



**Declassified<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development**

### **Minutes**

#### **of the hearing on the follow-up to the report “The absolute and urgent need to end the humanitarian crisis for women, children and the hostages in Gaza” held in Strasbourg on Tuesday 8 April 2025**

The committee held a hearing as part of the follow-up to the report “The absolute and urgent need to end the humanitarian crisis for women, children and the hostages in Gaza” by **Ms Saskia Kluit (Netherlands, SOC)**.

**The Chairperson** welcomed Ms Claire Nicolet, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and Mr David Wightwick, Chief Executive Officer at UK-Med, who were online, and recalled that the Committee already met them last September in Lisbon in the framework of the preparation of the report. These hearings aimed at providing an update to the current situation of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and on the needs of the women and children in particular and the responses and actions of these organisations in the region.

**Ms Claire Nicolet** informed the Committee of the steadily deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, emphasising the dire needs of the population and the collapse of the health care infrastructure. She reported that she had recently returned from Gaza and described the worsening conditions since her previous address seven months prior. Despite a two-month ceasefire, relief efforts had remained inadequate, hindered by severe shortages and the absence of protection mechanisms.

She explained that on 2 March 2025, Israeli authorities had imposed a total aid blockade, preventing the entry of fuel, food, and medical supplies, and had cut electricity on 9 March 2025, which disabled major desalination plants. Hostilities had resumed on 18 March 2025 with intense violence, exacerbating shortages and raising market costs. Everyone was surprised and shocked by the return of the attacks. By 2 April 2025, all bakeries supported by the World Food Programme had shut down, and United Nations (UN) food distribution was halved. Movement for humanitarian actors had been severely restricted due to ongoing strikes.

**Ms Nicolet** highlighted the blockade's impact on medicine and healthcare, with serious shortages in painkillers, surgical equipment, and outpatient treatments. She reported that currently, not a single hospital in Gaza was fully operational. This had led to deadly consequences for civilians, with the health system on the brink of collapse. Among the burns patients admitted in Nasser Hospital from May 2024 to February 2025, 72% were less than 18 years old (including 39% being less than 5 years old). In total in this hospital since May 2024: 37% admission were explosion related and 63% concerned domestic accident due to catastrophic living conditions. These patients needed surgeons, a high calories diet, and strict hygiene to prevent infections, or simply painkillers: all of this was no longer possible in Gaza.

She stated that 90% of Gaza's population had been displaced and lacked access to basic necessities. Since the collapse of the cease fire, over 1 100 people had been killed, women and children represent 60% of the persons killed and 56% of the injured. UNICEF deplored the killing of 322 children as of 2 April 2025.

**Ms Nicolet** emphasised the risk of a major outbreak of disease due to the collapse of water and sanitation structures and the halt of vaccination programmes since October 2023. Persons suffering from chronic diseases and non-communicable diseases no longer had access to medicines or proper care, leading to serious and fatal complications. Malnutrition was rising, with pregnant and lactating women now being affected. Respiratory infections accounted for 70% of admissions to MSF Pediatric in-Patient Department, and waterborne diseases like scabies and skin infections had increased drastically, representing 16% of outpatient consultations over the past four months.

<sup>1</sup> The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 16 May 2025.

She highlighted that basic hygiene products were becoming unaffordable for women and that security risks, road destruction, and transportation costs severely limited women's access to healthcare. She further noted that the fear for their own safety and the grief from the loss of family members weigh heavily on Gaza's women.

**Ms Nicolet** reported that only two medical evacuations had occurred since March 2025, although the World Health Organization (WHO) assessed that more than 12 000 were needed. Ms Nicolet was concerned about the enormous and growing mental health needs, particularly among children, and confirmed that MSF had been addressing these needs for over 18 months. MSF was currently supporting four hospitals, including two field hospitals, six health centers, and numerous water, sanitation, and hygiene activities across Gaza. MSF was also the second-largest provider of clean water across the Strip. MSF had performed over 11 700 surgeries since October 2023 and employed 40 international workers and more than 1 000 local staff.

