



Declassified¹

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4 December 2025

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 Wednesday 1st October 2025

Ms Saskia Kluit, Chairperson of the Committee, opened the hearing organised 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” (Ms Saskia Kluit, rapporteur). She welcomed Mr Marc Lassouaoui, Senior Manager Outreach Europe, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), who was accompanied by his colleague Mr Mats Radeck.

Mr Marc Lassouaoui, Senior Manager Outreach Europe, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

Mr Lassouaoui began by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to participate in the exchange and to present the realities his colleagues face on the ground in Gaza. He welcomed the resolution on “The absolute and urgent need to end the humanitarian crisis for women, children and the hostages in Gaza” adopted by the Assembly in January. He expressed gratitude to the rapporteur, Ms Saskia Kluit, for her unwavering support for UNRWA and highlighted how the Assembly’s January calls for action had become even more urgent.

Mr Lassouaoui provided an overview of UNRWA which was created in 1948 to deliver services typically provided by states, including healthcare, education and social services. Then, because of crises and due to its operational capacities, UNRWA also provided emergency assistance, such as food aid, psychosocial support and cash assistance. This vast operational capacity made it essential, especially during conflicts like the Syrian war and the current crisis in Gaza and the West Bank. In the absence of a political solution, the agency remained irreplaceable.

He described the situation in Gaza as unprecedented. After nearly two years of war and continuous bombardments, more than 80% of the Gaza Strip had been reduced to rubble. Too many people had suffered on both sides. Fatalities had surpassed 65 400 (not including deaths resulting from lack of access to medical care, food and water) - most of whom were women and children -, while 167 000 people had been injured, many suffering permanent disabilities. A complete collapse of law and order had occurred, and mass displacement had forced hundreds of thousands to rely entirely on humanitarian aid. Since August this year, over 321 000 more people had been displaced due to new evacuation orders.

Civilians were trapped in a cycle of despair. UNRWA had lost 370 staff members - the highest number of UN staff killed in a single conflict. According to UNICEF, children were being killed at a rate of 28 per day. The war had also become the deadliest for journalists in modern history.

Famine had taken hold in Gaza, with earlier warnings ignored. Acute malnutrition had reached 28,5% in Gaza City by early September, according to the latest IPC report (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, Famine Review Committee, Gaza Strip, August 2025). Nearly one in three children was malnourished, and deaths from starvation, especially among children under five - 85% of malnutrition-related deaths -, were increasing rapidly. Even caregivers and aid workers were collapsing from hunger. There should be no famine in Gaza, one of the easiest places on earth to access. If there were a political will, UNRWA could feed the population for three months using the food and trucks waiting outside Gaza.

¹ The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 4 December 2025.

He criticised the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), describing it as an inadequate and dangerous alternative to UN-led aid, favouring the strongest. Since its implementation, over 2 000 people had been killed while seeking aid. Only a UN-led distribution system, particularly involving UNRWA, was capable of delivering aid impartially and on large scale. During the ceasefire, UNRWA had delivered more than half the aid that entered Gaza. Their warehouses in Egypt and Jordan were stocked, but aid distribution was being blocked.

On the ground, UNRWA had continued to operate in Gaza and the West Bank. It managed shelters, provided primary health care to over 11 000 people per day, supplied drinking water to 65% of the population and collected waste.

In the West Bank, violence had reached an unprecedented level. There too, UNRWA was the only useful instrumental tool.

In conclusion, **Mr Lassouaoui** stressed that UNRWA should ultimately transfer its services to a Palestinian entity through a political process supporting a two-state solution. Until then, UNRWA needed support from governments, especially since major donors such as the US and Sweden had cut funding.

Discussion

Mr Mullen thanked the speaker and wished the very best in this important work. He asked about the Israeli objection to UNRWA being infiltrated by Hamas. What is the rationale behind Sweden cutting funds?

