

Brussels, February 1, 2024

Mr. Alexander De Croo
Prime Minister of Belgium,
holding the presidency of the
Council of the European Union
(January 1 - June 30, 2024)

Open letter

Peace for Israel and Palestine grounded in international law

Dear Prime Minister,

Our paths are marked by the imperative of defending international law and human rights, humanitarian action, the promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue by building bridges across communities, and the protection and deepening of democracy.

We, 100 signatories, write to you calling for your leadership and action under the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

On 10 December 2023, the international community celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration established fundamental human rights to be universally protected. It has become an essential reference point for our societies underpinning our humanity. December's celebration was overshadowed, however, by the massive and systematic violations of the rights of 2.2 million people in Gaza, two months after the mass slaughter of 1,200 Israelis and migrant workers in southern Israel.

It was also sullied by the veto by the United States at the meeting of the United Nations Security Council on December 8, which rendered the Security Council ineffective in its mandate to maintain peace and security around the world, including in Gaza for three months (and counting). Yet every UN agency had warned about the absolute necessity of a ceasefire to protect lives in Gaza. So in an exceptional move, the UN Secretary General invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter that enables him to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter that may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is horrendous, it is worsening daily and there is no indication that it will improve any time soon. Everything points to the contrary. All around the world, public trust in international institutions and in upholding legal standards has been damaged significantly. Following the request filed on 29 December 2023 by South Africa on the basis of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention), the International Court of Justice has indicated provisional measures to be adopted by Israel, including a duty, in relation to Palestinians in Gaza, to "take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of Article II of [the Genocide Convention]" (Order of 26 January 2024, para. 78). Quite apart from the final

outcome of that particular procedure, the international community has a duty to take all measures compatible with the Charter of the United Nations to ensure that the serious violations of international humanitarian law that are currently being committed, whether they amount to genocide or to other violations, cease immediately.

Belgium has taken several commendable positions. Your statement pronounced at the Rafah border crossing on November 24, during a joint press conference with the Prime Minister of Spain, Mr. Pedro Sanchez, was encouraging to all those who expect a balanced approach to the crisis, grounded in international law.¹

The continued brutality of the strategies on the ground requires acknowledging that repeating the same calls has led us no closer to peace. Calls by the international community for: an immediate and lasting ceasefire; an end to the Israeli blockade; and for the unconditional release of the hostages by Hamas have indeed been ineffective. Concerted actions rooted in international law and international cooperation must urgently be taken to build the conditions for peace, to fight impunity, and to free the hostages still held captive in Gaza.

As Belgium assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, it has a duty to lead by example and abide by its obligations under international law. Where serious violations of peremptory norms of international law occur, indicating a flagrant or systematic failure on the part of the responsible State to fulfil its obligations, international law requires all States to cooperate to put an end to the violation;² the ICJ has confirmed in 2004 that all States have a duty to contribute to putting an end to the violation.³

This is why your speech at Rafah can only be a starting point.

Now, it is a matter of responding to the appeal for international action from many Palestinian voices and the moderate voices of Israeli people. An appeal for help was launched by Yuval Noah Harari, world-renowned author of *Sapiens* and professor of history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Mr. Harari declared on October 24 that, for the people of Israel and Gaza, “your mind is so full of your own pain that any attempt to even draw your attention to the pain of somebody else feels like a betrayal.” He said, “at a time like this, we entrust the possibility of peace to outsiders (...) We cannot hold it right now, but we hope that outsiders hold it for us and help de-escalate the current situation (...) The job of intellectuals, artists and scholars is to try and go deeper. [It is] to try and see the complexity of reality, especially in today’s climate of post-truth. It feels intellectually and emotionally lazy to just pick a side.”⁴

We call on you Mr Prime Minister to heed the appeal of Mr Harari for effective international interventions to advance the possibilities of peace. We add our names to the call to you by 16 Belgian signatories on 23 December to undertake immediate measures grounded in international law.

