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Guterres calls for full Gaza ceasefire, rejecting 'ethnic cleansing'



UN News | Children in Gaza stand on debris from a destroyed building.

5 February 2025 | **Peace and Security**



UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged the international community to continue pushing for a full ceasefire and the release of all hostages in Gaza, and "to avoid any form of ethnic cleansing" in the enclave, in a speech in New York on Wednesday.

He was [addressing](#) the opening of the latest session of the [UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People](#), which met to elect a new bureau and adopt a programme of work for the year.

The UN chief spoke in the wake of comments made by United States President Donald Trump on Tuesday night in the White House, who suggested the US could “take over” the Gaza Strip, calling on Palestinians living there to leave.

Prior to the Committee meeting, journalists asked UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric at the noon briefing in New York if the Secretary-General believed the President’s plan amounted to ethnic cleansing: **“Any forced displacement of people is tantamount to ethnic cleansing,”** he responded.

Rights at risk

Addressing Committee members, the Secretary-General stated that “at its essence, **the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people is about the right of Palestinians to simply live as human beings in their own land.**”

He noted, however, that “we have seen the realization of those rights steadily slip farther out of reach” as well as “a **chilling, systematic dehumanization and demonization of an entire people.**”



Death, destruction and displacement

He stressed that “of course, nothing justifies the horrific Hamas attacks of October 7” or “what we have seen unfold in Gaza over these last many months.”

He pointed to “the catalogue of destruction and unspeakable horrors”, with nearly 50,000 people reportedly killed, mainly women and children, and most of the civilian infrastructure in Gaza destroyed.

UN Spokesperson  
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"It is vital to stay true to the bedrock of international law. It is essential to avoid any form of ethnic cleansing."

- [@antonioguterres](#) says  is fully committed to peace, stability & inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

His full remarks:

un.org
Secretary-General's remarks to the opening of the 2025 session of the

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Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the population has faced repeated displacement, hunger and disease, while children have been out of school for over a year – “a generation, left homeless and traumatized.”

Permanent ceasefire now

The Secretary-General welcomed the ceasefire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas, announced last month. He thanked mediators Egypt, Qatar and the United States for their continued efforts to ensure implementation.

"Now it is time to be crystal clear about objectives going forward," he said.

"First, we must keep pushing for a permanent ceasefire and the release of all hostages without delay. We cannot go back to more death and destruction."

The UN is working around the clock to reach Palestinians in need and scale up support, he said, which requires humanitarian access that is rapid, safe, unimpeded, expanded, and sustained.

He appealed to Member States, donors, and the international community to fully fund humanitarian operations and meet urgent needs, and again urged countries to support the essential work of [UNRWA](#) [↗](#), the UN agency that assists Palestine refugees.

Avoid 'ethnic cleansing'

"In the search for solutions, we must not make the problem worse," he continued.

"It is vital to stay true to the bedrock of international law. It is essential to avoid any form of ethnic cleansing."

His third and final point called for reaffirming the two-State solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

"Any durable peace will require tangible, irreversible and permanent progress toward the two-State solution, an end to the occupation, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Gaza as an integral part," he said.

He insisted that "a viable, sovereign Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel is the only sustainable solution for Middle East stability."

End West Bank violence

The Secretary-General turned to the situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, voicing grave concern over rising violence by Israeli settlers and other violations.

“The violence must stop,” he said. “As affirmed by the [International Court of Justice](#) [↗](#), Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian Territory must end.”

He said the international community must work toward preserving the unity, contiguity, and integrity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza.

A strong and unified Palestinian governance is crucial, and he urged countries to support the Palestinian Authority in this regard.

Halt ‘enemies of peace’: Committee chair

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established some 50 years ago by the UN General Assembly. It comprises 25 Member States, with 24 others serving as observers.

The newly elected chair of the 2025 session, Ambassador Coly Seck of Senegal, said the ceasefire was a decisive step forward, but the past days have seen “worrisome statements” seeking to undermine this.

“We need to reinvent strategies to block the way for those enemies of peace on Palestinian ground that is so dear to us,” he said, noting that “these postures indeed exacerbate the already difficult situation on the ground.”

He added that civilians continue to be affected following attacks by the Israeli army, while the provision of aid is suffering due to the recent entry into force of two Israeli laws banning UNRWA operations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

“Whilst firmly condemning these unilateral legal measures against the Palestinian people, I would call upon the international community to rise up against these measures, to defend this people long oppressed which has the right, as do all peoples of the world, to live in peace on the land of their ancestors,” he said.

Defend UNRWA: Palestine Ambassador

The Permanent Representative of the Observer State of Palestine expressed gratitude for the ceasefire but said it must become permanent and cover all of Gaza and the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Ambassador Riyad Mansour further called for all the provisions in the agreement to be implemented, which include the reconstruction of Gaza and allowing people to return to areas where they were displaced from.

He highlighted responsibilities and objectives to be achieved by the end of the year, starting with defending UNRWA "because it is the most successful story of multilateralism and the United Nations since its inception."

The UN agency provides healthcare, education and social services for more than five million Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and elsewhere in the Middle East.

UNRWA critical to ceasefire success

The head of UNRWA's liaison office in New York, Greta Gunnarsdottir, delivered a statement on behalf of Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini.

She said the agency is critical to the success of the ceasefire as it constitutes half of the emergency response in Gaza. UN entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide the other half.

"Curtailing our operations now, when the needs are so high and trust in the international community is so low, will undermine the ceasefire," she warned. "It will sabotage Gaza's recovery and political transition."

She said the new Israeli legislation, which went into effect last week, "is part of a relentless campaign to dismantle UNRWA".

Moreover, such threats are compounded by financial challenges, as key donors have ended or reduced their contributions to the agency.

Ms. Gunnarsdottir appealed for international support to push back against the implementation of the new laws, insist on a genuine political path forward that delineates UNRWA's role, and ensure that the financial crisis does not abruptly end its life-saving work.

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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE
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