

The Israel-Hamas War and our priorities: A call for Immediate Ceasefire and renewed priorities on Humanitarian Support and Peace Talks.

Statement by the Group of 78 – October 28, 2023

The Middle East region, and more specifically, the geographic region that includes Palestine, Israel, and Lebanon has once again been ravaged by acts of violence that have been met by further acts of violence, much of which is in breach of international law. Thousands of civilians have been killed. All sides have suffered in this latest episode and in the last few decades. However, the unbalanced military capacity and power have led to a level of suffering and killing that cannot be overlooked and cannot continue.

As a reminder, international law, which applies to Israel, Hamas and all others involved in the war, forbids any siege of civilian populations; forbids the deprivation of populations of their basic necessities (such as food, water, and medical supplies); forbids the undertaking of collective punishment, including that of more than 2.2 million people; forbids the forceable movement of civilians, including under dangerous circumstances; requires all combatants to ensure the minimum destruction to civilian life and infrastructure as indiscriminate damage could constitute a grave violation of international law; and forbids the taking of civilians as hostages. This position has been clearly highlighted by the Secretary General of the United Nations and various United Nations groups and entities. The Group of 78 unequivocally condemns the grave breaches of international law committed by Israel, Hamas, and other militant groups and calls for the release of all hostages held by Hamas and any other group in Gaza. No crime can justify other crimes by any side and any actor.

While the Israeli society has been deeply impacted by Hamas' actions on October 7, 2023, the lives of Palestinians, in Gaza and in the West Bank,

have become impossible. More specifically, Palestinians in Gaza now face an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe from Israeli retaliation to the most recent Hamas attack. There is a very high risk that this disaster spreads throughout the region and unleash an even higher level of violence.

Following what history has taught us, at least over the last hundred years, we need to recognize that such events are deeply rooted in struggles of societies, struggles that are also instrumentalized by extremist elements on all sides for their own gain, and struggles that have a long history and that cannot be simplified in a few talking points or labels. History has also taught us that we need to be very concerned about this level of violence and we need to do everything possible to act to stop the heinous killing of thousands of innocent civilians including countless children. On this issue, international law is very clear on the need to protect innocent civilians. Finally, history has also taught us that without the support and active work towards a long-term plan that helps deal with the root causes for the struggles of the societies involved, little hope can be held for a peaceful future.

The Group of 78 calls on Government of Canada to:

1. Insist on an immediate ceasefire from all sides, demand increased humanitarian aid to the populations in need, and take action by delivering this support as soon as possible.
2. Support the inclusion of a peacekeeping force that is unbiased and that follows international law during the transition period as peace might be unstable for a indeterminate period.
3. Demand the application of international law, support the initiative of the International Criminal Court prosecutor to investigate the crimes committed by all sides, and support an international unbiased process to assign accountabilities for the reconstruction of all infrastructure.