

Secretary General Antonio Guterres
United Nations Headquarters
405 East 42nd Street
New York, NY, 10017, USA

(Transmitted via E-mail to the SG's spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric: dujarric@un.org)

Regarding: Proposal for a UN protection zone for refugees and displaced persons from the Gaza Strip

Your Excellency,

Berlin, November 2nd, 2023

This letter reaches you from Berlin. We are a circle of people who are deeply disturbed and concerned about the situation in Israel and Palestine, and we have been committed for decades to the values and norms enshrined as universally valid in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We fully support your speech to the UN Security Council on October 23rd on the violent conflict between Hamas and Israel. We stand in solidarity with your stance in this crisis. We consider the criticism of your speech and the demands for your resignation as unjustified. Your critics have incompletely quoted and misquoted your remarks and taken them out of context.

The top priority of the international community should now be to preserve the lives and physical integrity of as many people as possible, both in Israel and in Gaza and in the West Bank.

Your urgent call for a humanitarian ceasefire and for the release of the more than 200 Israeli hostages has unfortunately so far fallen on deaf ears. Hamas, after its horrific massacre on October 7, continues its rocket attacks against Israeli territory. The Israeli government has until now categorically rejected your appeals for a ceasefire. The EU's call for humanitarian breaks/interruptions of Israel's air and ground warfare against targets in the Gaza strip was also rejected. There is still no sign of the Israeli government agreeing to sufficient deliveries of fuel, food, medicine and other essential humanitarian supplies to the Gaza Strip. The government appears determined to continue its war operations with the declared goal to destroy all of Hamas' weapons systems and infrastructure and to kill its fighters. With such warfare and in view of the dense population of the Gaza Strip - especially of Gaza City - the compliance with international humanitarian law that you rightly repeatedly called for is not possible at all.

Israel's war against Hamas may last many more weeks. Tens of thousands of civilians in the Gaza Strip could lose their lives or be wounded. This worst case scenario would lead to further radicalization, to even more hatred and more willingness to use violence against Israel and against Jews. And this not only in the Gaza Strip, but also in the occupied West Bank and probably also in the Arab states.

Despite your persistent efforts, the Egyptian government is still unwilling to agree to the evacuation to Egyptian territory of the residents of the Gaza Strip whose survival is threatened. This is out of concern that a permanent refugee camp with up to two million Palestinians could be created and out of fear that members of Hamas or other Islamist groups could move from this camp further into Egyptian territory.

In this life-threatening and hopeless situation for the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, we urgently ask you to take the initiative to create a temporary UN protection zone for these people on Egyptian territory south of the Gaza Strip. This zone should be created by a decision of the UN Security Council and with the consent of the Egyptian government. This protection zone should be guarded and secured by a UN peacekeeping force. Unhindered access for UN humanitarian organizations to provide all necessary goods for the survival of the people in the protection zone must be guaranteed. The UN should seek an agreement with the Israeli government that would allow people evacuated to this protection zone to return to the Gaza Strip once the Israeli military's war operations have ended.

A safe zone on Egyptian territory for the threatened people of Gaza may be perceived and criticised as a continuation of the historic expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland. But what civilians are suffering in Gaza right now - death and destruction - must come to an end. This is the sole intention of our proposal for a UN protection zone.

We will also be forwarding this proposal to the German federal government with a request for support.

Konrad Raiser (former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Geneva)

Andreas Zumach (former UN correspondent for „Die Tageszeitung“ in Geneva)

Hans Misselwitz (former Under State Secretary Foreign Office of East Germany)

Gerhard Rein (former correspondent in Southern Africa for German Public Radio, ARD)

Almuth Berger (former Under State Secretary, State of Brandenburg, East Germany)

Joachim Garstecki (former Secretary General of Pax Christi, Germany)

Heino Falcke (former Provost of the Protestant Church in Erfurt, East Germany)

Ruth Misselwitz (former Protestant pastor in East Berlin, Germany)

Heiko Lietz

Berlin, November 2nd, 2023