She also detailed the increasing threats to humanitarian operations, including targeted strikes on health infrastructure, staff, and convoys. Designated "safe zones" had been also attacked, evacuation orders had covered over 65% of the Gaza Strip, and MSF had been forced to relocate multiple times. She described systematic violations of international humanitarian law, including the use of medical sites for military purposes and direct attacks on protected facilities. In this context, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would reduce by 2 thirds their international workers and activities, while MSF would reduce its operations by half. She highlighted that humanitarian operations were further endangered by new restrictive Israeli regulations requiring registration of international NGOs, increased visa denials for international staff, accusations of aiding terrorism, and funding cuts from major donors, particularly affecting aid to northern Gaza.

In closing, **Ms Nicolet** warned that disproportionate attacks causing extreme civilian harm, the repeated targeting of hospitals, and strikes on humanitarian sites constitute an unprecedented violation of International Humanitarian Law. She reiterated that medical facilities must be protected and that Israel must end the blockade on Gaza to allow humanitarian aid to reach those in need.

**Mr David Wightwick** highlighted that the situation in Gaza had become exceptionally difficult in recent weeks. Following the breakdown of the ceasefire, he noted a sharp increase in attacks, particularly targeting humanitarian personnel. He referred specifically to recent incidents involving attacks on ambulance drivers and the strike on Nasser Hospital, alongside repeated incursions and evacuation orders.

He emphasised that these developments were compounded by the ongoing blockade, which had resulted in a complete halt of incoming supplies to the Gaza Strip. As a result, hospitals and other medical facilities were facing critical shortages, with only three to four weeks of supplies remaining. He clarified that this estimate did not reflect full supply levels, but rather a diminishing stock that would severely impact the level of care that could be provided. Consequently, he warned that an inability to treat serious wounds would inevitably result in more deaths.

**Mr Wightwick** pointed out that the supply crisis extended beyond medical needs, also affecting fuel, food, and water sanitation. These shortages were likely to trigger increased civil unrest, making humanitarian work even more dangerous. As the population struggled to access basic necessities, desperation among civilians was rising, further compounding the risk to aid workers.

He noted that repeated evacuation orders had forced civilians to relocate multiple times—often up to ten times—depleting their personal resources and complicating the delivery and continuity of medical care. The status of deconflicted buildings and facilities was increasingly uncertain, with repeated strikes suggesting that deconfliction was no longer reliably respected. Stray shots and shrapnel had already struck their hospital facilities, adding to the immediate danger.

Looking ahead, **Mr Wightwick** described the outlook as deeply concerning. He stated that the people of Gaza, already suffering from prolonged hardship, had rapidly diminishing resilience and were being confined to increasingly smaller areas with fewer resources. He underscored that principled aid delivery—meaning neutral, independent, and impartial assistance—was becoming nearly impossible under these conditions.

He expressed concern that the Israeli government appeared to be pursuing strategies to further fragment Gaza's territory and restrict humanitarian access. He cited ongoing negotiations over strict new registration requirements for NGOs, noting fears that these restrictions could go even further. This threatened to severely limit humanitarian organisations' ability to operate freely and deliver aid effectively.

**Mr Wightwick** concluded by emphasizing that the dangers on the ground were growing, access to essential goods and services was declining, and the collective ability of humanitarian actors to respond had been significantly eroded. He stressed the moral imperative to change the situation, whether through negotiations or economic measures, and stated that the ongoing conditions were unacceptable. Speaking from personal experience and in regular contact with his teams in Gaza, he attested that the situation for civilians was dire and the prospect of its continuation deeply alarming.

**Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez** stated that the description which the two speakers had shared with the participants was frightening and terrible. He emphasised that it was necessary to ask why such a situation could continue to happen. He questioned why people were being deprived of food, healthcare, and water, and why attacks against humanitarian workers were taking place. He then posed a question to the speakers, acknowledging that it might sound political. He asked what efforts, if any, were being made by the Israeli government to address the humanitarian situation. Referring to comments made by Donald Trump about Gaza, which he described as "fantasizing," and the broader discourse around the idea of "cleansing Gaza", Mr Fridez wondered whether the underlying intention behind these actions could be to force the population either to die or to leave the territory.

**Ms Saskia Kluit** asked what the Council of Europe member States and Committee of Ministers could do to help solving this terrible situation.

In response to the question regarding the motivations behind the current situation in Gaza, **Mr David Wightwick**, stated that he was not in a position to fully assess or accurately gauge the motivations behind the actions being taken. He noted that while he could offer a personal opinion, it might be biased, and therefore he preferred to focus on the observable facts. He observed that the actions of the Israeli forces were forcing civilians to move repeatedly, pushing them to rely on ever-diminishing resources. Vital humanitarian aid was being blocked, and humanitarian organisations' ability to deliver assistance safely, at the necessary scale and with the required effectiveness, was being severely compromised. He would not speculate on the underlying motivations but stressed the evident consequences: civilians were dying. The denial of aid, forced displacements, and exposure to active conflict zones without clear distinction between civilians and combatants were directly resulting in death and suffering. Furthermore, Mr Wightwick highlighted that civil society was being systematically eroded. As desperation mounts, civilians increasingly resorted to aggressive competition over the remaining resources, leading to violence and insecurity. He reported that there were already cases of humanitarian warehouses and aid trucks being looted and attacks occurring against humanitarian workers, as desperate people were left with few alternatives.

Regarding the question on which actions could the Council of Europe take, **Mr David Wightwick** acknowledged that the United States held the most significant leverage over Israel but emphasized that other nations and actors, including Hamas and intermediaries, also played a role in influencing the situation. Both political and economic pressure, such as sanctions, could impact all parties involved. He highlighted the severe challenges faced by humanitarian organisations due to significant cuts in funding. His organisation was currently operating with only two-thirds of the budget from the previous year, despite rising needs for medical care. He expressed concerns that, while more people require care, organisations may have to reduce their services due to financial limitations. He considered that although various tools exist to influence the situation, there was no immediate or guaranteed solution.

**Ms Sabrina Sebaihi** thanked the speakers for the valuable information they had provided. She acknowledged the reference to the issue of sanctions and pointed out that if any other State had been involved, economic sanctions would have likely been imposed a long time ago. She raised two questions. First, she referred to the speakers' mention of the limited medical supplies available, noting that they only had a few weeks' worth of supplies left. She asked how much longer the teams would be able to continue their work in Gaza, considering the significant difficulties they are facing and the everyday challenges encountered in their operations. Then, she inquired about the situation in the West Bank, acknowledging the rising violence and the ongoing issues with settlers.

**Ms Claire Nicolet** emphasised that while the exact intentions behind the current situation are unclear, the consequences are evident and alarming. She stressed the need for strong political pressure and urgent actions, including the necessity to facilitate medical evacuations and to end the blockade, actions that should be pursued at all levels immediately. Regarding the question of how long teams would remain operational on the ground in Gaza, Ms Nicolet explained that this was a day-to-day discussion within the organisation due to the ongoing incidents, evacuation orders, and attacks. She confirmed MSF strong commitment to stay in Gaza, supported by many Palestinian staff members who had no alternative but to stay. However, due to the increasing risks, MSF had to reduce their teams to limit exposure. She underlined the urgent need for the re-establishment of protection mechanisms for hospitals and humanitarian facilities, which previously existed but are no longer enforced. She described the current environment as significantly more dangerous than in previous months, posing serious threats to the teams and their activities.

