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### **Statement by the Conference of INGOs**

“The human cost of war: a call for lasting peace and protection in Gaza”

Adopted by the Conference of INGOs  
at its General Assembly of 15 October 2025

The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe welcomes the ceasefire now achieved between Israel and Hamas, and the release of all the living hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. Whether this fragile reprieve will open a path to lasting peace remains uncertain.

Our organisational mandate is to uphold human dignity, rights and the rule of law. These principles compel us to raise our voice, together, when entire populations are deprived not only of their present safety, but of their future.

#### **Lives shattered, futures stolen**

We are profoundly affected by the intolerable suffering of the people of Gaza. Gaza today is a place where daily life has been reduced to an unthinkable struggle for survival. Families have lived under constant Israeli government forces bombardment. Homes lie in ruins. Hospitals are overwhelmed, but mostly, destroyed. Schools, once spaces for learning and community, are now rubble or overcrowded shelters for the displaced.

Children who should be in classrooms, learning to read, write and above all else, imagine a future for themselves, now sit on cold concrete floors in makeshift shelters, struggling with hunger and trauma. Students who once dreamed of becoming doctors, teachers or artists, face the reality that their universities and libraries no longer exist. Teachers, themselves mourning loved ones, attempt to maintain a sense of learning by writing lessons on scraps of paper or on the walls of shelters.

War does not only kill the present: it robs people of their future. A society without schools, without universities, without basic health and life supporting infrastructures, without spaces for culture and communities, without hope for the next generation, is a society condemned to despair. For us in the Conference of INGOs, who have long enjoyed education, freedom of movement and the ability to shape our lives, it is devastating to see these fundamental rights denied so brutally to others.

## **Accountability and international law**

We condemn unequivocally the attacks of 7 October 2023 carried out by Hamas, which killed around 1200 civilians, including more than 360 young people at the Nova music festival, and took 251 hostages. These acts of terror are some of the gravest violations of international law and cannot ever be justified. We are acutely aware of the pain and fear that these attacks have caused amongst Jewish communities.

However, one atrocity cannot serve as an excuse for another. The scale and intensity of military action in Gaza, conducted by the Government of Israel, has inflicted destruction and civilian loss of life on a level that independent investigations and United Nations bodies have warned may constitute crimes against humanity and even acts of genocide. More than 60,000 people have been killed in Gaza since October 2023 according to the Gaza Ministry of health and the United Nations, of which about a third are believed to be children and over eighty percent civilians. Many more have been injured. The UN Commission of Inquiry has found evidence of killings, serious bodily and mental harm, and deliberate conditions of life calculated to bring about destruction of the population. These are all acts that fall under the Genocide Convention of 1948.

Moreover, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly has affirmed that there must be no unlawful transfer or forcible displacement of people from Gaza, nor any attempt to alter the territory. The Committee of Ministers has equally emphasised the need for strict adherence to international humanitarian law and protection of civilians, without exception.

With the overwhelming majority of Gaza's population displaced, humanitarian access blocked and basic necessities weaponised, the situation is now beyond humanitarian crisis. It has become a test of the credibility of the international community's commitment to law and to human rights. Accountability is non-negotiable.

## **Our shared responsibility**

As civil society organisations, we cannot remain silent in the face of such suffering. We carry a responsibility not only to denounce violations, but to remind the world that every human life has equal value. Every person, regardless of origin or belief, must be able to live in safety and dignity.

The Conference of INGOs therefore calls for:

1. **A lasting and unconditional ceasefire**, to halt the bloodshed and create space for dialogue.
2. **The return of all bodies of killed hostages**
3. **Unhindered humanitarian access**, so that children, families and older people, can receive food, clean water, medicine and safe shelter.
4. **Protection of education and cultural life**, recognising that schools and universities are not luxuries but the foundations of a society's dignity and future.

5. **A halt to arms transfers that facilitate attacks on civilians**, ensuring that no state or institution contributes to further violations.
6. **Support for international accountability mechanisms**, including the International Criminal Court, to ensure that all perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity are held to justice.
7. **Reconstruction and restitution**, with particular emphasis on restoring key infrastructure, educational, medical and cultural institutions, so that young people can rebuild their lives and communities.
8. **Renewed investment in political dialogue**, grounded in equality, dignity and justice for all peoples in the region.
9. **An internationally agreed political and non-military guarantee** that prevents Hamas or any other terrorist group from playing any role in the future of Gaza and the Palestinian people and ensures that Gaza and the currently occupied West Bank are governed by the Palestinian Authority or another democratically elected Palestinian leadership. This means, in particular, an immediate halt to colonisation activity and new settlements, including in the West Bank.
10. **A genuine path to a two-state solution**, where Israel and Palestine, and their peoples, can live alongside one another in lasting peace, with Palestine and Israel fully recognised as independent states by the entire international community.

### **A call for peace**

We end with a message of peace. War and revenge can never secure the safety or dignity of any people. Only peace, built on justice, accountability and mutual recognition, can do so.

The people of Gaza, like us, like all people, have the right to education, to health, to security, to peace. These are not privileges but fundamental rights. For us in Europe, who now for generations have built lives upon these rights, the responsibility to defend them universally is now our moral duty, and above all else, our human obligation.

The Conference of INGOs appeals to all governments, international organisations and civil society actors: do not look away, do not remain silent and do not let despair triumph.

Stand for humanity, stand for justice and stand for peace.

Only then can we honour the lives already lost and give hope to the generations yet to come.

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The Conference of International NGOs of the Council of Europe requests its President to ensure dissemination of the present Declaration to the other instances of the Council of Europe.