Mr Lassouaoui replied that UNRWA was at risk of infiltration like any other organisation. Former French Minister Colonna reported on the improvements that UNRWA was implementing in response to Israel's allegations. However, he noted that Israel had not provided any evidence to support its allegations, despite the fact that UNRWA had already taken action where necessary with regard to its 30 000 strong regional workforces. Sweden considered that UNRWA could not operate under the new Knesset legislation. In reality, 17 000 staff continued to operate.

Ms Baldursdóttir stated that women and children in Gaza were suffering immensely, and that time was running out. Immediate political will was needed to alleviate the suffering. It was clear that genocide was occurring, yet we continued to argue. **Mr Lassouaoui** confirmed that political action was indeed needed to stop the suffering. His UNRWA colleagues said that it was the worst they had seen on earth.

Replying to a question by **Ms Gräßle** regarding the situation in other parts of the region, **Mr Lassouaoui** said that in the West Bank, the number of casualties was increasing, with nearly 1 000 Palestinians having been killed since the 7 October. There has also been mass displacements, and impoverishment of the population as Palestinians did no longer work in Israel, thus turning for humanitarian support too. The situation was also worsening in Lebanon where Palestinians did not have access to the job market. The situation was also fragile in Lebanon and Syria. Nevertheless, UNRWA had delivered despite having fewer funds.

A Council of Europe staff member and former UNRWA staff member was concerned about the prospect of a lost generation of traumatised children lacking an education.

Stressing the previous success of the educational system in Gaza, **Mr Lassouaoui** said that learning - rather than education - was now possible only during periods of respite. The challenge was how to teach traumatised children. Kids could also access an online system when electricity and wi-fi were available. He actually thought that it was a lost generation.

The Chairperson added that the Palestinian people had already shown resilience and that if they remained in their homeland, they would find a way to enable their children to flourish.

Ms Weydert asked what can be practically done by governments and the civil society in addition to financial and political support.

Mr Lassouaoui answered that parliamentarians could put pressure on the parties to stop the suffering and call for funding. They could also put pressure on the authorities to allow journalists into Gaza to raise awareness of the situation on the ground. UNRWA already had good cooperation with civil society, but anything that entered Gaza was a gift.

The Chairperson said that Netherlands had almost stopped funding UNRWA. She suggested using a donation model for members of political parties as a temporary solution until the governments step in.

The Chairperson thanked the experts and all the participants, then closed the hearing.

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*:

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

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

Members / Membres	Country / Pays	Alternates / Remplaçant·e·s
Ms Jorida Tabaku	Albania / <i>Albanie</i>	Zz...
Mr Cerni Escalé	Andorra / <i>Andorre</i>	Mme Bernadeta Coma
Mr Armen Gevorgyan	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>	Mr Kostadin Angelov
Ms Maya Dimitrova	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Mr Ilian Iontchev
Mr Marko Pavić	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
Mme Sophia Chikirou	France	Ms Sabrina Sebaihi
M. Alexandre Dufosset	France	Mme Liliana Tanguy
M. Alain Milon	France	M. Alain Cadec
Mme Maud Petit	France	M. Jean Laussucq
Zz...	Georgia / <i>Géorgie</i>	Zz...
Mr Vinzenz Glaser	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Christin Willnat
Ms Birgit Bessin	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Martina Kempf
Mr Serdar Yüksel	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Franziska Kersten
Ms Inge Gräßle	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Julian Joswig
Ms Maria Syrengela	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Ms Maria-Nefeli Chatziioannidou
Mr Georgios Stamatis	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Mr Alexis Tsipras
Ms Mónika Bartos	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Mme Katalin Csöbör

Ms Mónika Dunai	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Ms Zita Gurmai
Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar Baldursdóttir	Iceland / <i>Islande</i>	Mr Ragnar Þór Ingólfsson
Mr Joseph O'Reilly	Ireland / <i>Irlande</i>	Mr Rónán Mullen
Ms Elena Bonetti	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Roberto Rosso
Ms Aurora Floridia	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
M. Andris Bērziņš	Latvia / <i>Lettonie</i>	Mr Edmunds Cepurītis
Mr Marc Risch	Liechtenstein	Mr Joachim Vogt
Ms Orinta Leiputė	Lithuania / <i>Lituanie</i>	Mr Zigmantas Balčytis
Mme Stéphanie Weydert	Luxembourg	M. Paul Galles
Mr Michael Farrugia	Malta / <i>Malte</i>	Mr Joseph Beppe Fenech Adami
Mr Ion Groza	Republic of Moldova / <i>République de Moldova</i>	Ms Diana Caraman
M. Régis Bergonzi	Monaco	Mme Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo
Mr Miloš Konatar	Montenegro / <i>Monténégro</i>	Mr Boris Mugoša
Ms Saskia Kluit	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	Ms Elly Van Wijk
Ms Carla Moonen	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	Mr Theo Bovens
Mr Bekim Kjeku	North Macedonia / <i>Macédoine du Nord</i>	Mr Sadula Duraki
Ms Lisa Marie Ness Klungland	Norway / <i>Norvège</i>	Ms Linda Hofstad Helleland
Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Mr Mirosław Adam Orliński
Mr Jan Filip Libicki	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Ms Magdalena Biejat
Mr Ryszard Petru	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Zz...
Ms Jamila Madeira	Portugal	Mr Nuno Fazenda
Mr Carlos Silva Santiago	Portugal	Mr Telmo Faria
Georgeta-Carmen Holban	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Ms Mirela Elena Adomnicai
Ms Dumitrina Mitrea	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Mr Iulian Bulai
Mr Robert-Ionatan Sighiartau	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Ms Maria-Gabriela Horga
Mr Gerardo Giovagnoli	San Marino / <i>Saint-Marin</i>	Ms Alice Mina
Mr Vladimir Đorđević	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Mr Predrag Marsenić
Ms Tatjana Pašić	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Ms Jelena Milošević
Mme Anna Záborská	Slovak Republic / <i>République Slovaque</i>	Mr Pavol Goga
Mr Dean Premik	Slovenia / <i>Slovénie</i>	Ms Iva Dimic
Ms María Fernández	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Mr Alfonso Rodríguez
Mr José Latorre	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Ms Marta González Vázquez
Ms Carmen Leyte	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Ms Luz Martinez Seijo
Ms Sofia Amløh	Sweden / <i>Suède</i>	Ms Annika Strandhäll
Ms Victoria Tiblom	Sweden / <i>Suède</i>	Ms Boriana Åberg
Mme Céline Amaudruz	Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mme Valérie Piller Carrard
Ms Sibel Arslan	Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mr Fabian Molina
Ms Gökçe Gökçen	Türkiye	Mr Namık Tan
Mr Berdan Öztürk	Türkiye	Ms Sevilay Özen
Mr Sevan Sivacioğlu	Türkiye	Ms Sena Nur Çelik Kanat
Mr Murat Cahid Cingi	Türkiye	Mr Mustafa Canbey

Ms Olena Khomenko	Ukraine	Ms Larysa Bilozir
Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova	Ukraine	Mr Andrii Lopushanskyi
Ms Lesia Zaboranna	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

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Ambassades / Représentations permanentes et Délégations**

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Ms / Mme Armande Pembele, France
Mr / M. Sencer Kağan Şenol, Türkiye

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

Ms / Mme Karine Shimshiryan, Armenia / Arménie
Ms / Mme Fabrizia Bientinesi, Italy / Italie
Ms / Mme Marina Giovannini, Italy / Italie
Mr / M. Semih Emre Özer, Türkiye

Other persons present / Autres personnes présentes

Ms / Mme Teresa Gerns, Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe / Fédération des associations familiales catholiques en Europe

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

Ms / Mme Gioia Scappucci, DGI, Collective Complaints / DGI, Réclamations Collectives

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 Catherine Du-BernardHead of the Secretariat / *Cheffe du Secrétariat*
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Ms / Mme Jannick DevauxSecretary to the Committee / *Secrétaire de la commission*
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