3 October 2024

AIDA Statement: One year of devastation: marking the unprecedented atrocity crimes and suffering in Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel

Over the past year, we have issued countless statements alerting the world of the horrific situation unfolding in Gaza. Each time, the same message was repeated with updated numbers reflecting the horrors inflicted on Palestinians, with no new words to describe the scale of what we are witnessing. On this one-year mark, we choose not to echo those warnings. What we want to say is simple: we never imagined the world would allow this horror to continue for so long, or for Israel to act with such impunity.

These last 12 months are not only a marker of the brutal violence inflicted on Palestinians but an indictment of our collective humanity. It reflects the failure of the international order—particularly powerful nations whose inaction and enabling of Israel's actions have compounded Palestinian suffering and shattered international norms. This failure extends far beyond Gaza, undermining the very foundations of what the global community has strived to uphold since its establishment.

Almost a year ago, Israeli authorities declared a "total siege" on Gaza, with the defence minister publicly announcing: "There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed." This exacerbated the suffering caused by the existing 17-year blockade and decades-long dehumanising and unlawful occupation, which already severely restricted the flow of people, essential goods, services, and humanitarian aid while collectively punishing an entire civilian population.

In the last year, Israel's military actions—including indiscriminate bombings, relentless airstrikes, and shelling—have killed and maimed Palestinian civilians, including children, in record numbers. The widespread destruction of Gaza's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and homes, has brought its healthcare system to its knees and made access to clean water nearly impossible while spreading disease. Starvation has been used as a method of warfare, with Israel restricting the entry of food, fuel, and medicine. The repeated unlawful forced displacement of millions of Palestinians has erased any sense of safety or dignity, squeezing them into ever smaller patches of land as Israeli military-designated humanitarian areas shrink to just 11% of the enclave's territory, fragmenting communities even further. These atrocities, in clear violation of international law, have caused an unprecedented human catastrophe, leaving Palestinians in cycles of displacement, suffering, and deprivation. A generation of children is orphaned, maimed, and traumatized, with the impacts set to last for generations, even if a ceasefire is reached. The devastation in Gaza continues to send disastrous ripple effects, destabilizing the region and impacting global peace and security, with consequences felt far beyond its borders.

Last year's October 7th attacks led by Palestinian armed groups on Israelis were a devastating reminder of the cycles of violence that show no signs of abating. The deliberate targeting of Israelis caused immense suffering, trauma, and loss of life. These acts have inflicted deep

scars on countless families and communities, and we unequivocally condemn them. As we remember those who perished, we call for an immediate ceasefire and the release of all hostages and the thousands of unlawfully detained civilians—whether Israeli or Palestinian. The protection of civilians must be a shared priority for all, and it is imperative that international law is upheld in all cases.

The United Nations reported an unprecedented number of children killed and maimed in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel in 2023, marking it as the year with the highest recorded grave violations against children worldwide since monitoring began. The data for 2024 is set to reveal even more horrifying realities. As humanitarian workers, we face immense risks as we attempt to deliver aid in dire conditions. More humanitarian colleagues have been killed in Gaza in the past year than in any other single year of conflict, anywhere in the world. Since October 7th, more Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank than over the 6 years prior to this date.

The unlawful, prolonged and belligerent Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory continues to strip the Palestinian people of their rights, in defiance of international legal bodies with rising numbers of violations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, including the widespread killing and maiming of Palestinians, the destruction of their homes, schools, and essential infrastructure necessary to sustain life. Furthermore, according to the International Court of Justice, there is a risk that Palestinian rights under the Genocide Convention are being violated, and Israel must cease any actions contributing to this. Third States are obligated to prevent genocide, including stopping arms supplies or military assistance that could be used by Israel in such acts. Failure to adhere to the ICJ's decision and its most recent advisory opinion as well as the historical United Nations General Assembly votes will send a message that states can be selective in their application of international law and will only fuel Israel's impunity.

As we mark one year of devastation and the collective punishment of an entire civilian population, we stand in collective mourning and condemnation of the atrocity crimes committed over the past 12 months. It is not too late for the global community to act. We urge leaders to implement a ceasefire, protect civilians, ensure humanitarian access, secure the release of hostages and unlawfully detained civilians, address the conflict's root causes, fully uphold international law including halting the export of arms to warring parties ensure accountability by triggering international mechanisms, and support investigations into these atrocities, and genuinely work towards an end of Israel's illegal occupation.

If the world continues to merely publish void condemnation, the principles of international law will continue to be weakened or disregarded, and we will risk setting a dangerous precedent for future atrocities and undermining of international mechanisms for justice and peace.

The Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA)