

Personalities around the world call on Israel to lift siege of Gaza Strip



Ramallah, May 17 (RHC)-- More than 250 global artists and writers -- including rocker Peter Gabriel, director Ken Loach and actor Viggo Mortensen -- have appealed to Israel to stop the "siege" of Gaza, saying the coronavirus epidemic could have a devastating effect in "the world's largest open-air prison."

"Long before the global outbreak of COVID-19 threatened to overwhelm the already devastated healthcare system in Gaza, the UN had predicted the blockaded coastal strip would be unlivable by 2020," the online letter said.

"With the pandemic, Gaza's almost two million inhabitants, predominantly refugees, face a mortal threat in the world's largest open-air prison."

Other signatories of the letter included poet Taha Adnan, Canadian writer Naomi Klein, and British group Massive Attack.

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007 when the Hamas movement started controlling the enclave. Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since but reached a truce in late 2018

that was renewed after successive flare-ups last year.

"Well before the ongoing crisis, Gaza's hospitals were already stretched to breaking point through lack of essential resources denied by Israel's siege. Its healthcare system could not cope with the thousands of gunshot wounds, leading to many amputations," the artists said.

"Reports of the first cases of coronavirus in densely populated Gaza are therefore deeply disturbing. We back Amnesty International's call on all world governments to impose a military embargo on Israel until it fully complies with its obligations under international law."

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