



Urgent appeal for EU Action in response to ongoing crisis in Gaza

Addressed to:

Ursula von der LEYEN, the President of the European Commission

Strasbourg, 21 November 2023

Dear Madame President Ursula von der Leyen,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the escalating humanitarian crisis in Gaza, now in its seventh week of the Israeli operation since the October 7 terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israel. We reiterate our call for the immediate release of hostages.

However, despite repeated calls from the United Nations Secretary-General, the High Representative and Vice President, and the majority of the international community urging Israel to adhere to international law, including international humanitarian law, the number **civilian casualties in this conflict have reached unprecedented levels**. Disturbingly, UNICEF reports that this **war has been particularly fatal for children**, and this has also been **the deadliest conflict for humanitarian workers**.

As long as hostilities persist and the unimpeded distribution of humanitarian aid is secured, including essentials such as food, water, medical supplies, and fuel, **the death toll will inevitably continue to rise**. The ongoing ground operation and bombardment campaign, including in the south Gaza, have resulted in severe damage to civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, refugee camps, and UN facilities. Regrettably, the Israeli government shows **no indication** of taking all the necessary measures to **minimize civilian casualties** nor **heed calls** for an **immediate ceasefire**. The violence against the Palestinian population has been also **worryingly intensifying** in the **West Bank**.

Even wars have rules. As a supposed democratic state Israeli government should know that **International humanitarian law, designed to protect civilians in armed conflicts, has been breached** at alarming levels, raising concerns of **ethnic cleansing and war crimes** in Gaza.

We, as democratically elected representatives, **cannot remain silent** and in doing so, **be complicit** in the face of these atrocities. We have a moral duty and obligation to do everything in our power to prevent further loss of lives and destruction. **We urge the European Union to move beyond merely calling for humanitarian pauses. Immediate cessation of hostilities and the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid are imperative.**

The European Union is first and foremost a peace project based on values and fundamental democratic principles, and the EU rightfully expects the same of its partners. And unless Israel takes concrete steps **toward a ceasefire and engages in meaningful peace talks**, the European Union must stand for these principles, and **must sanction those who do not.**

We, the undersigned members of the European Parliament, **are convinced that Israeli actions towards Palestinian civilians go against the principles and values of our Union.**

Given the extensive relations between the EU and Israel, governed by various bilateral agreements designed to facilitate political, economic, and people-to-people engagement between the two, **citizens of the EU and Israel *also* enjoy a reciprocal visa-free travel regime.**

Respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, as enshrined in Article 1 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1806¹, as well as **the EU Charter, are cornerstones of that EU visa-free regime framework.**

The European Commission has an obligation to monitor the continued compliance with the principles laid in Article 1 of the visa liberalisation regime with Israel, and has the obligation to act in accordance with Article 8(4) *in case that is not the case*, including by temporarily suspending the exemption from the visa requirement for the nationals of the third country concerned for a period of nine months based on Article 8(6) of the said Regulation.

Considering that Israeli self-defence seems to **no longer uphold** the proportionality principle of international humanitarian law, whereas Israel daily continues to commit gross human rights violations, we believe **Israel is in violation of the criteria for visa liberalization with the EU.**

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament strongly believe **that should Israel not implement an effective ceasefire without delay**, the Commission **ought to immediately suspend visa liberalization** between the Union and Israel.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement.

Let us be clear: no cause is nobler than preserving human life. Our actions today will be judged by history. We cannot remain silent and complicit at further loss of innocent civilian lives. ***The time to act is now.***

Sincerely,

Matjaž NEMEC, MEP (S&D)

Ana MIRANDA, MEP (Greens/EFA)

Irena JOVEVA, MEP (Renew)

Isabel SANTOS, MEP (S&D)

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