

Remarks to the Security Council by Sigrid Kaag, Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza

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The UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza

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Madam President, Excellencies, Members of the Security Council,

It has been almost seven months since the 7 October terror attack perpetrated by Hamas against Israel – a country which continues to be impacted by the deep trauma of the attack and the uncertainty about the fate of the hostages.

In Gaza, during the same period, over 34,000 people have been killed, and tens of thousands have been injured or maimed. Livelihoods, homes, schools and hospitals have been destroyed.

The health infrastructure in Gaza has been decimated. The few hospitals still standing struggle to operate due to severe shortages of supplies and frequent power outages. As summer draws near and temperatures rise, communicable diseases threaten to sweep through Gaza.

Children, who in every crisis suffer the worst and the most, are deprived of nutrition, protection and education, their futures hanging in the balance.

The scarcity of food and other essential goods has also led to a breakdown in civil order and the gradual unraveling of the social fabric in Gaza. There is no effective law enforcement.

As the Secretary-General has said: “We have a shared responsibility to secure an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid”.

Madam President,

Since my last briefing to this Council on the 7th of March, I have continued to engage in discussions with key governments and stakeholders across the region.

I have also submitted and discussed detailed proposals with the Governments of Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Cyprus, to accelerate and streamline the delivery of goods into Gaza and to ensure a consistent pipeline of goods for safe distributed across Gaza.

Today, I will share with you my assessment of the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2720, including areas where progress has been made and lack thereof.

Allow me to say from the outset that a paradigm shift is needed to continue to meet the immense needs of the civilian population in a safe and secure manner.

Madam President,

As I stated before, effective humanitarian operations cannot be reduced to counting trucks. This is a false metric for gauging whether humanitarian assistance is sufficient, let alone whether it responds to the basic humanitarian requirements.

For example, treating acutely malnourished children or pregnant women is not a matter of eating more calories. They require therapeutic and supplemental foods as well as long-term medical care.

Effective humanitarian operations are also about the need for a sustained flow to deliver the right quality and quantity of assistance. This requires a continued focus on volume, predictability and sustainability of diversified aid to scale up assistance. Humanitarian agencies must be able to move food, medicine and other supplies safely and via all possible routes and crossings, into and throughout every part of Gaza.

UNRWA is pivotal in providing life-saving humanitarian aid and essential social services, particularly in health and education, to Palestine refugees. As such, UNRWA is irreplaceable and indispensable as a humanitarian lifeline and must be allowed to deliver on its mandate.

Madam President,

On 5h of April, the Israeli government made several commitments to improve aid delivery, in response to requests by the UN and the international community. A number of steps have been taken, including:

- An increase in the volume of aid cleared, inspected, and crossed into Gaza
- The temporary opening of the Erez crossing and the opening of the Ashdod port for humanitarian goods
- An increase in the number of trucks entering Gaza directly from Jordan through Allenby/King Hussien Bridge and increased access to the North
- Preparations of other Northern crossings
- Continued use of Gate 96
- An expansion of the operating hours of Kerem Shalom and Nitsana crossings
- The resumption of operations by some bakeries in northern and central Gaza

- The repair of the Nahal Oz water line

I have also been advised on the approval of critical communication equipment and an increase in the allocation of fuel.

Whilst implementation of some measures is ongoing, further definitive and urgent steps are needed to set the course for a sustained flow of humanitarian and commercial goods into Gaza in terms of volume, need and reach. Given the scale and scope of destruction and the extent of human suffering every day counts.

The UN is in contact with the Israeli government on other measures that need urgent or continuous implementation. These include issues pertaining checkpoint procedures, repair of roads, timely clearances to allow humanitarian convoy movements to take place as scheduled, the approval of additional communication devices, armored vehicles and spare parts for critical equipment. Agreement on medical and casualty evacuation is equally urgent.

Delivering aid at scale requires a functioning humanitarian notification system – and improved and direct communications between humanitarians and military decisionmakers on the ground. Effective and credible deconfliction is vital for all humanitarian actors on the ground.

This list of basic measures is not exhaustive. Implementation is urgent. My Office is establishing a monitoring framework to determine progress and impact of respective measures taken. I will report to you in due course.

