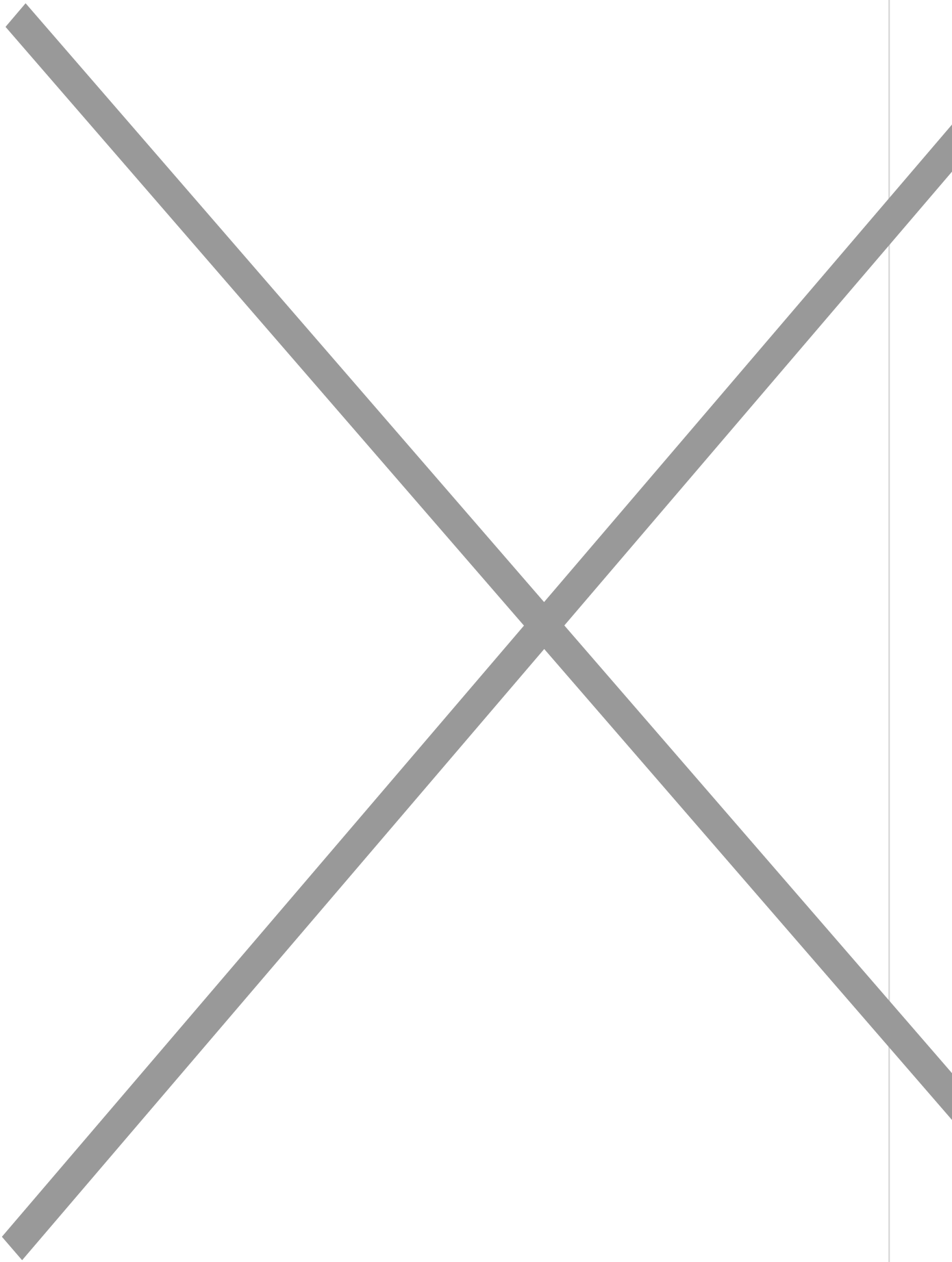


*UN Security Council demands
immediate Gaza ceasefire as
Washington's
representative abstains*

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United Nations, March 25 (RHC)-- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) demands an immediate ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages as the United States abstains from the vote.

The remaining 14 council members voted in favour of the resolution, which was proposed by the 10 elected members of the council. There was a round of applause in the council chamber after the vote on Monday. Washington's representative sat on her hands.

The resolution calls for an immediate ceasefire for the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which ends in two weeks, and also demands the release of all hostages seized in the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7.

"The bloodbath has continued for far too long," said Amar Bendjama, the ambassador from Algeria, the Arab bloc's current Security Council member and a sponsor of the resolution. "Finally, the Security Council is shouldering its responsibility."

The U.S. had repeatedly blocked Security Council resolutions that put pressure on Israel but has increasingly shown frustration with its ally as civilian casualties mount and the UN warns of impending famine in Gaza. Speaking after the vote, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield blamed Hamas for the delay in passing a ceasefire resolution.

"We did not agree with everything with the resolution," which she said was the reason why the U.S. abstained.

"Certain key edits were ignored, including our request to add a condemnation of Hamas," Thomas-Greenfield said. She stressed that the release of Israeli captives would lead to an increase in humanitarian aid supplies going into the besieged coastal enclave.

Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour addresses the UN Security Council [Andrew Kelly/Reuters] The White House said the final resolution did not have language the US considers essential and its abstention does not represent a shift in policy.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the US failure to veto the resolution is a "clear retreat" from its previous position and would hurt war efforts against Hamas as well as efforts to release Israeli captives held in Gaza.

U.S. President Joe Biden had requested to meet Israeli officials to discuss Israeli plans for a ground invasion of Rafah in southern Gaza, where more than 1 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

White House spokesperson John Kirby said the US was "disappointed" by Netanyahu's decision. "We're very disappointed that they won't be coming to Washington, DC, to allow us to have a fulsome conversation with them about viable alternatives to them going in on the ground in Rafah," Kirby told reporters.

He said senior US officials would still meet for separate talks with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who is currently in Washington, on issues including the captives, humanitarian aid and protecting civilians in Rafah.

Last week, Netanyahu promised to defy U.S. appeals and expand Israel's military campaign to Rafah even without its ally's support.

Al Jazeera's diplomatic editor James Bays said the vote is still a "very, very significant" development. "After almost six months, ... the vote, almost unanimous," has demanded a lasting and immediate

ceasefire in Gaza. “The U.S. has used its veto three times,” Bays said. “This time, the U.S. let this pass.”

“Resolutions of the Security Council are international law. They are always seen as binding on all the member states of the United Nations,” he added. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a post on X that the resolution “must be implemented”, adding that “failure would be unforgivable.”

The vote came amid international calls to bring the nearly six-month-long conflict to an end as Israeli forces pummel Gaza and humanitarian conditions in the besieged strip reach critical levels.

More than 90 percent of Gaza’s 2.3 million residents have been displaced, and conditions under Israeli siege and bombardment have pushed Gaza to the brink of famine, the UN said.

More than 32,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli assault since October 7, mostly women and children, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Israel began its military offensive in Gaza after Hamas led an attack on southern Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, and seizing about 250 others as hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Palestinian leaders welcomed the adoption of the resolution, saying it was a step in the right direction. “This must be a turning point,” Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour told the UNSC, holding back tears. “This must signal the end of this assault, of atrocities against our people.”

In a statement, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on UNSC member states to fulfill their legal responsibilities to implement the resolution immediately.

The ministry also stressed the importance of intensifying efforts to achieve a permanent ceasefire that extends beyond Ramadan, secure the entry of aid, work on the release Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails and prevent forced displacement of Palestinians.

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