



International Development Committee

Monday, 18 November 2024

Rt Hon David Lammy
Foreign Secretary
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
By email

Humanitarian situation in Gaza

Dear Foreign Secretary,

On Tuesday 12 November, the International Development Committee took oral evidence on the state of healthcare in Gaza. We pay tribute to all those who gave evidence, and their colleagues, for their efforts to relieve the suffering of Gazans.

Our predecessor Committee held numerous oral evidence sessions on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Since then, the situation has vastly deteriorated. The evidence this week was clear: not only is the situation unacceptable, but we heard that Israel has breached international humanitarian law.

Witnesses described the near-total block on medical aid and food being granted entry into Gaza. Since May, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society has received only 65 aid trucks. According to witnesses, the whole humanitarian sector in Gaza has received an average of 42 trucks per day over the past month, while northern Gaza has received no aid for 40 days. Our Committee heard earlier this year that a minimum of 500 aid trucks are required to enter Gaza every day in order to deliver the necessary food and medical supplies. The United States recently called on Israel to allow 350 aid trucks to enter Gaza daily, which was ignored. Israel's actions in this area are in direct contravention of the rulings of the International Court of Justice and raise concerns regarding Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law.

One witness described other rulings of the International Court of Justice that the Israeli Government has ignored. The ICJ ordered Israel to take effective measures to prevent the destruction of evidence related to allegations of acts within the scope of the Genocide Convention. However, forensic specialists, independent human rights experts and international media have struggled to enter Gaza to ensure compliance with this ruling.



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We also heard evidence on the indiscriminate killing of Gazan civilians, including children, by the Israeli army. We were shocked to hear of Israel's use of drones to locate and shoot civilians, often in the aftermath of explosions caused by Israeli bombs.

Witnesses told us that some 14,000 Gazans are in critical need of medical evacuation, not including those who would routinely have travelled to East Jerusalem or other places for the treatment of long-term conditions, such as cancer. UNICEF estimates that the severe restrictions on medical evacuations from Gaza mean it will take seven years before all children who need urgent medical care can leave. Again, this raises concerns about Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law.

Witnesses were also clear on the targeting of aid workers and aid convoys by the Israeli army. One witness noted a UN convoy that transports aid workers into and out of Gaza had been shot at five times, despite traveling on routes and at times pre-agreed with the Israeli army. Another witness told us of the killing by the Israeli army of her colleagues when attempting to rescue an injured child in a Palestinian Red Crescent Society operation that had received pre-approval from the Israelis.

These testimonies are supported by the findings of the latest report of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. The report stated:

"Israel has implemented a concerted policy to destroy the health-care system of Gaza. Israeli security forces have deliberately killed, wounded, arrested, detained, mistreated and tortured medical personnel and targeted medical vehicles, constituting the war crimes of wilful killing and mistreatment and the crime against humanity of extermination. Israeli authorities carried out such acts while tightening the siege of the Gaza Strip, resulting in fuel, food, water, medicines and medical supplies not reaching hospitals, while also drastically reducing permits for patients to leave the territory for medical treatment. The Commission finds that these actions were taken as collective punishment against the Palestinians in Gaza and are part of the ongoing Israeli attack against the Palestinian people that began on 7 October."

Finally, we took evidence on the Israeli Knesset's recent ban on UNRWA from conducting any activity or providing any service inside Israel, including the areas of annexed East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, effectively forcing the organisation to cease operation. UNRWA provides education, healthcare, social services and humanitarian aid to 6 million Palestinian refugees and other persons registered with UNRWA in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. It also operates sewerage,



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water purification, water supply and drainage facilities. At present, UNRWA provides food aid to 1.9 million people. According to our witnesses, no organisation has the scale, scope or resources to fill the same role as UNRWA. International humanitarian law requires that an occupying force provides the services currently provided across Gaza by UNRWA.

In the light of this evidence, we must ask:

- What action are you taking, at the multilateral level, to bring an end to the suffering in Gaza?
- What is your response to assessments made by the UN and others on the catastrophic and persistent disregard for international humanitarian law demonstrated by Israel?
- What attempts are you making to ensure that those responsible for directing these breaches of international humanitarian law are held accountable?
- How are you co-ordinating with international partners to avert a further decline in the humanitarian situation in Gaza by ensuring the continued operation of UNRWA?
- Will you consider further limiting arms sales to Israel while its disregard for international humanitarian law continues?

The present situation must be brought to an end. We cannot stand by any longer while innocent civilians, many tens of thousands of them children, continue to be targeted by the Israeli Defence Force, and while supplies to relieve their suffering are unjustifiably refused entry into Gaza. Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law. With the ban on UNRWA due to come into force early in the new year, which will only worsen matters, we urge you to act.

We would welcome your response by 25 November. In line with our practice with Committee correspondence, we will place this letter and your response in the public domain.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Champion MP
Chair of the International Development Committee