

Middle East

## October 2023 – News from the war

by Karin Leukefeld,\* Syria/Germany



Karin Leukefeld  
(Photo ma)

*Little is known these days about what is happening to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank. The news is dominated by Israeli or US sources; voices from Gaza or the West Bank hardly appear.*

When a resolution calling for a ceasefire and humanitarian aid for the tormented residents of the Gaza Strip was negotiated in the UN Security Council in New York in recent days, the USA vetoed it.

At another meeting of the body on Tuesday (24 October 2023, NY local time), the Israeli UN Ambassador and the Israeli Foreign Minister insulted the UN Secretary-General *António Guterres*. In his short opening statement, he condemned the violence of the Qassam Brigades and paid his respects to the relatives of the Israeli and foreign prisoners who were kidnapped in the Gaza Strip.

Guterres called upon Israel to comply with international humanitarian law. It is "important to recognise that Hamas' attacks did not come out of the blue", said Guterres. "The Palestinian people have suffered under oppressive occupation for 56 years. It has seen its land increasingly engulfed by settlements and violence, its economy suppressed, its people displaced, and its homes destroyed. Their hopes for a political solution to



View of the Israeli settlement of Matulla with wall from Journalists' Hill. (Picture Karin Leukefeld)

their plight have vanished into thin air." But none of this can "justify the terrible attacks by Hamas", continued Guterres. Nor could the "terrible attacks justify the *collective punishment of the Palestinian people*".<sup>1</sup>

Israeli representatives were outraged and responded by insulting the UN Secretary General. "I will not meet the UN Secretary General", told *Eli Cohen*, the Israeli foreign minister, on "X", formerly Twitter. "After the October 7 massacre, there is no room for a balanced position. Hamas must be wiped from the face of the earth". Israeli UN Ambassador *Gilad Erdan* called for Guterres' resignation.

In order to "teach the United Nations a lesson", UN representatives will no longer be granted visas, Erdan explained. It started with Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs *Martin Griffiths*, who did not receive an entry visa.

The rock-solid solidarity of the USA and its EU and NATO partners with Israel is now taking the form of supplying weapons and devastating special ammunition to the Israeli army, stationing of up to 4,000 US special forces, officers, and intelligence officers in aircraft carriers in the Eastern Mediterranean, aiming their missiles at Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The German government is also siding with Israel. Their right to self-defence must be granted and the German Defence Minister agreed – without asking Parliament – to allow

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Israel to use two of its drones previously sold to Germany.

Palestinians are horrified by states advocating “freedom and democracy”. A person expelled from Palestine in 1948 following the Nakba commented on a talk show with head-shaking:

“The whole discussion, including yesterday with *Anne Will*, is based on the fact that the conflict began on 7 October. The decades of oppression and terror on the part of Israel are not taking place.” And another Palestinian, who was also expelled from his homeland in 1948, writes in memory of the Crusades: “The barbarians are back.” Remembering a poem by the Palestinian national poet *Mahmoud Darwish*, who was 7 years old when he was expelled from Al Birwa, not far from the port city of Acra, in June 1948. Throughout his life he wrote about the experiences of the colonised in Palestine with Zionist settler colonialism:

“You stole the orchards of my ancestors/And the land that I cultivated/And you left us nothing/But these stones/.../When I get hungry/The flesh of the occupier will be my food.”

Below are some notes and messages from Gaza that the author has received since the beginning of the war.

### **Scraps of information from a devastated life**

**“Write what YOU want, it does NOT describe the horror, the extent of destruction.”**

#### **13 October**

AS (name known to the author) has many relatives in Gaza. The family comes from a village northeast of Gaza stormed by Zionist militias in 1948. Almost 500 people lived there in 1948. Those surviving the militia storm became refugees in the Gaza Strip. For days, AS tried to persuade the relatives to flee to the south of the Gaza Strip. But many were unwilling to leave their apartments and houses; others took their IDs and headed south without knowing where to stay. People were expecting the Israeli ground offensive at any moment, according to AS: “All hell will break loose.” (Source: private)

#### **15 October – News from Gaza:**

“We have left Gaza City and went south. It is NOT safer, BUT the attacks are slightly less intense. Many of our friends died in the attacks, UNFORTUNATELY. Please think of us. The global community doesn’t care about 2.5 million

people. If these were animals, the animal protection associations would have protested. With many, very sad greetings.” (Source: known)

#### **16 October**

*Khalil M.* (name changed) waited for days on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing. He was waiting for his family – wife, daughters, son – who are being hunted by Israeli bombs in the Gaza Strip. Their house in Gaza City was destroyed, and the family only survived because they had been sleeping night after night in other places for days. With relatives, with other relatives, they finally joined the procession of unfortunates who made their way to the south of the Gaza Strip to escape the murderous attacks.

