

## **EVERY HOUR COUNTS: Call for a ceasefire and an immediate end to targeting civilians**

### **News release**

*Geneva-Tunis, 26 October 2023*

The OMCT calls for an immediate ceasefire and for unconditional and adequate humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza instantly. With the scarce and limited aid that is brought in, 2,2 million people are deprived of access to the most basic necessities for their survival. The OMCT is also concerned about the scope of inflammatory statements that fuel violence and may trigger further war crimes with a risk of ethnic cleansing and forced exile.

Every hour counts. The full closure of Gaza, except for the most minimal and grossly insufficient assistance, constitutes collective punishment. If not immediately addressed, it will lead to disease, famine, and the starvation of civilians, including many children, pregnant women, the sick, wounded and disabled - a method of warfare that would constitute a war crime, violating the right to dignity and the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment.

A possible ground operation in a densely populated territory as Gaza will lead to further escalation and immeasurable civilian and human suffering and loss of life. It is vital that all civilians receive protection and all parties to the conflict need to fully respect international humanitarian and human rights law. In this regard, we call on the unconditional liberation of any civilian hostages.

We are concerned that the military counter-operations by Israeli forces fail to adhere to the principles of international law, notably the protection of civilians. Civilians are being targeted, and these attacks include reports of bombardments on forcibly displaced people who took shelter in refugee camps and hospitals. According to the latest [figures](#) provided by Defense for Children Palestine, as of 24 October 2023, at least 2,369 Palestinian children have been killed in Gaza. The OMCT reiterates its position that the tens of thousands of civilians who remain in northern Gaza remain fully protected as civilians under International Humanitarian Law, despite the evacuation order imposed by Israel.

The ongoing blockade and intentional cutoff of water, fuel, electricity, food and medicine along with aerial bombardments have led to the loss of civilian lives and large-scale forced displacement. If fuel shipments are not allowed into Gaza in the next hours, and according to UNRAWA's aid and relief operations will come to a stop, with catastrophic consequences for hospitals and the deprivation of access to drinking water and bread. Silence and inaction by United Nations (UN) Member States, when there are repeated strikes on civilians under their watch, raise serious concerns as they may encourage further violations or complicity with international crimes.

As the UN Secretary General António Guterres [stated](#) at the UN Security Council, condemning unequivocally the killing of civilians by Hamas and by Israel the escalation is not occurring in a vacuum. Decades of occupation have led to the creation of what has been described as an open-air prison, subjecting Gazans to severe movement restrictions and systemic human rights violations. Palestinians have been victims of arbitrary arrests and detention by Israeli forces for years. Reports of torture and ill-treatment have raised concerns as reported by INGOs, international mechanisms and UN bodies.

Multiple commissions of inquiry and independent experts of the UN Human Rights Council have documented grave violations of international law and called for an end to impunity. Similarly, the ICC Prosecutor has stated that the situation falls within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. The international community, especially the UN, must face the challenge and address this protracted conflict and its root causes, including decades of occupation.

Every life counts, and we cannot turn a blind eye on acts that shake up the legal and moral foundation enshrined in the United Nations Charter. All civilians must be protected by all parties to the conflict whoever they are, wherever they are.

Lasting peace in the region can only be achieved through mutual and equal recognition of rights, including the collective rights of the Palestinian people and the realization of their right to self-determination and sovereignty, as recognised under international law.

Humanitarian aid providers, medical professionals, human rights organisations and journalists must be protected and allowed to work in secure environments. For the OMCT, it is vital in this critical juncture to ensure that the voice of our fellow human rights activists in the region in our member organisations working against torture and abuse is heard - Check #HearTheirVoice on our social media.

*The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) works with 197 member organisations which constitute its SOS-Torture Network in 75 countries, to end torture, fight impunity and protect human rights defenders worldwide.*

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