Addressing the situation in the West Bank, **Ms Nicolet** expressed deep concern, stating that the situation is rapidly deteriorating. She reported significant displacement, with more than 40 000 people forced to leave their homes, a level of displacement not seen for decades in the West Bank. She highlighted the growing difficulties for the population, including access to healthcare, safe housing, and the ability to move freely, describing the situation as a "full nightmare."

**Mr David Wightwick** stated that while his organisation had a team present in the West Bank, MSF had far greater expertise and knowledge regarding the situation there. He confirmed that, based on his organisation's observations, the situation in the West Bank was significantly deteriorating.

In response to the question regarding the remaining medical supplies and operational duration, **Mr Wightwick** explained that organisations will continue to stretch their resources as long as possible. He noted that, although stock levels theoretically indicated that supplies could last approximately three to four weeks, in practice they would likely last longer. This would be achieved by sharing supplies among organisations, using fewer and lower-quality materials, and rationing remaining stock. He stressed that this approach would have serious consequences. The level of care provided would inevitably decline, resulting in a higher risk of infection, increased danger to patients, and, ultimately, more deaths. He underlined that while humanitarian actors would continue their efforts, the quality of care would be substantially compromised due to the shortage and degradation of supplies.

**The Chairperson** expressed deep sorrow and outrage at the current humanitarian situation, emphasising that the suffering, illnesses, and deaths occurring were entirely preventable, making the situation particularly appalling and distressing. She conveyed condolences to the speakers for the loss of humanitarian workers who risk their lives daily to assist others. Their bravery and dedication were highly honored. She condemned repeated attacks on humanitarian workers, emphasising that such personnel should be protected as they work to safeguard the lives of ordinary civilians.

**The Chairperson** assured speakers that efforts would continue to bring attention to these issues, particularly during the upcoming debate on Thursday. Additionally, she committed to taking action to address the severe impacts of funding cuts, particularly affecting agencies like UNRWA, which were already struggling to operate under increasingly difficult circumstances. She thanked the speakers for their contributions and affirmed the Committee's commitment to supporting humanitarian efforts.

## List of presence / *Liste de présence*

(The names of members who took part in the meeting are in bold / *Les noms des membres ayant pris part à la réunion sont en caractères gras*)

Chairperson / *Président·e*:

<b>Ms / Mme Saskia Kluit</b>	
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Vice-Chairpersons / *Vice-Président·e·s* :

Ms / Mme Danuta Jazłowiecka	
<b>Mr / M. Armen Gevorgyan</b>	
Lord Don Touhig	

<b>Members / Membres</b>	<b>Country / Pays</b>	<b>Alternates / Remplaçant·e·s</b>
Ms Jorida Tabaku	Albania / <i>Albanie</i>	Zz...
Mr Cerni Escalé	Andorra / <i>Andorre</i>	Mme Bernadeta Coma
<b>Mr Armen Gevorgyan</b>	Armenia / <i>Arménie</i>	Ms Hripsime Grigoryan
Mr Stefan Schennach	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Ms Doris Bures
Mr Andreas Minnich	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Ms Agnes Sirkka Prammer
Ms Anne Lambelin	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mr Andries Gryffroy
M. Benoît Lutgen	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mme Véronique Durenne
Ms Darijana Filipović	Bosnia and Herzegovina / <i>Bosnie-Herzégovine</i>	Mr Šemsudin Dedić
Ms Atidzhe Alieva-Veli	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Zz...
Ms Petya Tsankova	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Zz...
<b>Ms Zdravka Bušić</b>	Croatia / <i>Croatie</i>	Ms Rada Borić
Ms Christiana Erotokritou	Cyprus / <i>Chypre</i>	Mr Constantinos Efstathiou
Ms Ivana Mádlová	Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i>	Mr Aleš Juchelka
Ms Michaela Šebelová	Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i>	Mr Ondřej Šimetka
Ms Camilla Fabricius	Denmark / <i>Danemark</i>	Ms Karin Liltorp
Ms Hanah Lahe	Estonia / <i>Estonie</i>	Zz...
Ms Minna Reijonen	Finland / <i>Finlande</i>	Ms Miapetra Kumpula-Natri
<b>Mme Sophia Chikirou</b>	France	<b>Ms Sabrina Sebaihi</b>
M. Alexandre Dufosset	France	Mme Liliana Tanguy
<b>M. Alain Milon</b>	France	M. Alain Cadec
Mme Maud Petit	France	M. Jean Laussucq
Zz...	Georgia / <i>Géorgie</i>	Zz...
<b>Ms Heike Engelhardt</b>	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Franziska Kersten
Mr Andrej Hunko	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Catarina Dos Santos-Wintz
Mr Christian Petry	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Martina Stamm-Fibich
Mr Harald Weyel	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Katrin Staffler
Ms Maria Syrengela	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	<b>Ms Maria-Nefeli Vasileiou Chatzioannidou</b>

