

The Gaza Strip

Israeli organizations to President Biden: stop the humanitarian catastrophe

Wednesday 17 January 2024, by [Israel-based civil society and human rights organizations](#) (Date first published: 13 December 2023).

Israeli Human rights and civil society organizations sent a letter yesterday (Tuesday, 12 Dec. 2023) to US President Biden, asking him to use his influence to change Israel's policy and prevent the deteriorating humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip. The letter is also published as a print advertisement in the New York Times.

The President

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, DC 20500

USA

Dear President Biden,

Re: The humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip

The war in the Gaza Strip has been underway for more than nine weeks, ever since Hamas carried out its horrific and criminal attack on Israeli civilians, which included killing more than 1,200 people and kidnapping some 250 to Gaza - among them Israeli civilians, foreign nationals and children. Immediately after the attack, and in a speech you later gave in Israel, you made it clear that Israel has the right to defend itself, while emphasizing it must do so only in accordance with the provisions of international law, and particularly the rules of war.

We, Israeli human rights organizations and civil society groups, must at this stage state with a heavy heart that our government has chosen to ignore your advice and similar statements by US officials. This letter does not address the grave suspicions of Israeli violations of international humanitarian law during the war, but centers on the extreme humanitarian crisis developing in Gaza and the urgent need to change Israel's policy on this issue.

Since the war began, Israel's policy has driven the humanitarian crisis in Gaza to the point of catastrophe - not only as an inevitable outcome of war. As part of this policy, soon after the fighting began, Israel stopped selling Gaza electricity and water, closed its crossings and blocked all entry of food, water, fuel and medicine. It has since partially renewed supply of water to the south, but without electricity, most of the civilian population has no access to safe drinking water. Since October 21, Israel has enabled partial entry of aid through Rafah Crossing, followed by a small

amount of fuel, but this falls far short of the growing needs of a population under incessant bombings, which according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health have killed more than 18,000 people, most of them women and children.

It is crucial that Hamas release the hostages back into Israel. However, allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza is not a gesture of goodwill on Israel's part but one of its obligations. According to the provisions of international humanitarian law, when a civilian population under armed conflict cannot survive on available means, the fighting parties have a positive obligation to enable quick, unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid - including food and medicine. This obligation applies even when the aid is needed for civilians of the other party, and binds countries whose location is vital for facilitating the passage of aid or even only easing it. Failure to fulfill this obligation constitutes a war crime.

UN agencies and humanitarian organizations report that the situation in Gaza is catastrophic and they have almost no way left to help the population. The few truckloads that are allowed in - a drop in the ocean, according to the reports - cannot be distributed due to the ongoing bombardments, the destruction of infrastructure and restrictions imposed by Israel. This leaves more than two million people hungry and thirsty, without access to proper medical care, and with infectious diseases spreading due to unhygienic overcrowding and lack of water. This inconceivable reality grows worse by the day.

You have the power to influence our government to change its policy and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, in accordance with Israel's legal obligations and the needs of the population. The UN agencies and humanitarian organizations on the ground in Gaza must be the ones to make decisions regarding distribution within Gaza and the necessary quantities - not Israel. There is no doubt regarding the urgency of opening Kerem Shalom Crossing for the passage of goods and ongoing, unlimited humanitarian aid.

We are in the final throes of an emergency. Many deaths can still be prevented. Israel must change its policy now.

Sincerely,

**Academia for Equality | Akevot Institute For Israeli Palestinian Conflict Research |
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for the Defense of the Individual | Jordan Valley Activists | Looking the Occupation in the
Eye Machsom Watch | Parents Against Child Detentions | Psychoative | PWG | Rabbis for
Human Rights | Re'Acha Kamocha | Social Workers for Peace and Wellare | Yesh Din |
Zazim -Community Action**

P.S.

• B'Tselem. 13 December 2023:

https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20231213_israeli_organizations_to_president_biden_stop_the_humanitarian_catastrophe