

United Nations

Guterres appeals for 'sustained' humanitarian access to Gaza

(Cairo, 19 October 2023) With essential supplies running out in Gaza, UN Secretary-General António Guterres on Thursday appealed for humanitarian access to the besieged enclave.

"For nearly two weeks the people of Gaza have gone without any shipments of fuel, food, water, medicine, and other essentials. Disease is spreading. Supplies are dwindling. People are dying", he said at a *press conference*¹ in Cairo alongside Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry.

Mr. Guterres is in the Middle East to witness UN preparations to be able to deliver massive support to Gaza.

'A moment of profound crisis'

He is there at what he described as "a moment of profound crisis [...] unlike any the region has seen in decades", triggered by the "atrocious" Hamas attacks against Israel on 7 October, resulting in Israel's siege and relentless bombing of Gaza.

He pointed to the ever-mounting toll on civilians, the vast majority of whom are women and children, but also journalists, health workers and many others, including UN staff.

The UN chief called for two immediate humanitarian actions in the face of the humanitarian catastrophe.

"To Hamas, for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. To Israel, for immediate unrestricted access of humanitarian aid to respond to the most basic needs of the people of Gaza."

He also called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to help realize them.

"Let me be clear. The Palestinian people have legitimate and deep grievances after 56 years of occupation. But, as serious as those grievances are, they cannot justify terror attacks", he said.

"And as appalling as those attacks have been, they cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people."



Cairo. Secretary-General António Guterres speaking to the media, alongside Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. (UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe)

Safe aid delivery

Mr. Guterres underlined the need for rapid, unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza, where some two million people require urgent assistance.

"We need food, water, medicine and fuel now. We need it at scale, and we need it to be sustained," he said.

"It is not one small operation that is required. It is a sustained effort to deliver humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. In plain terms, that means humanitarians need to be able to get the aid in *and they need to be able to distribute it safely.*"

In this regard, he said Egypt's El Arish airport and the Rafah crossing, the sole one open into Gaza, "are not only critical, they are our only hope" and "the lifelines" to the people there.

He also warned of the risk of the violence spilling over, the longer the situation persists.

The Secretary-General praised Egypt for being "a pillar of multilateral cooperation and the linchpin in helping to defuse tensions and to ease colossal human pain and suffering".

Mr. Guterres is scheduled to participate in an international summit on Gaza convened by Egyptian President *Abdel Fattah El-Sisi* for this Saturday [21 October].

Source: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142542>, 19 October 2023

¹ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2023-10-19/secretary-generals-press-encounter-after-meeting-the-egyptian-minister-of-foreign-affairs-sameh-hassan-shoukry-selim>