

Secretary-General's press encounter on the humanitarian situation in Gaza

Palestinians in Gaza are enduring what may be the crudest phase of this cruel conflict.

For nearly 80 days, Israel blocked the entry of life-saving international aid.

As the world's leading hunger assessment found, the entire population of Gaza is facing the risk of famine.

Families are being starved and denied the very basics.

All with the world watching in real time.

Israel has clear obligations under international humanitarian law.

It must treat civilians humanely, with respect for their inherent dignity.

It must not forcibly transport, deport or displace the civilian population of an occupied territory.

And as the occupying power, it must agree to allow and facilitate the aid that is needed.

Finally, a trickle of aid has crossed over.

In recent days, almost 400 trucks were cleared for entry to Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing.

But supplies from only 115 trucks have been able to be collected.

And nothing has reached the besieged north.

We are working around the clock to get whatever aid we can to people in need.

And we managed to distribute some wheat flour, baby food, nutrition supplements and medicines.

At long last, a few bakeries in south and central Gaza are operating.

But let us not forget that we are operating in the middle of a military operation.

In any case, all the aid authorized until now amounts to a teaspoon of aid when a flood of assistance is required.

The needs are massive –and the obstacles are staggering.

Strict quotas are being imposed on the goods we distribute – along with unnecessary delay procedures.

Other essentials – including fuel, shelter, cooking gas, and water purification supplies – are prohibited.

We continue to request for safety and security mitigation measures to be in place for our convoys.

Our staff's lives are at risk if we continue to be prevented from distributing food parcels and wheat flour directly to people in desperate need.

Without those, and in the absence of the rule of law and a desperate population after months of blockade, and totally insufficient supply entering, the risk of security incidents and looting remains high.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military offensive is intensifying with atrocious levels of death and destruction.

Today, 80 per cent of Gaza has been either designated an Israeli-militarized zone or an area where people have been ordered to leave.

In other words, four-fifths of the territory of Gaza is a no-go zone for the people of Gaza.

And so, beyond questions about the particular number of trucks at any particular moment, it is important to stay fixed on the big picture.

And the big picture is that without rapid, reliable, safe and sustained aid access, more people will die – and the long-term consequences on the entire population will be profound.

The United Nations has been clear:

We will not take part in any scheme that fails to respect international law and the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.

And we have been equally clear about what is needed.

A permanent ceasefire. The immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. And full humanitarian access.

The United Nations and our partners have a detailed, principled, operationally-sound 5-stage plan – supported by Member States – to get aid to a desperate population.

A mechanism to:

- Ensure the delivery of aid to Gaza;
- Inspect and scan aid at crossing points;
- Transport aid from crossing points to humanitarian facilities;
- Prepare aid for onward distribution;
- And transport aid to people in need.

We have the personnel, the distribution networks, the systems and community relationships in place to act.

The supplies – 160,000 pallets, enough to fill nearly 9,000 trucks – are waiting.

This is my appeal for life-saving aid for the long-suffering people of Gaza:

Let's do it right. And let's do it right away.

Thank you.