

UN Security Council passes motion denouncing attacks on aid workers

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United Nations, May 24 (RHC)-- The United Nations Security Council has passed a resolution denouncing attacks on UN staff and aid workers in conflict zones as record numbers of UN personnel have been killed in Israel's war on the Gaza Strip.

The resolution, which calls on all countries to protect humanitarian workers in accordance with international law, passed on Friday with 14 votes in favour, zero against and one abstention.

"This resolution [sends] a strong message," said Pascale Baeriswyl, the UN ambassador for Switzerland, which put forward the measure. "This resolution reaffirms state responsibility and that of parties to conflict to respect and protect the civilian population and, more particularly, to respect and protect these men and women who every day work alongside those affected by armed conflicts," Baeriswyl told the council.

The resolution passed amid threats and attacks against humanitarian workers in conflict zones around the world, including in Sudan and Ukraine.

But since October, the Gaza Strip has seen an unprecedented death toll among UN personnel and other aid workers.

More than 190 UN staff have been killed in the Israeli war on Gaza, according to the latest figures from the global body, sparking widespread concern and calls for a permanent ceasefire in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Robert Wood, the United States deputy ambassador to the UN, said on Friday that “harm to workers of great courage who are risking their lives to help Palestinian civilians [in Gaza] is unacceptable.”

Wood condemned the Palestinian group Hamas for taking captives from Israel and holding them in the coastal enclave and said Israel must do “much more to prevent the death and harm of aid workers and UN personnel.”

“We insist that all attacks on humanitarian personnel in Gaza, regardless of whether against local or international staff, be investigated thoroughly, and there must be full and public accountability for those responsible for any wrongdoing,” he said.

Washington faces calls to do much more to help reach a ceasefire in Gaza, however, including by conditioning military and diplomatic support to Israel.

But U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration continues to provide staunch backing to its top Middle East ally. Since October, the country has vetoed three separate efforts at the Security Council to secure a ceasefire.

Al Jazeera’s diplomatic editor James Bays noted that Friday’s resolution was passed shortly after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – the top UN court – ordered Israel to immediately halt its military offensive on the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

Wood was asked on his way into the Security Council about the ICJ’s ruling, Bays said, but the U.S. envoy did not have an immediate response. “The ruling of the International Court of Justice matches very much what the U.S. has been asking for,” Bays reported.

“But it’s a strong, binding international law ruling, and it puts Israel in a hard place – and diplomatically, in the end when it’s come to it, the US has had Israel’s back at every twist and turn since October 7.”

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) welcomed the passage of the Security Council resolution on Friday. The motion, the ICRC said in a statement, serves as “a clear reminder of the absolute necessity and obligation for all parties of armed conflicts to respect and protect humanitarian personnel, their premises and assets.”

“Just as the civilian population is paying an increasingly unbearable price in today’s conflicts, so too are humanitarian personnel, who face daily risks such as verbal threats and intimidation, disappearance, serious injury, and death,” the committee said.

“The unacceptably high price paid by humanitarian personnel must stop, and it is only the vigorous application in practice of this resolution that will make a difference on the ground.”

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