

Human Rights Council

Topic A:

Protecting the human rights of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip



I. Introduction

The Occupied Palestinian Territory is facing a protracted political crisis marked by decades of Israeli military occupation, violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and internal Palestinian divisions. The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade of varying intensity since 2007, experiencing recurrent escalations of hostilities between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups.

The latest escalation, which began in October 2023, has resulted in unprecedented levels of death, destruction and suffering, with tens of thousands reported killed and repeated internal displacement of most Palestinians. Civilians have faced conditions unfit for human survival for much of the duration of the escalated hostilities, with no safe place within the Gaza Strip and no opportunities to flee. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)

II. Definition of key terms

- **Occupied Palestinian Territory:** The OPT consists of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. Some 4.5 million Palestinians live in the OPT (2.7 million in the West Bank and 1.8 million in Gaza). (European Council on Foreign Relations)

- **International Human Rights Law:** International human rights law lays down obligations which States are bound to respect. By becoming parties to international treaties, States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights (United Nations. "International Human Rights Law.")
- **Internal Palestinian Divisions:** divide between the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA) and the de-facto Hamas authorities in Gaza. (OCHA)
- **Two-State solution:** two-state solution is a proposed framework for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by establishing two states for two peoples: Israel for the Jewish people and Palestine for the Palestinian people. (Britannica)
- **Critical Infrastructure:** The physical structures, facilities, networks and other assets which provide services that are essential to the social and economic functioning of a community or society. (UNDRR)
- **Humanitarian Access:** Humanitarian access is generally defined as humanitarians' ability to reach affected populations and plan, implement, deliver and monitor aid interventions in a principled way; and people's ability to access assistance and protection safely and in dignity. (Norwegian Refugee Council)
- **Famine:** Famine is a term referring to a population that faces widespread malnutrition and hunger-related deaths due to a lack of access to food. (United Nations. "Explainer: What is famine?")
- **Military Occupation:** invasion plus taking possession of an enemy country for the purpose of holding it, at any rate temporarily. (Oxford Bibliographies)

- **Blockade:** A blockade is a military operation employed by belligerents to control, prevents or blocks partially or completely the flow of goods, persons to and from specific areas, be they territories, regions under their control or of the enemy. (Médecins Sans Frontières)
- **Internally displaced people:** Internally displaced people (IDPs) have been forced to flee their homes by conflict, violence, persecution or disasters, however, unlike refugees, they remain within their own country. (UNHCR. "Internally Displaced People.")
- **Ceasefire:** A cease-fire is an agreement that regulates the cessation of all military activity for a given length of time in a given area. It may be declared unilaterally, or it may be negotiated between parties to a conflict. (Médecins Sans Frontières. "The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law - Ceasefire.")
- **Self-determination:** The UN's right to self-determination is a fundamental principle in international law, meaning "all peoples" can freely choose their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development without outside interference, as enshrined in the UN Charter and human rights covenants. (Australian Human Rights Commission)

III. Background information

Timeline of events

1948: UN proposed terminating the Mandate and partitioning Palestine into two independent States, one Palestinian Arab and the other Jewish, with Jerusalem internationalized. One of the

two envisaged States proclaimed its independence as Israel. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

1967: In the 1967 war, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, which was subsequently annexed by Israel. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

1982: In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon with the declared intention to eliminate the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). (United Nations Question of Palestine)

1987: A mass uprising against the Israeli occupation began in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Methods used by the Israeli forces resulted in mass injuries and heavy loss of life among the civilian Palestinian population. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

2005: Israel withdrew its settlers and troops from Gaza while retaining control over its borders, seashore and airspace. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

2007: After an armed takeover of Gaza by Hamas in, Israel imposed a blockade. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

2008: Escalating rocket fire and air strikes culminated in Israeli ground operation “Cast Lead” in Gaza. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

2012-2014: In November 2012 another cycle of violence between Israel and Gaza concluded with an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire. Another round of fighting between Israel and Gaza took place in July-August 2014. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

2023: In October 2023, a major escalation between Gaza and Israel began. South Africa filed an ICJ case against Israel alleging genocide. While the case progressed, the Court ordered Israel to prevent genocide, enable provision of basic services and aid in Gaza, and curb incitement to genocide. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