But things weren’t safe in the south either, as it soon became clear. Khalil M.’s family feared for their lives, and he feared for them too. Khalil hoped that the family would be able to leave the Gaza Strip when the long-awaited aid from Egypt reached the Gaza Strip. But they were wrong. Not a single person was evacuated across the border into Egypt. The relief supplies reached the coastal strip under fire. Israel bombed the area even more intensive and hard than on any previous day. Israeli media reported that Israeli special forces had entered the Gaza Strip while aid supplies were crossing the border in the south. In the capitals of the USA and Europe this is called the “humanitarian corridor”. (Source: Author)

#### **17 October – News from Gaza:**

“It’s 9:28 a.m. Here too the night was restless, but we are still alive. The madness, the horror continues and makes us more and more speechless. We don’t know what will happen to/with us (the civilian population). Helplessness, paralysis, being at the mercy. That’s what we’re feeling right now. I think that the global community has forgotten us. For them, it seems to me, we are not people. If this were happening to animals in Africa, animal protection groups would have protested. This proves that they have not created a good instrument for justice. I have spoken very often about justice. But unfortunately, it is only a dubious theory, a toy of the intellect with which we console ourselves. Everything seems absurd to me. It’s all about economic interests and power. It is not about human rights nor about the humanitarian legal system. This makes me very sad, makes me angry, desperate, melancholic, and hopeless. Unfortunately. Please think of us and remember us. The abandoned civilian population of the Gaza Strip.” (Source: known)

### 18 October – News from Gaza:

"It's 3:33 p.m. The horror and madness continue with the help of the USA, Germany, UK, France, etc. I give you a free suggestion: Just drop poison gas on Gaza tonight. While we sleep. Then everything is over. Or drop a nuclear bomb on Gaza at night. Then there is peace. I/we can NOT endure this unlimited suffering anymore. It is enough. The slow death should come to an end. And so, the democratic world should be very happy about genocide on us. When we are dead, you will carry our guilt on your shoulders for eternity. Because we've been in hell for a few days now. Maybe after death we will go to the afterlife, to paradise. It's 6:53 p.m. Our strength is weakening. We feel abandoned by the whole world. What should the civilian population do? The Christian Hospital that was destroyed yesterday is evidence of genocide. Yet the fact is distorted." (Source: known)

### 19 October

A group of special UN rapporteurs condemn the bombing of hospitals and schools in the Gaza Strip and call for *genocide to be prevented*.<sup>2</sup>

They refer to the bombing of the Al Ahli Arab Hospital and a UNRWA school in Al Maghazi refugee camp on 17 October. The attack on the hospital came after two warnings from Israel stating that an attack on the hospital was imminent if people there were not evacuated. The attack on Al Ahli Arab Hospital is an atrocity. "We are equally outraged by the deadly attack on the same day on a UNRWA school in the Al Maghazi refugee camp, which houses around 4,000 displaced people, as well as on two densely populated refugee camps", the statement said. Israel's ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip has been going on for 16 years, denying 2.2 million people "access to essential food, fuel, water, electricity and medicine".

"The complete siege of the Gaza Strip, combined with impossible evacuation orders and forced population transfers, constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law and criminal law. It is also unspeakably cruel", said the experts.

"We are sounding the alarm: there is an ongoing campaign by Israel constituting crimes against humanity in Gaza. "There is also a risk of genocide against the Palestinian people given the statements made by leading Israeli politicians and their allies, accompanied by military action in the Gaza Strip and an escalation of arrests and killings in the West Ban", the experts said.

"There are no justifications or exceptions for such crimes. We are appalled by the inaction of the international community in the face of war-mongering", said the experts. The fire must be stopped immediately, and supplies and the physical safety of the civilian population must be guaranteed.

The appeal ends with this sentence: "The occupation must end and there must be reparations, restitution and reconstruction to bring full justice to the Palestinians."

Author's note: The *UN experts' report to the UN Human Rights Council*<sup>3</sup> on its behalf of the human right to *clean drinking water and sanitation*; of human rights *in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories since 1967*; of *violence used against women and girls*; of the human rights of *internally displaced persons*; of *the right to food*; of the right of every person to *enjoy the best standards of physical and mental health*; of *the right to adequate housing and the right to education*.

None of this is secured in the besieged and now bombed Gaza Strip or in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

### 20 October – News from Gaza

(As a reminder: On 13 October the "acquaintance" left his apartment in Gaza City after the Israeli warning and drove south with his wife and five children. The youngest child turn one year old these days.)

"We are almost in Rafah. We're not doing well at all. We're not safe anywhere here. The red line has long since been crossed and the world is still watching as we are murdered and slaughtered. It doesn't not only watch but support, help and protect. Truths are being covered up and facts get distorted. That offends me very much. Death lies in wait for us everywhere. Universities, schools, mosques, churches, bakeries, everything has already been bombed. For 10 days there has been no electricity, no drinking water, no water for washing. There is no cooking gas, no fuel. Food is becoming scarce. Hospitals hardly have any materials to care for the injured. There aren't enough coffins to bury the dead. The murdered are buried in mass graves, not in cemeteries, in gardens and on private property. 45 military aircraft full of various types of relief supplies have reached Israel and the occupying army since the beginning of the Aqsa flood. In contrast, no Arab country has dared to bring even 1 bottle of water to Gaza. 16 Christians died because of direct Israeli attacks on the Greek Orthodox Church. On Thursday evening,

occupation fighter jets bombed hundreds of displaced people at the Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza City. The Porphyrius Church is the third oldest church in the world." (Source: known)

### 23 October

Information from AS: 15 family houses and apartments were destroyed by bombing, including the grandfather's house. The relatives were able to escape somewhere. But friends and their families were killed. (Source: Author)

### 24 October

UNRWA – *Situationreport Nr. 13<sup>4</sup>* (UNRWA – *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East*)

In the Gaza Strip, nearly 600,000 internally displaced people are housed in 150 UNRWA facilities. In Central Gaza, Khan Younis and Rafah alone, there are almost 439,000 internally displaced people in 93 UNRWA refuges. In the last 24 hours alone, the number has increased by 10,000.