The acts committed since October 7 in Southern Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (in Gaza in particular) are well documented at this stage. The mass killings by Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and other groups on October 7 resulted in the murder of 1,200 Jewish and Palestinian Israelis (citizens of Israel), migrant workers and other foreign nationals, including nearly 860 civilians.⁵ Indiscriminate attacks against children, women and men included taking 240 people as hostages. Horrific acts of sexual violence have been committed. The perpetrators of these massacres deliberately resorted to extreme, gratuitous and

dehumanising violence.⁶ These acts were intended to terrorise the Israeli population. As early as October 10, the nature of these atrocities as war crimes was already clear to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem and Israel.⁷

It was the biggest massacre of Jews since the Shoah. The attack traumatised the Israeli nation, bringing to the fore in a matter of hours the insecurity of Jewish communities in Israel and far beyond, a legitimate insecurity considering the recurring history of pogroms and the accumulated violence suffered by Jews over the centuries. The reluctance of some governments to condemn unconditionally this outpouring of viciousness has led to doubts in the Jewish community about its intrinsic right to life and security, and the ability of others to empathise with the terror suffered by Israel. As early as October 16, Israeli peace activists called for the unequivocal condemnation of the indiscriminate violence against civilians on both sides, and for greater solidarity and empathy with the suffering of the victims and survivors of the massacre.⁸ The resurgence of anti-Semitic actions and rhetoric has amplified the feelings of insecurity.

Israel's military response has created an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. The scale of this catastrophe has been summarized in the first call of the 16 Belgian personalities (*see Appendix at the end of this document*). The worsening of the situation in Gaza since then prompts us to join them and reiterate a call for the implementation of immediate measures grounded in international law.

The Israeli government has chosen to persist in a military course involving massive violations of international humanitarian law and human rights and has ignored the distinction – essential in international humanitarian law – between military targets and civilian population and infrastructure. It appears to all observers to be grossly disproportionate,

Even if the situation is rapidly evolving, and deteriorating, it is useful to go back to some of the measures taken by Israel on December 10, international Human Rights Day, ten days after the resumption of hostilities after the ceasefire. Just a few days after the President of the Red Cross gave an exceptional speech attesting to the extremely dire situation in Gaza, the head of the Israeli army announced that intensive military operations would continue. A few days earlier, the Israeli Finance Minister had announced an additional budget of nearly €100 million for the settlements, intended to build checkpoints and fund civilian security squads, “as well as the weapons and equipment these teams will need.”⁹ This would be arming violent settler militias that are committing crimes.

This extension of the regime of occupation, colonisation and annexation of territories, coupled with the establishment of what Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call a regime of apartheid, is illegal under international law. This makes it impossible to implement United Nations Resolutions 242 and 1515 aimed at the coexistence of the two peoples. The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s visa was not renewed by the Israeli Foreign Minister, following her criticism of the military operation in Gaza.¹⁰

Israel's actions and official statements have been consistent since October 7. The flagrant and systematic violations of international law are getting worse by the day.

International human rights organisations, independent UN experts and academic groups have assessed the nature of the crimes being committed, and have alerted us to the risk

that we are witnessing genocide in the making. Genocide occurs when acts are committed “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.” On November 16, the independent experts appointed as part of the United Nations Human Rights Council's Special Procedures declared that the serious violations committed by Israel against the Palestinians in the aftermath of October 7, particularly in Gaza, “point to genocide in progress” and warned of evidence of increasing incitement to genocide coupled with “the use of powerful weapons with inherently indiscriminate effects, resulting in colossal numbers of deaths and the destruction of infrastructure essential to life.”¹¹

Further on October 18, the US Center for Constitutional Rights published a legal brief on “The failure of the United States to prevent genocide and its complicity in genocide,” highlighting the links between high level political statements, ongoing military operations and the announcement of the complete siege of Gaza.¹² On November 17, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) wrote to the 27 Member States of the European Union, stating that the Israeli government's speeches and the evacuation order of October 13 from northern Gaza constituted an attempt to forcibly and illegally displace civilians, which, combined with the cutting of electricity, water and humanitarian aid, could “reflect genocidal intent or ethnic cleansing.”¹³

The Executive Board of the FIDH, which brings together 188 human rights organisations worldwide, stated on December 12 that “Israel's pattern of attacks and measures against the Palestinian population in Gaza since October 7th, collective punishment, forced displacement, combined with Israel's use of starvation as a tool of warfare, the cutting of water, electricity and fuel, coupled with the public and repeated statements of senior Israeli government and military officials, are evidence to Israel's genocidal intent and acts in its current aggression.”¹⁴