2025: In January 2025 a Gaza ceasefire came into effect. However, the pause was short lived as Israel launched airstrikes on Gaza on 18 March, effectively ending the ceasefire. A ceasefire went into effect on Friday, 10 October 2025. The agreement included commitments to increase humanitarian aid and access, as well as to secure the release of hostages, which occurred shortly after the deal was reached. (United Nations Question of Palestine)

Israeli airstrikes, bombings and ground-level fighting between Israel and Hamas have killed over 69,000 Palestinians, and destroyed critical infrastructure.

Civilians injured in the conflict and those suffering from everyday health problems are increasingly unable to access basic care. Only 14 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are partially functional, and they are understaffed and lack proper medical supplies. They are also overwhelmed with patients. Verified reports confirm that children in Gaza are dying from preventable diseases and suffering life-changing injuries, as well as missing out on years of education. (International Rescue Committee)

Over 90% of homes in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, leaving nearly 1.9 million Palestinians without a permanent and safe place to live. People are seeking refuge in tents or makeshift shelters that fail to provide safety or dignity. (International Rescue Committee)

In August 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) confirmed that in Gaza all three famine thresholds: catastrophic hunger, acute malnutrition and mass death, had officially been surpassed.(International Rescue Committee)

IV. UN Treaties:

Advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Obligations of Israel in relation to the presence and activities of the United Nations, other international organizations and third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory: The resolution welcomes the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on Israel's obligations in relation to the presence and activities of the United Nations, other international organizations and third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It demands that Israel comply with all its legal obligations under international law, including as stipulated by the Court.

These include its obligations as an occupying Power and as a Member of the United Nations, including the general obligation to administer the territory for the benefit of the local population and the obligation to cooperate in good faith with the UN. The text also demanded that Israel immediately allow and facilitate the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance and basic services to the Palestinian civilian population, including relief provided by the United Nations and its entities, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

in the Near East (UNRWA), other international organizations and third States.

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/L.26>

Human Rights Council Resolution: Right of the Palestinian people to self-determination

(A/HRC/RES/58/27): Right of the Palestinian people to self-determination 4th April 2025: reaffirms the Palestinian people's inherent right to self-determination, including an independent State of Palestine with sovereignty over their land, and urges an end to Israel's occupation and actions violating international law.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/human-rights-council-resolution-right-of-the-palestinian-people-to-self-determination-a-hrc-res-58-27/>

Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice (A/HRC/RES/58/2):

UN Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/58/2 (adopted in April 2025) strongly condemns violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). It demands that Israel ends its occupation and blockade of Gaza, ceases collective punishment, allows aid to be delivered and stops building settlements. The resolution emphasises accountability for war crimes such as starvation and the destruction of infrastructure, while urging international action to prevent forced displacement and uphold international law to ensure justice and reconstruction.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/human-rights-council-adopted-resolution-human-rights-sit>

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Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice – Human Rights Council Resolution (A/HRC/RES/55/28): The resolution demands an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the lifting of the blockade and the granting of full humanitarian access amid grave violations of international law, as well as the protection of civilians. It demands accountability for alleged war crimes and supports international investigations. It also urges states to halt arms transfers that could contribute to human rights abuses. The resolution emphasises that lasting peace requires respect for international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as an end to impunity.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/hrc-resolution-55-28-5apr24/>

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED

PALESTINIAN TERRITORY: The text outlines the UN Human Rights Council's evaluation of the severe human rights crisis in Gaza since October 2023, characterised by widespread civilian casualties, the destruction of vital infrastructure, forced displacement, and a complete blockade. The text emphasises the disproportionate impact on civilians, particularly children and women, and calls for an immediate ceasefire, the protection of civilians, respect for international law, and the release of hostages and detainees. The text also outlines the role of the UN Human Rights Office in monitoring and documenting violations, warning of possible war crimes and coordinating protection responses, while seeking funding to continue this work.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/un-hr-opt-appeal-may-2025.pdf>

V. Countries and groups involved

Israel:

