

Declassified<sup>1</sup>  
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## Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

### Minutes

of the public hearing on “The humanitarian situation of (mainly) children and women in Gaza, the West Bank and in Israël”  
(*Rapporteur, Saskia Kluit, Netherlands, SOC*)

held in Strasbourg on Monday, 30 September 2024

The Committee **held** a hearing with Mr Sam Rose, Director of Planning, and Ms Amal Abu Shawareb, Associate Protection Officer, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), who participated *online*.

The Committee **approved** the proposal by **Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka**, First Vice-Chair of the Committee, to open the hearing to the public.

**Ms Jazłowiecka** introduced the two UNRWA experts and thanked them for accepting the Committee's invitation.

**Mr Sam Rose**, Director of Planning, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), thanked the Committee for the invitation. He noted that the humanitarian situation had reached an unacceptably urgent level. 2.1 million people had been living in unimaginable conditions for almost a year, under the brutality of complex attacks. The situation was also very difficult for humanitarian workers on the ground. A number of factors showed the scale of the disaster: intense bombing in very densely populated urban areas, increasing food shortages, the extreme deterioration of health situation, the highest number of journalists killed in the world, and the highest number of humanitarian staff killed – 250, including 222 from UNRWA – in a single conflict.

The human toll was unbearable. 41,000 people had been killed as a direct result of the conflict, the vast majority of them women, children and the elderly. Others had died ‘indirectly’, meaning that they would not have died in the absence of the conflict - for example due to a lack of medicines - and finally almost 100,000 people had been injured, i.e. 1 in 20 Gazans. There would be a need to deal with the long-term consequences. 9 out of 10 people had been displaced several times, on average once a month. They were living in appalling conditions. Hundreds of thousands of people were living on beaches under plastic sheeting, others in schools where they were in any case not safe. Around 85% of Gaza was under evacuation orders, leaving families in constant fear and humiliation.

Every week there were new tragedies. Recently, 6 UNRWA staff were killed in the school where they were distributing polio vaccines. There had been attacks and kidnappings against United Nations staff, including UNRWA, as they were travelling from the south to the north of Gaza on a mission that had been authorised in advance by the Israeli authorities. Heavy weapons were used in the Al Mawasi ‘humanitarian zone’ in southern Gaza. These were not isolated incidents. Since 7 October 2023, more than half of UNRWA's facilities had been attacked. Any attack on Gaza had devastating humanitarian repercussions on the civilian population because of the overcrowding in Gaza. Given the demographics of the region, most of the 41,000 people killed were women,

<sup>1</sup> The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 6 December 2024.

children and the elderly. More than 600,000 children had been out of school for a year, with devastating immediate and long-term consequences for individual children and for society as a whole.

Restrictions on humanitarian access to Gaza and operational constraints had worsened since the closure of the Rafah checkpoint, the main access point for humanitarian aid. Insecurity and public order problems were also hampering UNRWA's ability to distribute aid. Aid lorries could not drive safely, and the roads were impassable. Stocks had now run out. More than a million people could not get food aid in August, and the situation was not any better in September. Tents for displaced families and sheets and blankets for the winter were in short supply. There was a shortage of essential medicines and medical equipment, and hygiene products for women. Despite limited resources, UNRWA was providing services to thousands of people, including 15,000 medical consultations a day. 560,000 children had been vaccinated against polio.

4,000 people were working for UNRWA every day. Mr Rose praised the work and professionalism of UNRWA staff and its partners such as the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF, as well as the NGOs and those involved in the first phase of vaccination. This vaccination campaign showed the deterioration of conditions in Gaza and the distress of the population with the emergence of a disease eradicated 25 years ago. 50,000 children under the age of 5 had been diagnosed as suffering from malnutrition. Access to drinking water had become precarious, with 2/3 of water and sanitation infrastructure destroyed or damaged. Rubbish was no longer being disposed of.

The deliberate campaign to denigrate UNRWA and other United Nations agencies was having a direct impact on the civilian population, by blocking the arrival of aid, refusing to deliver protective equipment for staff and restricting access to Gaza. The legal framework on which these agencies were operating had to be respected. The protection of civilians, the restoration of order, the facilitation of humanitarian work with unhindered humanitarian access to the whole of the Gaza Strip, a ceasefire and the release of hostages were necessary.

**Ms Amal Abu Shawareb**, Protection Officer, UNRWA, recalled that Gaza covered an area of 360 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of over 2 million, making it one of the most densely populated places in the world. The impact of 45,000 bombs dropped in 11 months by Israel was significant. The situation was critical and deteriorating rapidly. It was one of the most complex humanitarian crises in the world, given the degree of destruction and loss of civilian life. Women and children were among those most at risk.