FIDH called on States to adopt measures to ensure an immediate ceasefire that will put an end to the genocide underway in Gaza and guarantee that the serious violations will not be repeated, end the siege and allow access for humanitarian aid to all parts of the Gaza Strip. It calls on the International Criminal Court and the Office of the Prosecutor “to immediately issue arrest warrants for Israeli officials responsible for international crimes against Palestinians, and expand the scope of the investigation to not only include war crimes, but crimes against humanity, and the crime of genocide.”

55 scholars in Holocaust and genocide studies have co-signed a statement in which they say they “feel compelled to warn of the danger of genocide in Israel's attack on Gaza.”¹⁵ They assert that the statements by Israeli leaders, ministers in the war cabinet and senior army officers, i.e. people with command authority, suggest an “intent to destroy” the Palestinians “as such,” reflecting the terms of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention). In particular, the statements in question describe all Palestinians in Gaza as responsible for the Hamas attack on October 7, thus treating an entire civilian population as enemies, a key element that “marks the history of modern genocide.” The statements by Israeli officials contain dehumanising language, such as Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant's reference to “human animals.” The researchers implored governments to take concerted action to “prevent genocide,” in accordance with their legal obligations under Article 1 of the Genocide Convention to intervene and prevent genocide.

These warnings from credible organisations and well-informed groups deserve to be taken seriously. They are based on a reading of international law rather than only on the memory of

the appalling genocides that have already been recognised. These allegations must be dealt with in the appropriate fora.

In its request submitted to the International Court of Justice on the basis of the Genocide Convention, South Africa provides a detailed description of the impacts on the population of Gaza of the actions taken by the Israeli military since October 7. Whether or not the International Court of Justice ultimately concludes that Israel has violated the Genocide Convention, which does not concern other war crimes or crimes against humanity, **the indications about the serious violations of international humanitarian law abound.** This requires that the international community does more to protect the population of Gaza.

Indeed, should the level of devastation of Gaza lead to the forced displacement of the population of Gaza outside of the Gaza Strip, it would not only constitute a gross violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Times of War of August 12, 1949; it would also represent a major breach to the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, which was reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of July 8, 2004 and most recently by the UN General Assembly in its resolution of December 16, 2020.¹⁶

In view of the unprecedented situation, we request Belgium to use its presidency of the Council of the European Union to ensure the European Union and its Member States do more to contribute to ending the armed conflict as a matter of utmost urgency and to invest in peace building immediately thereafter. The goal is to save lives, to address the most flagrant and systematic violations of international humanitarian law, and to fight the cycle of impunity that fuels future crimes. States have a legal obligation to take all the measures consistent with international law to put an end to the serious known violations of peremptory rules of international law.

EU measures have been taken against Hamas including being placed on the list of terrorist organisations. This has resulted in freezing Hamas assets and other sanctions designed to deprive it of its means of operation.

Recommendations:

We believe it is essential and urgent to take **nine immediate measures** in order to uphold international law and to build peace:

1. **Officially and publicly request Switzerland to urgently convene a Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the (Fourth) Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War** of August 12, 1949. European States should officially and publicly join the countries that have requested Switzerland, in its capacity as depositary of the Geneva Conventions, to convene such an urgent meeting. This appeal has been supported by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW).
2. **Mobilise to guarantee an immediate increase in the volume of humanitarian aid** that is actually delivered on the ground, safely and without restriction, **and to effectively protect humanitarian teams** and their operations in Gaza. The unprecedented level of deaths among humanitarian aid workers highlights that it is necessary to support initiatives which advocate for the protection of the status of humanitarian aid workers

and provide effective and meaningful support for humanitarians in case they have been targeted during the conflict.