<b>Mr Georgios Stamatis</b>	Greece / Grèce	Mr Alexis Tsipras
Ms Mónika Bartos	Hungary / Hongrie	Mme Katalin Csöbör
Ms Mónika Dunai	Hungary / Hongrie	Ms Zita Gurmai
<b>Mr Ragnar Þór Ingólfsson</b>	Iceland / Islande	Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar Baldursdóttir
<b>Mr Joseph O'Reilly</b>	Ireland / Irlande	Mr Rónán Mullen
Ms Elena Bonetti	Italy / Italie	Mr Roberto Rosso
<b>Ms Aurora Floridia</b>	Italy / Italie	Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro
Mr Alessandro Giglio Vigna	Italy / Italie	Mr Graziano Pizzimenti
Mr Stefano Maullu	Italy / Italie	Mr Francesco Zaffini
M. Andris Bērziņš	Latvia / Lettonie	Mr Edmunds Cepurītis
Mr Peter Frick	Liechtenstein	Ms Franziska Hoop
<b>Ms Orinta Leiputė</b>	Lithuania / Lituanie	Mr Zigmantas Balcytis
Mme Stéphanie Weydert	Luxembourg	<b>M. Paul Galles</b>
Mr Michael Farrugia	Malta / Malte	Mr Joseph Beppe Fenech Adami
Mr Ion Groza	Republic of Moldova / République de Moldova	Ms Diana Caraman
Mme Christine Pasquier-Ciulla	Monaco	<b>Mme Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo</b>
Mr Miloš Konatar	Montenegro / Monténégro	Mr Boris Mugoša
<b>Ms Saskia Kluit</b>	Netherlands / Pays-Bas	<b>Ms Elly Van Wijk</b>
Ms Carla Moonen	Netherlands / Pays-Bas	Mr Theo Bovens
Mr Bekim Kjoku	North Macedonia / Macédoine	Mr Sadula Duraki
Ms Lisa Marie Ness Klungland	Norway / Norvège	Ms Linda Hofstad Helleland
Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka	Poland / Pologne	Mr Mirosław Adam Orliński
<b>Mr Jan Filip Libicki</b>	Poland / Pologne	Ms Magdalena Biejat
Mr Ryszard Petru	Poland / Pologne	Zz...
<b>Ms Jamila Madeira</b>	Portugal	Mr Nuno Fazenda
Mr Carlos Silva Santiago	Portugal	Mr Telmo Faria
<b>Georgeta-Carmen Holban</b>	Romania / Roumanie	Ms Mirela Elena Adomnicai
Ms Dumitrina Mitrea	Romania / Roumanie	Mr Iulian Bulai
Mr Robert-Ionatan Sighiartau	Romania / Roumanie	<b>Ms Maria-Gabriela Horga</b>
<b>Mr Gerardo Giovagnoli</b>	San Marino / Saint-Marin	<b>Ms Alice Mina</b>
Mr Vladimir Đorđević	Serbia / Serbie	Mr Predrag Marsenić
Ms Tatjana Pašić	Serbia / Serbie	Ms Jelena Milošević
Mme Anna Záborská	Slovak Republic / République Slovaque	Mr Pavol Goga
Mr Dean Premik	Slovenia / Slovénie	Ms Iva Dimic
<b>Ms María Fernández</b>	Spain / Espagne	Mr Alfonso Rodríguez
Mr José Latorre	Spain / Espagne	Ms Marta González Vázquez
<b>Ms Carmen Leyte</b>	Spain / Espagne	<b>Ms Luz Martinez Seijo</b>
<b>Ms Sofia Amlöh</b>	Sweden / Suède	Ms Annika Strandhäll
Ms Victoria Tiblom	Sweden / Suède	Ms Boriana Åberg
Mme Céline Amaudruz	Switzerland / Suisse	<b>Mme Valérie Piller Carrard</b>
Ms Sibel Arslan	Switzerland / Suisse	<b>M. Pierre-Alain Fridez</b>
Ms Gökçe Gökçen	Türkiye	Mr Namık Tan
Mr Berdan Öztürk	Türkiye	Ms Sevilay Celenk Özen
Mr Sevan Sivacioğlu	Türkiye	Ms Sena Nur Çelik Kanat
<b>Mr Cemalettin Kani Torun</b>	Türkiye	Mr Mustafa Kaya