Ms Abu Shawareb shared the recent experience of her sister and her family, who were living in a tent in a 'humanitarian zone' designated as such by Israel, where no evacuation order had been given. Faced with advancing tanks and explosions, they had to flee to the coast to escape the intense gunfire. The next day, they had to abandon everything and flee again. This was just one example of repeated displacement. 85% of the population had been displaced. According to recent reports from the Gaza's Ministry of Health, more than 41,000 Palestinians had been killed and more than 96,000 injured, despite repeated calls to protect civilians. 70% of civilian casualties were women and children. No one was safe in Gaza. Repeated evacuation orders were confining the population to ever-smaller areas lacking water, food and sanitation. Displacement had led to the separation of families, the erosion of social protection systems for women and children and exposed them to increased risks of various forms of violence, including gender-based violence. Essential goods such as clothing, footwear and hygiene products were no longer sufficient, despite the considerable efforts of humanitarian organisations. This was contributing to increased exposure to disease and a major public health crisis, with no possibility of prevention, particularly affecting women and children.

It was estimated that 177,000 women were exposed to vital health risks due to disease and malnutrition, particularly during pregnancy. More than 5,000 women suffering from cancer needed immediate treatment, while 84% of healthcare facilities had been destroyed or damaged. The remaining health facilities lacked medicines, ambulances, electricity, water and treatment capacity. The risk of starvation and disease was greatest for pregnant women and children under 5. More than 96% of women and children aged between 6 and 23 months did not have the diet they needed. Mothers could not breastfeed. Women did not have access to food aid distributions, especially those who were alone with their children.

Children were exposed to all kinds of physical and psychological risks and had no access to essential goods and services (food, water, education and paediatric care). On average, 10 children a day lost a limb, with no capacity for rehabilitation. 17,000 children were separated from their parents and took on responsibilities that did not correspond to their age, such as looking after their siblings. This pushed them into negative mechanisms, such as child marriage or child labour. Many children had known nothing but conflict, with long-term negative effects on their physical and mental health. The destruction of the education system was unparalleled, and greatly disrupted children's prospects. Even with a sustainable ceasefire, rebuilding the education system would take years. Ms Abu Shawareb concluded by urging the Council of Europe to call for a ceasefire and to support and protect the people of Gaza throughout this prolonged suffering.

## **Discussion**

**Ms Kluit** thanked the speakers for their testimonies. She asked for more details on the operational problems and what would be needed to improve the situation in the short and medium term. In the long term, assuming a ceasefire was reached, how could Gaza be rebuilt?

**Mr Torun** thanked the speakers for their humanitarian work. 70,000 tonnes of bombs had fallen on Gaza since October 2023, more than on Dresden, Hamburg and London put together during the Second World War. Those who continued to sell arms to the Israeli government were complicit in these crimes. This humanitarian situation was unbearable. The United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe should use all diplomatic means to bring about an immediate ceasefire.

**Ms Abu Shawareb** confirmed that humanitarian work was extremely difficult, including the risks to the lives of staff. The reconstruction of Gaza was inconceivable without a ceasefire and large-scale humanitarian aid. First and foremost, there must be a ceasefire. Given the level of destruction, cooperation from the entire international community would be necessary for reconstruction.

**Mr Rose** pointed out that humanitarian workers were working every day in appalling conditions. Their protection was essential. They must be allowed to help the most vulnerable. The humiliation they suffered should stop. More crossing points were needed to deliver aid throughout Gaza, which was blocked in Egypt and elsewhere, especially with winter approaching. The international media should also have access to Gaza, otherwise there was no information and therefore no accountability.

**Ms Jazłowiecka** thanked the experts, wished them a better future and closed the discussion.

## List of presence / *Liste de présence*

(The names of members who took part in the meetings are in bold /  
*Les noms des membres ayant pris part aux réunions sont en caractères gras*)

<b>Members / Membres</b>	<b>Country / Pays</b>	<b>Alternates / Remplaçant(e)s</b>
Ms Jorida Tabaku	Albania / <i>Albanie</i>	Zz...
<b>Ms Bernadeta Coma</b>	Andorra / <i>Andorre</i>	Ms Susanna Vela
<b>Mr Armen Gevorgyan</b>	Armenia / <i>Arménie</i>	Ms Hripsime Grigoryan
<b>Mr Franz Leonhard Essl</b>	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Ms Agnes Sirkka Prammer
<b>Mr Stefan Schennach</b>	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Ms Doris Bures
<b>Ms Anne Lambelin</b>	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mr Andries Gryffroy
Mr Benoît Lutgen	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Ms Marie-Christine Marghem
Ms Darijana Filipović	Bosnia and Herzegovina / <i>Bosnie-Herzégovine</i>	Mr Šemsudin Dedić
Ms Atidzhe Alieva-Veli	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Zz...
<b>Ms Denitsa Sacheva</b>	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Zz...
Ms Zdravka Bušić	Croatia / <i>Croatie</i>	Ms Rada Borić
Ms Christiana Erotokritou	Cyprus / <i>Chypre</i>	Mr Constantinos Efstathiou
Ms Ivana Mádllová	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
Ms Aude Luquet	France	Ms Nathalie Serre
Mr Alain Milon	France	Mr Alain Cadec
Ms Isabelle Santiago	France	Ms Mireille Clapot
Ms Anne Stambach-Terrenoir	France	Ms Liliana Tanguy
Ms Eka Sepashvili	Georgia / <i>Géorgie</i>	Ms Ketevan Turazashvili
<b>Ms Heike Engelhardt</b>	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Franziska Kersten
Mr Andrej Hunko	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Catarina Dos Santos-Wintz
<b>Mr Christian Petry</b>	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Martina Stamm-Fibich
Mr Harald Weyel	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Katrin Staffler
Mr Ioannis Oikonomou	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Ms Maria Syrengela
<b>Mr Georgios Stamatis</b>	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Mr Alexis Tsipras
<b>Ms Mónika Bartos</b>	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Ms Katalin Csöbör
Ms Mónika Dunai	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Ms Zita Gurmai
Mr Bjarni Jónsson	Iceland / <i>Islande</i>	Ms Jódís Skúladóttir
<b>Mr Joseph O'Reilly</b>	Ireland / <i>Irlande</i>	Ms Reada Cronin
<b>Ms Elena Bonetti</b>	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Roberto Rosso