3. **Enact an immediate suspension of arms transfers** to the parties in the conflict. This is a duty under the Geneva Conventions, in particular to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. In the face of serious violations of peremptory norms of international law, all States must refrain from rendering aid or assistance to the State responsible for the violation.¹⁷
4. **Immediately suspend trade in products from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.** Israel's settlement policy is a violation of international law under Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the Occupying Power from “deporting or transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.” The colonisation movement is accelerating, resulting in an unprecedented increase in the level of violence, murder and massive forced population displacements in impunity. It is vital to recognise and respect the legal obligations resulting from the duty of non-recognition and non-assistance related to the Israeli settlements and their economic activity.¹⁸

The study of broader economic sanctions is one of the legal obligations in order to take all measures in accordance with international law to put an end to the serious known violations of peremptory rules of international law.

5. **Strengthen a group of States active in a peace initiative.** Current peace initiatives, in particular Egypt's ceasefire proposal, focus on immediate priorities that would alleviate human suffering, including stopping the fighting, releasing hostages and improving the delivery of food and humanitarian aid. They are welcome, though insufficient. While it is clear that a peace agreement will not be reached without active support from the major political powers, in particular the United States, and this leadership is lacking. Bold leadership is required for peace; any other attitude would only reinforce popular cynicism. The Belgian Presidency of the Council of European Union could – with Spain, Ireland and other States sharing a common vision – build a core group of Member States to help lay the foundations for a lasting peace initiative, co-sponsored with Arab countries, in liaison with major powers. We call on the European Union to assume its leading role for peace and security in the Euro-Mediterranean area. Europeans owe it to the people of Israel and Palestine, including for obvious historical reasons. Spain, Ireland and Belgium have a strong combined legitimacy to support a process aimed at peace, mutual recognition, addressing a history of violence, to catalyse a discussion on the coexistence of two peoples – be it in two states, a single state, a confederation or any formula decided by mutual agreement. A huge mediation effort is inescapable. We need to start this process with civilian groups willing to talk about peace. Given the lack of political will to stop the massacres, free the hostages and negotiate for peace amongst the government officials involved, a process that includes civil society organisations and democratic leaders ready to consider and negotiate for peace could help strengthen civil society, and speed up the pathway to peace.
6. **Strengthen diplomatic efforts for the immediate and unconditional release of all civilian hostages** held in Gaza after being abducted by Hamas and other armed groups on October 7. At the time of writing, 129 hostages taken from Israel remain in captivity in the Gaza Strip. International Law prohibits taking hostages. Hamas and other armed

groups involved clearly and unequivocally committed acts defined as war crimes. As a bare minimum, diplomatic efforts should pressure the Hamas leadership to treat the hostages humanely, which entails International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to the hostages so that those who are injured or ill are provided medical care and they can communicate regularly with their families. International efforts should be deployed to recognise that stronger legal responses are needed to address the taking of hostages. New mechanisms should be trialled to ensure faster characterization, to improve family support and to fight impunity of these war crimes. The EU should strengthen its diplomatic action regarding Palestinians detained in Israel without charge or trial. They must be urgently freed. Some 2,000 Palestinians were held in administrative detention¹⁹ on November 1, while more than 1000 were being detained before October 7 in violation of international law.²⁰

7. **Recognise the State of Palestine.** The international community has asserted the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people in United Nations resolutions since 1947. The effective implementation of this right is long overdue. The gap between solemn pledges and developments on the ground worsens the imbalance between the parties involved, the fantasies of religious extremists whose violence is increasingly coming to light, and the overwhelming perception globally of a double standard that the Western world seems to dramatically underestimate in both its impact on respect for democracy and on multilateralism itself. Recognise Palestine immediately, according to internationally recognised borders, while reasserting Israel's right to exist and to its security. Draw the wrath of those who shun law and justice, and contribute to peace.
8. **Increase the support to the International Criminal Court and ensure that those responsible for core international crimes are held to account** within a reasonable timeframe. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction over war crimes committed in or from the OPT – and by nationals of Palestine (the State of Palestine being an ICC member). The ongoing investigations related to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, must receive proper resources and support. The extremely slow progress of the investigations regarding potential human rights violations during the previous wars in Gaza violates international law. The call of the FIDH to expand the scope of the ICC investigation in order to include not only war crimes, but crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide, deserves to be taken seriously. As is the call to issue arrest warrants for officials responsible for alleged international crimes since October 7. We encourage the EU to pressure other parties who are not yet members of the ICC to recognise the court's jurisdiction and to cooperate.
9. **Invest massively in a culture and in initiatives that promote peace and international cooperation.** The violence in Israel on October 7, in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (including East Jerusalem) since has a direct destabilising effect on peace and security throughout the world. It has contributed to a steep rise in dehumanising, racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, identity-based and messianic speech and assaults in many countries and regions. It leads to threats to human rights, to international cooperation and to the kind of partnerships needed to tackle the most important issues facing a divided world. Faith in democracy and values that can underpin effective and coordinated action is being put further at risk, in particular in building communities of peace and addressing the climate and ecological collapse.