It maintains the right to defend its citizens from attacks by Hamas and other armed groups. It faces international scrutiny over civilian casualties and its blockade policies. Domestic politics remain divided on Gaza policy and ceasefire conditions. Although the 1993 Oslo Accords granted limited Palestinian autonomy, a fully independent Palestinian state has not yet been established. One of the reasons is the ongoing Israeli opposition to a two-state solution. Israel seeks full security control over the disputed territories, which the UN designates as Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Gaza (Palestinian territory):

Gaza forms part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, alongside the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Ruled by Hamas, it is home to more than 2 million Palestinians. Israel has imposed a blockade on Gaza, controlling most goods and people travelling to and from the narrow strip.

West Bank (Palestinian territory):

The West Bank forms part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, alongside Gaza and East Jerusalem. Fatah partially governs the area, which is home to more than 3 million Palestinians. Under the Oslo Accords, Israel retains full control of most of the area.

Iran:

As one of the region's major powers, Iran leads a military alliance of state and non-state actors in their struggle for dominance against Israel and the US. It supports the Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Lebanon:

Lebanon shares a southern border with Israel and the two countries have a long-standing territorial dispute. However, the two countries are not at war. The militant group Hezbollah, which is based in Lebanon, has launched strikes against Israel since 7 October in support of its Hamas allies.

Egypt:

As well as acting as a mediator in the conflict, Egypt shares a very important border with Gaza, including the Rafah crossing. It was the first Arab country to recognise Israel, and is a close ally of Saudi Arabia. However, it has an uneasy relationship with Hamas and the Palestinian factions in the West Bank.

Jordan:

Jordan shares a border with Israel and the West Bank, and at least half of its population is of Palestinian origin. Jordan fears that the conflict in Gaza could lead to increased violence by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, which could trigger a large-scale exodus of Palestinians into Jordan. Jordan supports a two-state solution and is a strategic ally of the US.

Qatar:

Due to its deep ties to Hamas, Qatar has played a key mediating role in the conflict. The country hosts some of the militant group's exiled leaders and has transferred funds to Gaza in recent years. In November, Qatar helped secure a week-long truce during which more than 100 hostages were released from Gaza.

European Union:

Provides aid to Gaza and supports two-state solution

South Africa:

South Africa condemns Israel's refusal to allow aid into Gaza and its ongoing military operations in the West Bank.

United Arab Emirates:

The United Arab Emirates has condemned in the strongest terms and denounced the Israeli government's decision to occupy the Gaza Strip, warning that this decision will lead to catastrophic consequences, including further loss of innocent life and a worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

VI. Possible Solutions

Rapid delivery of humanitarian aid at a large scale: Food, water, medical, nutrition and shelter supplies and the restoration of basic infrastructure (water, electricity and sanitation) are urgently needed to meet the overwhelming needs of the population and treat those experiencing famine, particularly in northern Gaza where conditions are most severe.

Humanitarian aid includes:

- Clean drinking water through water trucking
- Sanitation and hygiene services including building emergency latrines and distributing hygiene and menstruation management kits
- Direct cash assistance to help families meet their urgent needs
- Malnutrition screening, counseling and treatment for children and their caregivers
- Protection programs that improve the safety and wellbeing of women and children
- Mental health and psychosocial support to children and their caregivers
- Early childhood development activities for children who have their lives uprooted

Open all border crossings for aid: All crossings must be opened to enable the rapid delivery of scaled-up assistance as well as the movement of expert humanitarian staff. This access is vital for NGOs to bring in critical supplies that have been held at border points and to quickly move assistance to people all over Gaza.

Establish a lasting and durable peace: Unlike previous ceasefires, this one must endure and pave the way for a lasting peace in the region. A permanent cessation of hostilities and safe conditions on the ground is the only way to fully protect Palestinian lives and to allow for the

safe, rapid and unimpeded scale-up of humanitarian assistance, and enable Palestinians to begin rebuilding their lives.

Ensure sustained funding for humanitarian efforts: As aid efforts expand, sustained funding for humanitarian organizations like the IRC is essential to allow us to scale up and meet the overwhelming needs faced by Gaza's population.

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