<b>Ms Aurora Floridia</b>	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro
Mr Alessandro Giglio Vigna	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Graziano Pizzimenti
Mr Stefano Maullu	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Francesco Zaffini
Mr Andris Bērziņš	Latvia / <i>Lettonie</i>	Mr Edmunds Cepurītis
Mr Peter Frick	Liechtenstein	Ms Franziska Hoop
Mr Kęstutis Masiulis	Lithuania / <i>Lituanie</i>	Ms Rasa Budbergytė
Ms Stéphanie Weydert	Luxembourg	Mr Paul Galles
Ms Romilda Zarb	Malta / <i>Malte</i>	Mr Joseph Beppe Fenech Adami
Mr Ion Groza	Republic of Moldova / <i>République de Moldova</i>	Ms Diana Caraman
Ms Christine Pasquier-Ciulla	Monaco	Ms Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo
Mr Miloš Konatar	Montenegro / <i>Monténégro</i>	Mr Boris Mugoša
<b>Ms Saskia Kluit</b>	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	Zz.....
<b>Ms Carla Moonen</b>	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	<b>Mr Theo Bovens</b>
<b>Mr Bekim Qoku</b>	North Macedonia / <i>Macédoine du Nord</i>	<b>Mr Sadula Duraki</b>
Ms Lisa Marie Ness Klungland	Norway / <i>Norvège</i>	Ms Linda Hofstad Helleland
<b>Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka</b>	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Mr Mirosław Adam Orliński
<b>Mr Jan Filip Libicki</b>	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Ms Magdalena Biejat
Mr Ryszard Petru	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Mr Mr Jan Kanthak
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<b>Mr Carlos Silva Santiago</b>	Portugal	Mr Telmo Faria
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Ms Alina-Ştefania Gorghiu	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	<b>Mr Cristian-Augustin Niculescu-Ţăgârlaş</b>
<b>Ms Diana Stoica</b>	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Ms Daniela Oteşanu
Mr Gerardo Giavagnoli	San Marino / <i>Saint-Marin</i>	Ms Alice Mina
Ms Tatjana Pašić	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Ms Jelena Milošević
Mr Vladimir Đorđević	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Mr Predrag Marsenić
Ms Anna Záborská	Slovak Republic / <i>République Slovaque</i>	Mr Pavol Goga
Mr Dean Premik	Slovenia / <i>Slovénie</i>	Ms Iva Dimic
<b>Ms María Fernández</b>	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Mr Alfonso Rodríguez
Mr José Latorre	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Ms Marta González Vázquez
<b>Ms Carmen Leyte</b>	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	<b>Ms Luz Martinez Seijo</b>
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<b>Ms Gökçe Gökçen</b>	Türkiye	Mr Namık Tan
<b>Mr Cemalettin Kani Torun</b>	Türkiye	Mr Ali Fazıl Kasap
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Ms Kate Osamor	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Zz...
<b>Ms Sally-Ann Hart</b>	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Richard Bacon
<b>Lord Don Touhig</b>	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Ruth Jones
Ms Sheryll Murray	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Zz...

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

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**Experts / Expert-e-s**

Online / *En ligne* : **Mr / M. Sam Rose**, Director of Planning, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) / *Directeur de la planification, Office de secours et de travaux des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés de Palestine (UNRWA)*  
Online / *En ligne* : **Ms / Mme Amal Abu Shawareb**, Associate Protection Officer, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) / *Spécialiste chargée de la protection, Office de secours et de travaux des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés de Palestine (UNRWA)*

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**Ms / Mme Roksolana Okolit**, Ukraine

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**Ms / Mme Alina Dmytrenko**, Ukraine  
**Ms / Mme Josefina Gomes**, Portugal  
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**Ms / Mme Sonja Langenhaeck**, Belgium / *Belgique*  
**Ms / Mme Eva Östlund**, Sweden / *Suède*  
**Mr / M. Sabih Gazi Öztürk**, Türkiye  
**Mr / M. Cedric Scarpellini**, Luxembourg  
**Ms / Mme Karine Shimshiryan**, Armenia / *Arménie*

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

**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*

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