We call on you to take new initiatives to counter this trend. Increased financial support for non-governmental organisations promoting human rights is crucial. Moral support for the promotion of open, inclusive societies that recognise the multiple identities of every human being needs resources and support. In the short term, we need to echo the wisdom of Palestinian poets and Israeli authors, and root international actions in the richness of the region's and the world's cultures.

We are aware that each of these actions may elicit criticism. Yet they are just, rooted in international law, and will ultimately contribute to peace and security for civilians in Palestine and Israel, and throughout the world. Conversely, every day of inaction prolongs insecurity across the region and globally. Given the global divisions deepened by this conflict, the failure to halt it and the ongoing forced displacement of the Palestinian people could lead to a breaking point in international cooperation, especially as it follows inaction by Western nations toward human rights violations against the Rohingya in Burma and the Uighurs in China.

During the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we urge you to propose these immediate measures to the EU Member States. We are facing history in the making: destruction or life, impunity or justice, war or peace.

The 100 signatories:

E. Tendayi Achiume - Alicia Miñana Professor of Law, UCLA Law School, Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

Aziza Ahmed - Professor of Law, Boston University

Philip Alston - Professor of Law, New York University, former UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions

Yves Aubin de La Messuzière - Former Ambassador of France and Director at the French Foreign Affairs Ministry for North Africa and the Middle East

François Audet - Founding Director of the Canadian Research Institute on Humanitarian Crises and Aid (OCCAH), Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

Bertrand Badie - Emer. Professor Sciences Po Paris

LaToya Baldwin Clark - Professor of Law, UCLA School of Law

Aslı Ü. Bâli - Professor of Law, Yale Law School

Henri Bartholomeeusen - Attorney, former member of the Council of the French Order of Lawyers of the Brussels Bar, former President of the Center for Secular Action of Belgium (Centre d'Action Laïque de Belgique)

Fabrizio Battistelli - Professor of Sociology University Roma3, president of IRIAD (Istituto di Ricerche Internazionali Archivio Disarmo).

Denis Bauchard - Former Ambassador of France and Director at the French Foreign Affairs Ministry for North Africa and the Middle East, former Chair of the Arab World Institute in Paris, IFRI Senior Advisor for North Africa and the Middle East

Samantha Besson - Professor, Collège de France and University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Ulf Bjereld - Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg

Mario Bova - Diplomat and former Ambassador of Italy to Japan and Albania, former Director General for Europe Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Jean-Hervé Bradol - Physician, former Chair of Doctors without Borders (MSF) International 2000-2008

Rony Brauman - Physician, former President of Doctors without Borders (MSF) France 1982-1994, former Director of the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute, University of Manchester

Eva Brems - Professor of Human Rights Law, Ghent University

Romana Cacchioli - Executive Director of PEN International

Giuseppe Cassini - Diplomat and former Ambassador of Italy to Lebanon, author

Helen Clark - Former Prime Minister of New Zealand and Former UNDP Administrator

Jean d'Aspremont - Professor, Sciences Po Paris

Jerome de Hemptinne - Assist. Professor, Utrecht University

Olivier De Schutter - UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Co-chair, International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food). Former member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Professor, UCLouvain and SciencesPo

Tana de Zulueta - Journalist, former member of Parliament (Italy), independent consultant in the fields of election observation and assistance, media and human rights

Donatella Di Cesare - Philosopher and author, peace activist, Professor Department of Philosophy La Sapienza University Rome

Ryan D. Doerfler - Professor of Law, Harvard Law School

Veena Dubal - Professor of Law, University of California, Irvine

Brigitte Dufour - Director International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)

