thousand Palestinians have been displaced.

Moreover, Israeli authorities has been blocking entry of water, food, fuel and medical supplies to Gaza, which is leading to a humanitarian catastrophe, with international agencies able to allocate 1 Liter of drinking water per day per person. This is a clear violation of international law and the Geneva Conventions. The effects of this siege coupled with the failure to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief operations constructively amounts to a policy of starvation against the civilian population of Gaza, in serious violation of international humanitarian law.

We, the Association of International Development Agencies – Jerusalem, a membership body and coordination forum of over 80 international non-governmental and non-profit organizations working in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) (<https://aidajerusalem.org/>), on the occasion of the European Council meeting on October 17<sup>th</sup> urge the European Council and its Members States to realise:

1. **Immediate Cessation of Hostilities:** The European Council and its Member States should support efforts to pass a UN Security Council Resolution calling for a ceasefire. The ongoing violence is causing immeasurable suffering and loss of human life.
2. **End the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and Targeting of Civilians:** We implore the European Council to demand an immediate halt to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, as well as the targeting of civilians, UN premises, schools, and hospitals where civilians seek shelter.
3. **Facilitate Essential Relief Assistance:** The international community, led by the EU, must facilitate the provision of essential and life-saving relief assistance, including food, water, and medical supplies. Humanitarian personnel must be granted access to Gaza to provide essential care and support.
4. **Medical Evacuations for Vulnerable Groups:** Immediate medical evacuations for children and families in need, either to Egypt, the West Bank, or Israel, must be facilitated. The wounded and sick must receive the necessary medical care promptly.
5. **Immediate Release of Persons Deprived of Liberty:** We urge the European Council to demand the immediate, unconditional release of all persons deprived of liberty, particularly children, pregnant women, mothers with infants and young children, the sick and the elderly, and other vulnerable groups held captive by armed groups in Gaza, and in Israeli prisons and under unlawful administrative detention.
6. **Guarantee Safe Passage for Families Seeking Safety:** The international community, with the support of the European Council, must ensure safe passage for families who need and want to seek safety in areas where they feel secure. Families should be provided with access to information and the necessary time to make these transitions safely.

The Government of Israel has a legal obligation to provide safe shelter and humanitarian assistance for civilians displaced by their offensive. Moreover, the right to repatriate or return to habitual places of residence must be internationally guaranteed for those who seek safety outside of the Gaza Strip.

Families who are unable or unwilling to leave their homes should remain protected under international humanitarian law. There are various reasons why people may be unable to heed evacuation warnings, and we must ensure their safety and well-being.

We implore world leaders and actors on the ground to prioritize the preservation of human life above all else. Anything less would be a stain on our collective conscience.

Thank you for your attention and action on this urgent matter. We know you share our deep concern for the well-being of civilians in the region and the imperative need for immediate humanitarian relief and a durable ceasefire.

Yours respectfully,

Faris Arouri

Director

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