Ms Olena Khomenko	Ukraine	Ms Larysa Bilozir
Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova	Ukraine	Mr Andrii Lopushanskyi
Ms Lesia Zaburanna	Ukraine	Mr Rostyslav Tistyk
Ms Alicia Kearns	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Dan Aldridge
Ms Kate Osamor	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Perran Moon
Ms Elaine Stewart	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Mike Reader
Lord Don Touhig	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Michelle Welsh

**Partners for Democracy / Partenaires pour la Démocratie**

Mr / M. Allal Amraoui, Morocco / *Maroc*

Mr / M. Hassan Arif, Morocco / *Maroc*

**Embassies / Permanent Representations and Delegations**  
**Ambassades / Représentations permanentes et Délégations**

Ms / Mme Gisèle Levy, Israel / *Israël*

Ms / Mme Gül Sarigül, Türkiye

Mr / M. Sencer Kağan Şenol, Türkiye

**Secretariat of Delegation or of Political Group / Secrétariat de Délégation ou de Groupe politique**

Ms / Mme Femmy Bakker-De Jong, Netherlands / *Pays-Bas*

Mr / M. Sabih Gazi Öztürk, Türkiye

**Experts / Expert-es**

Ms / Mme Claire Nicolet, Doctors Without Borders / Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) *online / en ligne*

Mr / M. David Wightwick, Chief Executive Officer / Directeur exécutif, UK-Med *online / en ligne*

**Other persons present / Autres personnes présentes**

Mr / M. Anthony Gony

Mr / M. Jacopo Dalbon, Italy / *Italie*

Ms / Mme Apolline Paillat, stagiaire RP France

Ms / Mme Idil Igdir

Ms / Mme Sandra Regol, France

**Council of Europe staff / Secrétariat du Conseil de l'Europe**

Ms / Mme Françoise Kempf, DGII

**Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée parlementaire**

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /  
*Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable*

Ms / Mme Louise Barton.....Director of Committees / *Directrice des commissions*

Ms / Mme Catherine Du-Bernard .....Head of the Secretariat / *Cheffe du Secrétariat*

Ms / Mme Aiste Ramanauskaite .....Secretary to the Committee / *Secrétaire de la commission*

Ms / Mme Jannick Devaux .....Secretary to the Committee / *Secrétaire de la commission*

Ms / Mme Grazia-Alessandra Siino.....Project Manager / *Chargée de projet*

Ms / Mme Xenia Birioukova.....Assistant/ *Assistante*

Ms / Mme Özgü Tan.....Assistant/ *Assistante*