Isabelle Durant - Former Deputy Secretary General of UNCTAD and current member of the UN Expert Mechanism of the Right to Development

Dominique Edde - Lebanese novelist and essayist

Vincent Engel - President of PEN Belgium

Carlos Espósito - Professor of Public International Law at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Isabelle Ferreras - Tenured Research Fellow FNRS. Professor UCLouvain, Senior Research Associate, Harvard Law School. Member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. Visiting Fellow, Oxford University. Co-founder of the international movement DemocratizingWork aiming to expand the democratic project

Bernard Focroulle - Composer, Director General of the Brussels opera-house La Monnaie (1992-2007), Director General of the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence (2007-2018), founder of the association Culture and Democracy

Domenico Gallo - Former President of the Supreme Court of Cassation (Italy)

Maria Gavouneli - Professor Faculty of Law, and Director, Refugee & Migration Studies Hub, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens

Alicja Gescinska - Philosopher and writer, President of PEN Flanders, Director of the Philosophy PhD program at the University of Buckingham

Matthias Goldmann - EBS University Wiesbaden / Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law

Māris Graudiņš - Former Head of the European Parliament Information Office, Riga, former Latvian MP and former Progressive party Chairperson, Board member Levi. I. Graudins Christian Foundation. Guest Lecturer at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga

Simon Gronowski - Attorney and author, Shoah survivor, former president of the Union of Deported Jews in Belgium - Daughters and Sons of the Deportation

Kübra Gümüşay - Writer, political scientist, Fellow at The New Institute in Hamburg author 'Speaking and Being'

Ricardo Gutiérrez - General Secretary of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Thomas Hammarberg - Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights 2006-2012, Representative of the UN Secretary General for human rights in Cambodia 1996-2000, Former Ambassador of the Swedish Government on Humanitarian Affairs and former Secretary General of Save the Children Sweden and Amnesty International Sweden

Ludovic Hennebel - Expert member and Vice President of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Professor of Law and Director of the Institute of International Humanitarian Studies at the Faculty of Law of Aix-en-Provence (France)

Lisa Herzog - Philosopher

Lena Hjelm-Wallén - Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Development Aid and Deputy Prime Minister in Swedish Governments from 1985 - 2002

Sylvie Humbert - Professeure d'histoire du droit et de la justice, Université catholique de Lille

Ahmet Insel - Emer. Professor at Galatasaray University, Istanbul

Franco Ippollito - Former judge and Secretary General of the Supreme Court of Cassation, president of the Fondazione Basso, dedicated to the study of societal change and international justice.

Wolfgang Kaleck - Lawyer and Author, Berlin

Karl Klare - Professor of Law, Northeastern University; Co-Convenor, International Social and Economic Rights Project

Martti Koskenniemi - Emer. Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland

Genevieve Lakier - Professor of Law and Herbert & Marjorie Fried Teaching Scholar, The University of Chicago Law School

Mary Lawlor - UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

Jonathan Littell - Writer, Prix Goncourt laureate

Susan Marks - Professor of International Law, London School of Economics and Political Science

Marco Mascia - Professor of International Relations, University of Padova, UNESCO Chair 'Human rights, democracy and peace', President of the University Human Rights Centre "Antonio Papisca", Coordinator of the 'Italian Network of Universities for Peace'

Henning Melber - Extraordinary Professor and Director emeritus of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala/Sweden, former President of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI)

Emilio Menéndez del Valle - Ambassador of Spain. Former European Parliament member. Former ambassador to Jordan and Italy. Former ECHO director Middle East

Pierre Micheletti - Physician, former President of Action Contre la Faim (ACF) France 2019-2022, former President of Médecins du Monde (Mdm) France 2006-2009, Membre de la Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme (CNCDH) de la République française

Gian Giacomo Migone - Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Senate (1994-2001), Member of the Advisory Board of the European Institute Columbia, Former Professor of History of Euro-Atlantic Relations, University of Torino

Alice Mogwe - President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Réginald Moreels - Former Minister of Development Cooperation, former President of Doctors without Borders (MSF) Belgium, founder and humanitarian surgeon at UNICHR in Beni (northeast region in the DRC)

