

May 20, 2021

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power:

We, the undersigned Chief Executives of 12 humanitarian organizations, are writing to urgently appeal for the U.S. to step up its actions in achieving an immediate and lasting cessation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups and in allowing unfettered and safe humanitarian access to provide life-saving relief to communities in need. We are alarmed by the large loss of civilian life and destruction in the past weeks as the violence continues with no signs of abating. Once the hostilities have subsided, it is imperative to address the root causes of the conflict, otherwise this repetitive cycle of violence and loss of civilian lives will continue to fester.

At the time of writing, 230 people, including 65 children, have been killed, with 1,710 injured, in the Gaza Strip. Another 25 people have been killed, with 6,309 injured, in the West Bank. In addition, 12 people have been killed in Israel. These deaths were all preventable.

The situation in Gaza is especially acute. Shelters to hide against attacks do not exist and people cannot leave Gaza to seek refuge elsewhere. The destruction of infrastructure – including the homes of several of our own staff – and the drastic rise of civilian casualties have pushed Gaza beyond breaking point. All this is occurring against the backdrop of an unabated Covid-19 pandemic with only 38,000 Palestinians in Gaza vaccinated, with testing clinics and laboratories badly damaged in bombing. In the background of this, the decades-long erosion of basic services, employment opportunities and social safety nets had led to deep poverty and economic crisis. For example, if no fuel enters Gaza immediately, its only power plant will stop functioning, jeopardizing health, water and other essential services, while putting people in the dark.

Our staff and the entire humanitarian community stand ready to respond in Gaza, but too often are unable to move because the situation is too dangerous. In the absence of a lasting cease-fire, we immediately need:

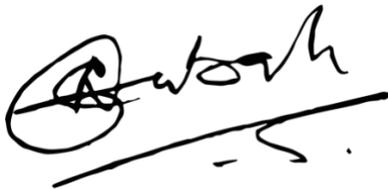
- Respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, and assurances that the protection of civilians is paramount.
- Regular, predictable and comprehensive humanitarian pauses, respected by all parties, across all areas of Gaza to carry out all required life-saving interventions.
- Humanitarian corridors so that first responders and maintenance crews can carry out life-saving rescue missions and repair essential water, electricity and other infrastructure.
- Humanitarian goods, including fuel and materials for repairs to enter, and additional humanitarian personnel need to be granted swift access to Gaza. This includes a rapid and functional coordination mechanism with all parties involved.
- Assurances that hospitals and clinics treating the wounded and schools and other buildings used as shelters for internally displaced persons retain their civilian character and are safe from hostilities.

In the longer-term, we need to address the fact that decades of Israeli military occupation have created an unlivable environment. The ongoing occupation, including a suffocating siege on the Gaza Strip, home demolitions and evictions of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem and the West

Bank violate the fundamental rights, freedom and future of Palestinians. Repetitive violent escalations threaten the lives and undermine the human security and human rights of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Now, more than ever, we need U.S. leadership to bring the parties together to agree to end the hostilities and urgently reach a ceasefire. The Biden administration has emphasized its commitment to a human rights-centered U.S. foreign policy. As such, we look to you to publicly and unequivocally speak out against violations of international humanitarian law and human rights and engage with all parties directly.

Sincerely yours,



Charles Owubah
Chief Executive Officer
Action Against Hunger USA



Sean Carroll
President and Chief Executive Officer
American Near East Refugee Aid



Michelle Nunn
President and Chief Executive Officer
CARE



David Weiss
Chief Executive Officer
Global Communities



David Miliband
President and Chief Executive Officer
International Rescue Committee



Sharif Aly
Chief Executive Officer
Islamic Relief USA



Hany Saqr
Chief Executive Officer
Life for Relief and Development



Aimee Shalan
Chief Executive Officer
Medical Aid for Palestinians



Ann Graber Hershberger
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.



Tjada D'Oyen McKenna
Chief Executive Officer
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Jan Egeland
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