

*Permanent Observer Mission
of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations*



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة
لدولة فلسطين
لدى الأمم المتحدة

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Statement by Loureen Sayej, Third Secretary, before the 79th Session of the General Assembly Meeting of the Sixth Committee on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters (Agenda Item 86)

Mr. Chair,

On every continent, disasters and human suffering, whether natural or human made, have claimed untold victims. But we have pressed forward, slowly, steadily, to make a system of international rules and norms that are better and stronger and more consistent rooted in solidarity and empathy and aimed to relief human suffering, to end it, and preserve the dignity and sanctity of human life.

But nothing could have prepared us for the unchecked human will to destroy.

Nothing could have prepared us for the biggest human made disaster of the century: Gaza.

Between death and displacement, between starvation and loss. More rage and outrage. More pain and suffering.

Beyond what the human mind can comprehend, beyond what any human heart should have to bear, beyond what the human eye can witness.

There is no statement that can convey the screams of a child being amputated or dealing with severe burns, the silent agony of a father watching his child turning into bones before his eyes until all life leaves his body, the tears in a doctor's eyes as he counts the days and hours in lives he could not save, the anguish of a humanitarian worker trying to feed the starved only to be themselves killed.

An avalanche of suffering that is unparalleled and unprecedented in modern times.

Human suffering borne out of human criminality. Human suffering as a result of human made disaster, an Israeli made disaster.

Gaza, Khan Yuins, Rafah, Jabalia, al-Mawasi, Al- Nuseirat, they are the names of cities, neighborhoods, and refugee camps that will be etched in our memory, as open wounds, as stains on humanity's conscience. They will be etched as a reminder of what happens when 2.3 million human beings, half of whom are children, are locked and besieged in a tiny strip of coastal land, without an escape, without a moment of respite, starved to death, denied aid, repeatedly displaced under the most intense bombing campaigns in history, sickened, traumatized, and exterminated from air, land, and sea.

Gaza is disaster that has surpassed records, expectations, and imaginations. "Broke all superlatives" UNRWA Chief said, the highest number of children killed, the highest number of humanitarian personnel killed, journalists, medical teams....the most intense bombardment in modern history, in just first 60 days, produced more planet-warming gases than 20 climate-vulnerable nations do in a year.

No basic regards for humanity, morality, or legality. A disaster regarded as a "betrayal to humanity" by the UN relief chief who also lamented that the "international community should hang its head in shame for failing to stop this."

Even after a year of hell, Israel can still manage to shock us with its barbarism- engineered to cause the most pain, the most suffering, the most damage.

Just last week, the SG of the United Nations concluded: “It has been said that *“The United Nations was not created to bring us to heaven, but to save us from hell.”* Unfortunately, neither the United Nations nor anyone else that might have the power to do it was able to save the people of Gaza from hell. We have failed the people of Gaza. They are in a living hell that somehow gets even worse by the day. Two million Palestinians are now crammed into a space the size of the Shanghai International Airport. Existing – not living, but existing – among lakes of sewage, piles of rubbish and mountains of rubble. The only certainty they have is that tomorrow will be worse.”

The United Nations, which has become the measure and vehicle of humanity, and with all the existing mechanisms, the conventions, the declarations, is not able to save the Palestinian people from hell.

A question that lingers as we sit in this room, deliberating draft articles on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters, how is humanity going to cooperate to protect persons in disasters, caused by natural disasters or human made disaster, when a segment of humanity still believes it is entitled to exterminate another segment of humanity on the basis of race or religion? It is entitled to cause disasters, burn cities to the ground? Starve people? Spread diseases? Attack humanitarian agencies and envoys?

How is humanity going to cooperate to protect persons in disasters when the most powerful among us and the most richest feel entitled to cut funding for UNRWA amidst the worst humanitarian crisis, leaving children starved? Or the most powerful undermining the binding nature of Security Council resolutions and ICJ orders calling for an end to unprecedented levels of hunger and starvation an end to what the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification described as “the highest ever recorded on the IPC scale...Never before have we seen such rapid deterioration into widespread starvation”?

This reckoning requires a moral revolution in our institutions and conventions starting with further committing ourselves to the law and committing to multilateralism and human solidarity.

As such, the State of Palestine is grateful for the work of the ILC in advancing collective solidarity, human dignity, legal rights and duties of affected States, participating actors, and victims. The State of Palestine welcomes the draft articles and sees merit in consolidating the legal framework governing the protection of persons in the events of disasters without prejudice to existing laws, including IHL and the rights of relief towards humanitarian organizations during armed conflict.

We look forward to exchanging views with other States and contributing to reaching a fruitful outcome in the deliberations of the Working Group.

The Gaza disaster must not become the norm. The willful failure of the most powerful to relief human suffering must not go unchecked. Let’s work to ensure that our deliberations give primacy to human life and dignity over political calculations, over discrimination, and racism. Human empathy is the defining line between barbarism and civilization, let’s use these ILC draft articles to push for the latter.