

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and
Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock**

Statement on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel

The current escalation of hostilities has caused immense suffering. I abhor the violence that has killed and injured scores of children and other civilians and caused extensive damage to homes and vital infrastructure.

The hostilities must stop. I echo the Secretary-General's calls for the parties to stop the aerial and artillery bombardments and the indiscriminate launching of rockets. These acts have brought nothing but death, destruction and widespread trauma throughout the Occupied Palestinian territory and Israel.

The parties must respect international humanitarian law, including the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. All parties must take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects from harm.

In Gaza, I am deeply troubled by reports of high-frequency Israeli bombardments. There is no safe place in Gaza, where 2 million people have been forcibly isolated from the rest of the world, for over 13 years. The indiscriminate launching of rockets by armed groups towards populated areas in Israel is unacceptable and must end.

The hostilities have displaced over 58,000 Palestinians, many of whom are seeking refuge in UNRWA schools across Gaza. I am concerned about the transmission of COVID-19 between vulnerable people huddled in crowded shelters and the inability of the health-care system to cope.

Damage to vital infrastructure and insufficient fuel supplies have affected water, sanitation and hygiene services for hundreds of thousands of people. Electrical power shortages, and the damage to the Gaza Ministry of Health Central Laboratory, hinder healthcare provision at dozens of centres throughout Gaza.

In order to respond to needs at the scale required, two critical issues must be addressed. First, we need adequate funding to enable a speedy response. The Humanitarian Coordinator, Lynn Hastings, hopes to release some US\$14 million from the OPT Humanitarian Fund. I call upon donors to accelerate their contributions to the Fund without delay. This is for immediate needs; the Secretary-General and I will be launching a fuller appeal shortly.

Second, access is paramount. Without this, the humanitarian community is unable to respond to the extent needed. The crossings with Gaza need to be opened and to remain as such for the

entrance of essential and humanitarian supplies, including fuel for basic services and supplies to curb the spread of COVID-19. Opening the crossings will also ensure the exit of patients who need life-saving treatment and the entry of special surgical emergency teams to tend to the wounded.

I recognize the efforts undertaken today to open Kerem Shalom crossing, allowing UNRWA fuel trucks to enter Gaza. Regrettably, other essential humanitarian cargo was unable to cross. I call for the sustainable opening of Kerem Shalom crossing for the entry of emergency essential and humanitarian supplies including fuel and the opening of Erez crossing to allow the evacuation of non-essential international staff and the entry of critical international humanitarian staff. I call upon all parties to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.

I call on all parties to the hostilities to agree to a humanitarian pause to allow for emergency humanitarian relief distribution and for civilians to purchase food and water, seek medical care and attend to other emergency needs.

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