Samuel Moyn - Professor of Law and History, Yale University

Jay Naidoo - Minister in President Mandela's Cabinet 1994-1999, and Founding General Secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions

Christoph Nußbaumer - Novelist, playwright

Jerome Oberreit - Executive Director of BRAC Global and former Secretary General of Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders International

HRH Princess Esmeralda of Belgium - Journalist and activist for human rights and the environment

Moni Ovadia - Actor, theatre director, musician and author

Katharina Pistor - Edwin B. Parker Professor of Comparative Law, Columbia Law School

Guy Quaden - Economist. Professor emeritus, Liège University. Honorary Governor of the National Bank of Belgium. Former administrator of various international and European economic and financial institutions. Member emeritus, Royal Academy of Belgium

Aziz Rana - Incoming J. Donald Monan, S.J., University Professor of Law and Government, Boston College

Madeleine Rees - British lawyer, Secretary-General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

Matthieu Ricard - Nepalese French writer and Buddhist monk

Jean-Baptiste Richardier - Cofounder of United Against Inhumanity, Président of Alternatives Humanitaires, Cofounder of Handicap International/ Humanity & Inclusion (HI)

Jean-Maurice Ripert - French Ambassador, former UN Under-Secretary-General, President of the French Association for the United Nations.

Mary Robinson - Former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Chiara Saraceno - Sociologist, Professor Emerita University of Turin and Berlin Social Science Center, Honorary fellow Collegio Carlo Alberto.

Jordi Savall - Musician

Iain GM Scobbie - Professor, Chair of Public International Law and Director of the Manchester International Law Centre, University of Manchester

Linus-Alexander Sicilianos - Dean of the Law School of the University of Athens, former President of the European Court of Human Rights

Burhan Sonmez - President of PEN International

Johann Soufi - International Lawyer, Founder of the Institute for International Legal and Advocacy Training (IILAT), Former Head of UNRWA Legal Office in Gaza and Former Legal Advisor of the International Commission of Inquiry for Mali

Armando Spataro - Former chief Public Prosecutor, Torino, former Milan Deputy Public Prosecutor and coordinator of the Court's anti-terrorism unit.

Anna Sundström - Secretary General for the Olof Palme International Center

Simone Suskind - Peace activist, former senator, former President of the David Suskind Secular Jewish Community Center (CCLJ), founder and President of Actions in the Mediterranean

Marleen Temmerman - Former senator (Belgium), Professor emeritus Ghent University, former Director of the Department for Reproductive Health and Research at the WHO, member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Liv Tørres - International Secretary, Trade Union Confederation LO Norway, formerly Executive Director of Nobel Peace Center, of Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (New York) and General Secretary of Norwegian People's Aid

Emmanuelle Tourme Jouannet - Professor of International Law, Ecole de droit, Sciences Po Paris

Françoise Tulkens - Former Judge and Vice President at the European Court of Human Rights, Co-chair of the Committee for academic thinking on the conditions for a durable peace at the Royal Academy of Belgium (2022-2023)

David Van Reybrouck - Writer and author of books on the history of colonialism and expanding democracies, including Congo, Revolusi, The Plague, Against Elections: The Case for Democracy

Olivier Vandecasteele - Humanitarian leader, held as a state hostage by Iran for 15 months, recognized by Amnesty International and the UN as victim of torture and arbitrary detention

Damien Vandermeersch - Professor emeritus UCLouvain and prosecutor (Belgium)

Gaëtan Vanloqueren - Originator of the open letter, Researcher at University of Liège, Lecturer, UCLouvain and ICHEC - Brussels Management School

Maruša T. Veber - Ass. Professor, International Law, University of Ljubljana

Margot Wallström - Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden (2014–2019), European Commissioner for the Environment (1999–2004), First Vice-President of the European Commission (2004–2010), United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict (2010–2012)

Jody Williams - Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

Lucy Williams - Professor of Law, Northeastern University; Co-Convenor, International Social and Economic Rights Project

Pål Wrange - Professor of Public International Law at Stockholm University

Vladimiro Zagrebelsky - Former Judge of the European Court of Human Rights

Fuad Zarbiyev - Professor of International Law, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva

