



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on December 7, 2023

UN Chief Calls for Israel-Hamas Cease-fire

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is asking for an end to the Israel-Hamas conflict.

In a December 6 [letter](#) to members of the UN Security Council, he urged them to “press to avert a humanitarian catastrophe” by appealing for a cease-fire.

In making his appeal, Guterres cited [Article 99](#) of the UN Charter, which specifies that the secretary-general “may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.”



AP Images
Antonio Guterres

This marks the first time Guterres has invoked Article 99 since taking office in 2017. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric [related](#) that “the scale of the loss of human life in Gaza and Israel, in such a short amount of time,” prompted the unprecedented move.

In his letter, Guterres also cited Security Council Resolution 2712, passed this year, which calls for “scaling up” supplies “to meet the humanitarian needs” in the Gaza region. He lamented that current military operations are not only preventing UN personnel from reaching thousands who are in grave peril, but also putting the lives of those same personnel in danger.

“We are facing a severe risk of collapse of the humanitarian system,” Guterres wrote. “The situation is fast deteriorating into a catastrophe with potentially irreversible implications for Palestinians as a whole and for peace and security in the region. Such an outcome must be avoided at all cost.”

CNBC [reports](#) that Guterres’ letter “prompted sharp criticism from Israel.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen posted this message on X:

Guterres’ tenure is a danger to world peace. His request to activate Article 99 and the call for a cease fire in Gaza constitutes support of the Hamas terrorist organization and an endorsement of the murder of the elderly, the abduction of babies and the rape of women. Anyone who supports world peace must support the liberation of Gaza from Hamas.

The Security Council has yet to respond, though in mid-November it passed a resolution calling for “urgent and extended humanitarian pauses” in fighting for the purpose of delivering aid. Permanent members of the Security Council are the U.S., the U.K., France, Russia, and China. There are also 10 nonpermanent members who do not hold veto power as do their permanent cohorts.

Guterres’ letter is available [here](#) and is transcribed below in full.

6 December 2023



Dear Mr. President,

I am writing under Article 99 of the United Nations Charter to bring to the attention of the Security Council a matter which, in my opinion, may aggravate existing threats to the maintenance of international peace and security.

More than eight weeks of hostilities in Gaza and Israel have created appalling human suffering, physical destruction and collective trauma across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

More than 1,200 people were brutally killed, including 33 children, and thousands were injured in the abhorrent acts of terror by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on October 7, 2023, which I have repeatedly condemned. Some 250 people were abducted, including 34 children, more than 130 of whom are still captive. They must be immediately and unconditionally released. Accounts of sexual violence during the attacks are appalling.

Civilians throughout Gaza face grave danger. Since the start of Israel's military operation, more than 15,000 people have reportedly been killed, over 40 per cent of whom were children. Thousands of others have been injured. More than half of all homes have been destroyed. Some 80 per cent of the population of 2.2 million has been forcibly displaced, into increasingly smaller areas. More than 1.1 million people have sought refuge in UNRWA facilities across Gaza, creating overcrowded, undignified and unhygienic conditions. Others have nowhere to shelter and find themselves on the street. Explosive remnants of war are rendering areas uninhabitable. There is no effective protection of civilians.

The health care system in Gaza is collapsing. Hospitals have turned into battlegrounds. Only 14 hospitals out of 36 facilities are even partially functional. The two major hospitals in south Gaza are operating at three times their bed capacity and are running out of basic supplies and fuel. They are also sheltering thousands of displaced persons. Under these circumstances, more people will die untreated in the coming days and weeks.

Nowhere is safe in Gaza.

Amid constant bombardment by the Israel Defense Forces, and without shelter or the essentials to survive, I expect public order to completely break down soon due to the desperate conditions, rendering even limited humanitarian assistance impossible. An even worse situation could unfold, including epidemic diseases and increased pressure for mass displacement into neighboring countries.

In Resolution 2712 (2023), the Security Council "calls for the scaling up of the provision of such supplies to meet the humanitarian needs of the civilian population, especially children."

The current conditions are making it impossible for meaningful humanitarian operations to be conducted. We are, nevertheless, preparing options for monitoring the implementation of the resolution, even if we recognize that in the present circumstances, that is untenable.

While delivery of supplies through Rafah continues, quantities are insufficient and have dropped since the pause came to an end. We are simply unable to reach those in need inside Gaza. The capacity of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners has been decimated by supply shortages, lack of fuel, interrupted communications, and growing insecurity.



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Humanitarian personnel have joined the vast majority of Gazan civilians in evacuating to south Gaza ahead of advancing military operations. At least 130 UNRWA colleagues have been killed, many with their families.

We are facing a severe risk of collapse of the humanitarian system. The situation is fast deteriorating into a catastrophe with potentially irreversible implications for Palestinians as a whole and for peace and security in the region. Such an outcome must be avoided at all cost.

The international community has a responsibility to use all its influence to prevent further escalation and end this crisis. I urge the members of the Security Council to press to avert a humanitarian catastrophe. I reiterate my appeal for a humanitarian cease fire to be declared. This is urgent. The civilian population must be spared from greater harm. With a humanitarian ceasefire, the means of survival can be restored, and humanitarian assistance can be delivered in a safe and timely manner across the Gaza Strip.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration.

[handwritten: "with my warmest personal regards"]

Signed: Antonio Guterres



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