Madam President,

Allow me to share an update on the diversification of supply routes under Security Council resolution 2720 (2023).

Jordan

My team has worked with the concerned authorities to launch the Jordan land corridor under a new streamlined modality. This has resulted in an increase in the number of trucks, thereby volume, with only one transloading inside the Gaza crossing, and has the potential for further increases.

The entire UN family is planning for the receipt and onward distribution of cargo at scale directly from Jordan to Northern Gaza via the Erez crossing. This route is both effective and vital to reach civilians in Northern Gaza and beyond.

Egypt

Given the importance of the aid flow from Egypt, we will continue to streamline operations and maximize access through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom/Abu Salem crossings. We have engaged in constructive dialogue to explore opportunities for optimizing the efficiency of aid delivery through Egypt.

To further streamline access for humanitarian cargo to Gaza from Rafah, the UN has proposed the establishment of an inspection, monitoring and verification unit on the Palestinian side of Rafah. The Egypt land corridor, in particular via Rafah crossing, is important given its volume for humanitarian assistance and early recovery and reconstruction in Gaza.

Cyprus

The Cyprus maritime corridor provides for additionality of humanitarian aid to Gaza. It can never be a substitute for delivery by land. Land routes are the only way to bring in the bulk of supplies needed.

Preparations for building the floating port and pier on the shores of Gaza are advancing, with the involvement of the US and other Member States. The UN has outlined the parameters under which it can play a meaningful role in the distribution of aid via this corridor.

My office has proposed a multi-donor funding mechanism and provides secretariat support to the maritime corridor to ensure full coordination with the operations on the ground in Gaza. UN monitors have been deployed to Cyprus as part of the 2720 Mechanism.

Finally, regarding airdrops, and in view of the above, several Member States have indicated their intent to phase out this mode of delivery in conjunction with the scaling up of assistance via land and sea.

Madame President,

I am pleased to announce that the operationalization of the UN 2720 Mechanism for Gaza will start in the coming days. I am grateful for the constructive cooperation.

The mechanism will initially be applicable to the Cyprus and Jordan routes, respectively. Technical consultations will shortly be finalized with Egypt on its route. I have informed Israel on the operationalization of the Mechanism as per the resolution.

A database and notification system will go online for all cargo destined for Gaza along supply routes. The approval for the placement of international monitors at crossings, inspection and supply points has been requested from relevant authorities. Verification and monitoring inside Gaza will commence as soon as possible. In the coming weeks, my office in Gaza will also be operational.

The operationalization of the Mechanism will allow for pipeline prioritization, predictability, visibility and tracking of supplies to Gaza. As the Resolution intended, the Mechanism is designed to facilitate and support the work of all humanitarian partners on the ground.

Madam President,

The extent of the destruction and the devastating impact of this war on the entire population call for an ambitious and comprehensive plan of support with commensurate investments.

The recent UN, EU and World Bank Interim Disaster Assessment illustrates the scale of the damage and the magnitude of investments required across all sectors, for example:

- The rebuilding and repair of the more than 84% of destroyed health facilities.
- And the return of an entire student population to school whilst educational facilities have been destroyed.

As the Secretary-General has stated, the Palestinian Authority has a critical role to play in Gaza. The international community must work toward enabling its return, strengthen its governance capacity, and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza.

All efforts toward early recovery and reconstruction also need the participation of Palestinian civil society. Fostering a conducive environment to reestablish the commercial sector in Gaza and the engagement of the Palestinian business community and its investors are equally important.

Madam President,

I wish to echo the United Nations' grave concern over the prospect of an Israeli operation in Rafah. Such action would compound an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe, with consequences for people already displaced and enduring severe hardships and suffering. The UN's ability to deliver will be constrained.

In closing,

I wish to reiterate the importance of a paradigm shift. This requires:

- A further scale up in the quality and quantity of assistance and distribution
- Irreversible steps to enable safe, secure and unhindered delivery inside Gaza
- And planning and timely preparations for early recovery and reconstruction

There is no substitute for political will to sustain these efforts. Let us remember that behind every statistic is a human story of loss and suffering. It is our duty to provide protection, support and therefore hope to the Palestinian population in Gaza. It is also our duty to advocate for lasting peace between Israel and a fully independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian state.