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Appendix : Summary of the violence in Gaza, as presented to the Belgian Prime Minister in an open letter signed by 16 Belgian civil leaders and published in two Belgian newspapers on December 23 and 28, 2023.²¹

The description of the facts up to December 14, 2023

As of December 10, the bombardments and military operations on the ground had killed 17,700 Palestinians – 70% of them women, children and people over 60 – and injured 48,780 people, not to mention nearly 8,000 missing persons. These figures come from local authorities and are corroborated by UN agencies and independent academic analyses.²² The bombardments in Gaza are the most indiscriminate toward civilians, and the ratio of civilians killed exceeds the average ratio of all the wars in the 20th century, according to an analysis by Yagil Levy, a professor at

Israel's Open University.²³ Human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, have already communicated about instances of illegal and indiscriminate attacks that should be investigated as war crimes.²⁴

Nearly 85% of the population, or 1.9 million people, have been forcibly displaced several times. Half the population is starving according to the deputy director of the World Food Programme; 100% of the population is food insecure according to the Food Security Cluster, and the reduction in the water supply is estimated at 94%.²⁵ Humanitarian and food aid is trickling in; it is restricted for no good reason, and at the time of writing was only possible in the governorate of Rafah. The siege and blockade of Gaza have caused severe disruptions to the supply of medicines, medical equipment and electricity. According to humanitarian organisations on the ground, deaths from starvation and disease will soon outnumber those caused by bombs.²⁶ Health workers are also under attack: the World Health Organisation has denounced an unprecedented number of attacks on the Gazan health system; by December 4, there had already been 203 attacks on hospitals, ambulances and medical supplies, and health workers have been detained.²⁷ By the same date, 202 humanitarian workers had been killed or injured, including 135 who worked for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).²⁸ People on the ground are warning of the unprecedented level of deaths among humanitarian workers, with the United Nations stating that this is “the highest number of humanitarian workers killed in the history of our organisation in such a short period of time.”²⁹ The ban preventing media from entering Gaza, for no legitimate reason, is hampering access to information; as of December 10, 63 journalists had been killed.

Gaza's civilian infrastructure has been almost completely destroyed. According to independent scientific analyses of satellite images, 98,000 buildings had been damaged or destroyed by November 29, before the resumption of massive and incessant bombardments after the short truce.³⁰ The total or partial destruction includes 339 school buildings, 167 places of worship, as well as symbolic buildings like the Palace of Justice and the Palestinian Legislative Council complex. 26 of 35 hospitals are no longer operational. The level of devastation in northern Gaza (with 68% of all buildings damaged) exceeds that of Dresden and Cologne after the Allied bombing raids between 1943 and 1945.³¹

Investigations by several credible media outlets and testimonials from Israeli military personnel suggest that this mass destruction of civilian buildings is a **deliberate goal of the Israeli strategy**. Artificial intelligence tools are used to identify important non-military targets (*power targets*), leading to what one former intelligence officer calls a "mass murder factory".³² The army allegedly deliberately targets residential buildings to cause massive civilian casualties and damage in order to minimise the military risks for its soldiers on the ground and benefit from a period of calm after the war in the hope of turning the population against Hamas; this is known as the “Dahiya doctrine,” referring to a district in Beirut that was heavily bombed in 2006.³³ This doctrine might have been used this time to cause the terror needed to trigger the forced displacement of more than a million people in a few days.

Israeli tanks and bulldozers are also reported to have destroyed farmland. By the end of October, **more than 20% of Gaza's agricultural land had already been damaged**, according to an analysis by UNOSAT, the United Nations' imaging department.³⁴ Human Rights Watch and teams from France 24 have documented the destruction of orchards, greenhouses and agricultural land, including during the humanitarian truce, based on precise images that are publicly available.³⁵

Today, civilians are deprived of a secure existence in 100% of the Gaza Strip.

Finally, in the West Bank, settlers and representatives of the State of Israel have perpetrated unprecedented levels of violence against Palestinians: 265 of the 464 Palestinians killed in the West Bank in 2023 have been killed since October 7 and at least 1,000 people have been forcibly displaced from their property.³⁶

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