In the West Bank (23 October), *Israeli Security Forces* (ISF) conducted a search and arrest operation in the Jalazone refugee camp, not far from Ramallah. Many people were arrested, and two Palestinian refugees were killed. According to the UN, 93 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since 7 October.

Overall situation in the Gaza Strip: 5,087 people have been killed since 7 October, including 2,055 children, 1,119 women and 217 elderly people. 15,273 people were injured. 1,500 people are missing, including 830 children. (Source: Gaza Ministry of Health).

The shelters (for Palestinians) are completely overcrowded. Many new internally displaced people are sleeping on the streets. The number of internally displaced persons in UNRWA shelters is four times higher than UNRWA's original target (for the shelters).

*Israel*: Nearly 1,400 Israelis and foreigners were killed in Israel, most on 7 October. (Source: Israeli authorities). Author's note: In Israel there are bunkers as shelters. Internally displaced persons and evacuees are accommodated in hotel complexes.

### 24 October

**The children killed in Gaza are "a growing stain on our collective conscience"**

This is the headline of a *press release from the UN children's agency, UNICEF*.<sup>5</sup> An immediate

ceasefire and permanent and unhindered access for humanitarian aid are called for.

In the past 18 days, the Gaza Strip has taken a devastating toll on its children, said a statement from UNICEF, the UN children's agency: 2,360 dead and 5,364 injured children were due to the "relentless attacks". According to reports, "more than 400 children are killed or injured every day". More than 30 children have lost their lives in Israel and dozens are in captivity in the Gaza Strip.

Almost every child in the Gaza Strip is severely traumatised by terrible experiences, by the immense destruction, the relentless attacks, the displacement and the severe shortage of essential goods such as food, water and medicine. "The killing and mutilation of children, the abduction of children, the attacks on hospitals and schools and the denial of access to humanitarian aid represent serious violations of children's rights", said a UNICEF spokeswoman. "Civil population – especially children – must be protected".

### 23 October – News from Gaza:

"Hello, the news speaks of even more intense attacks. That's the way it is. Now even more bombs are being dropped on Gaza, all in the name of self-defence. I am very ashamed of this world, of these countries that constantly distort victims and perpetrators or cause and effect. Is that intentional? For us it means even more deaths and injuries. I cannot understand why the global community is blind. If IL (i.e., Israel, kl) has not committed or is committing any crimes, why are journalists NOT allowed to go to GAZA? Truce, yes, we want that too, BUT the vampires are still very thirsty for our blood. Currently, the north of the Gaza Strip, the east, the west (border regions), everything, absolutely everything, is being destroyed. Horrible bombings, horror. Write what YOU want, it does NOT describe the horror, the extent of destruction." (Source: known)

### 25 October 25 – Addendum:

As this text receives its final edits, a friend and colleague sends another message from Gaza. The video shows an older man wearing a protective vest that says "Press". It is *Wael Dahdouh*, Al Jazeera's Gaza bureau chief. Crying, he kneels next to a dead young man and strokes his face. The dead man is his son *Mahmoud*, who was killed in a targeted Israeli airstrike on the Dahdouh family home. His mother and little sis-

ter Shams died with him. Fifteen-year-old Mahmoud was about to finish school and wanted to become a journalist like his father. The daughter *Shams* was seven years old. Wael Dahdouh moved with his family to the Nuseirat refugee camp after Israel asked people to leave Gaza City.

“It’s clear what happened”, Dahdouh later told colleagues. “It is a series of targeted attacks on children, women and civilians”. He reported an attack on the Yarmouk neighbourhood in Gaza City, but the Israeli attacks targeted many areas. “Nuseirat too”, said Dahdouh. “This is the ‘safer area’ that the occupying army was talking about.”

On Al Jazeera’s report on *the death of the family of its correspondent Wael Dahdouh*.<sup>6</sup>

Source: <https://globalbridge.ch/oktober-2023-nachrichten-aus-dem-krieg/>, 25 October 2023

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

<sup>1</sup> <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm22003.doc.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/gaza-un-experts-decry-bombing-hospitals-and-schools-crimes-against-humanity>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/gaza-un-experts-decry-bombing-hospitals-and-schools-crimes-against-humanity>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-13-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem#block-menu-block-10>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/child-casualties-gaza-growing-stain-our-collective-conscience>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/25/family-of-al-jazeera-gaza-bureau-head-killed-in-israeli-air-raid>

