

UN aid chief warns of gravest crimes committed in Israel's war on Gaza

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Joyce Msuya tells UN Security Council that the "daily cruelty we see in Gaza seems to have no limits" Palestinians mourn by the body of a relative killed in overnight Israeli strikes on the al-Mawasi cafeteria in southern Gaza's Khan Younis, on Tuesday [Bashar Taleb/AFP]

United Nations, November 14 (RHC)-- The United Nations's humanitarian aid chief told a meeting of the Security Council (UNSC) that "acts reminiscent of the gravest international crimes" are being committed in Gaza where Israel's military continues to bombard, besiege and prevent aid from reaching the civilian population.

Addressing the UNSC in New York, Joyce Msuya, the interim chief of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), described Israel's monthlong ground offensive and ongoing siege of northern Gaza as an "intensified, extreme, and accelerated version of the horrors of the past year" in the Palestinian territory.

Palestinian civilians have been driven from their homes by Israel's military and "forced to witness their family members killed, burned and buried alive" in Gaza, which Msuya described as "a wasteland of rubble".

"We are witnessing acts reminiscent of the gravest international crimes," she warned the council meeting. "The daily cruelty we see in Gaza seems to have no limits," she said, firmly pointing the finger of blame at Israel for blocking aid from entering Gaza's besieged north.

"As I brief you, Israeli authorities are blocking humanitarian assistance from entering North Gaza, where fighting continues and around 75,000 people remain with dwindling water and food supplies," she said.

Msuya also called out the indiscriminate destruction of Gaza after more than a year of Israeli attacks. "What distinction was made and what precautions were taken, if more than 70 percent of civilian housing is either damaged or destroyed?"

The meeting of the UNSC was called by Guyana, Switzerland, Algeria and Slovenia following a report by international food security experts on Friday who said the humanitarian situation in Gaza was "extremely grave and rapidly deteriorating" and warned of an imminent famine in parts of the north.

Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon called the reports of possible famine in northern Gaza "baseless and slanderous." He told reporters before the UNSC meeting that the situation in Gaza, including the north, has shown improvement since October.

Earlier on Tuesday, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said October saw the lowest amount of humanitarian aid enter Gaza this year, and the war-torn enclave had received "nowhere near what we need to support more than two million Palestinians".

Dujarric said that for a second month, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) was only able to reach half the people who rely on UN assistance in Gaza, and only with reduced rations.

A convoy of 14 trucks had planned to deliver humanitarian supplies to shelters for displaced people in north Gaza's Beit Hanoun and the Indonesian Hospital in the Jabalia refugee camp on Monday, but only two trucks with ready-to-eat meals, wheat flour and one carrying water made it to two shelters.

The other trucks in the aid convoy were unable to make their deliveries because of delays in receiving authorisation from Israeli authorities as well as due to crowds of desperately hungry people waiting along the convoy's route, Dujarric said.

The delivery was the first time in more than a month that people in Beit Hanoun had received any food assistance, he said. The WFP had planned another mission to Beit Hanoun to reach the rest of the shelters and the hospital on Tuesday, but he said that "those missions have been denied" by Israel.

"We continue to call for the immediate opening of more land routes into Gaza and for the lifting of administrative and physical restrictions within Gaza to efficiently reach the most vulnerable people and areas," Dujarric said.

Palestine's UN envoy, Riyad Mansour, told the UNSC meeting that Israel has chosen to perpetrate "famine as a method of war" in a process of ethnic cleansing in Gaza. "Everything we warned against, everything Israel denied, is happening before our eyes," he said.

"We are at the last stages of an orchestrated plan to empty wide areas of Gaza from its Palestinian population."

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