

9 November 2023

Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

CC:

Hon Pat Conroy MP, Minister for International Development and the Pacific
Hon Tim Watts MP, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

Dear Minister Wong,

RE: Special protection of children in Gaza

We are writing to urge you to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an end to the siege on humanitarian aid that is preventing children and their families from accessing food, water and lifesaving medical supplies. Given the intensity of fighting and the degree of devastation on the ground, short pauses will not be adequate to ensure the flow of aid and humanitarian assistance required by affected civilians. Nor will it be adequate for an orderly release and transportation of civilian hostages.

Australia has been a strong advocate for an international rules-based order and for compliance with International Humanitarian Law. Nothing can ever justify the killing or maiming of children. As a group of experienced and trusted child rights' organisations, we call for the Australian Government to:

- call for an immediate ceasefire, in line with growing international consensus
- continue to message that all parties to the conflict must observe their obligations under International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law
- call for the release of all hostages
- call for a safe pathway for the permanent entry for humanitarian aid into Gaza to meet humanitarian need including medical, food and clean water supplies
- call attention to the special protection owed to children in armed conflict
- as a signatory to the *International Safe Schools Declaration* condemn continued attacks and threats against schools, as well as children, teachers and other civilians taking shelter in schools (over 250 education facilities have been struck in Gaza since 7 October)
- call for recognition of the global Responsibility to Protect all civilians in Palestine and in particular, children.

A humanitarian catastrophe is worsening every day in Gaza - the United Nations has described Gaza as a 'graveyard for thousands of children'. At the time of writing this letter, over 10,000 civilians, including 4,000 children have been killed in Gaza over the past four weeks, with more than one thousand children missing. Save the Children estimates that the number of children reported killed in Gaza since 7 October is more than the annual number of children killed across the world's conflict zones since 2019. That means one child is being killed every 10 minutes – something we, and the Australian people, refuse to accept.

For those children who have survived, they are living in an increasingly desperate and deteriorating situation, without access to clean water, food or medicine. Although aid deliveries have resumed, it is a drop in the ocean and nowhere near enough. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees has reported that to date, 151 trucks have entered Gaza through the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza¹. According to the UN, at least 100 trucks a day are needed to supply

¹ [UNRWA Situation Report #18 on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank \(including East Jerusalem\)](#)
[| UNRWA](#)

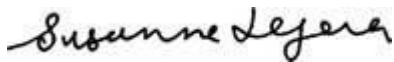
desperately needed food, water, medicine, and fuel². There are reports of injured children and pregnant women being operated on without anaesthetic.

The impact on the children of Gaza will endure long after the immediate crisis. The trauma of this war will leave them with lifelong and profound psycho-social and mental health impacts.

All children have the right to a life free from violence and fear. Every child's life – Palestinian and Israeli – should be valued and treated with humanity.

We are urgently calling on you to demand an immediate ceasefire and a resumption of the required humanitarian aid. Any delay is unacceptable.

Sincerely



Susanne Legena, CEO Plan International Australia



Margaret Sheehan, CEO Childfund Australia



Zahra Al-Hilaly, CEO Oaktree



Mat Tinkler
CEO Save the Children Australia

² [Israel-Palestine: Gaza buckles under fuel shortage, healthcare in crisis | UN News](#)