

*UN General Assembly
overwhelmingly demands
immediate ceasefire in Gaza...
with U.S. voting against*

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United Nations, December 12 (RHC)--The United Nations General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly to demand an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and expressed support for the work of the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA).

The assembly on Wednesday passed a resolution demanding an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, which was adopted with 158 votes in favor from the 193-member assembly and nine votes against with 13 abstentions.

A second resolution expressing support for UNRWA and deploring a new Israeli law that would ban the UN agency's operations in Israel was carried with 159 votes in favor, nine against and 11 abstentions. That resolution demands that Israel respect UNRWA's mandate and calls on the Israeli government "to abide by its international obligations, respect the privileges and immunities of UNRWA and uphold its responsibility to allow and facilitate full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance in all its forms into and throughout the entire Gaza Strip."

Both votes culminated two days of speeches at the UN where speaker after speaker called for an end to Israel's 14-month war on the Palestinian territory that has killed at least 44,805 people – mostly Palestinian women and children – and wounded 106,257.

"Gaza doesn't exist any more," Slovenia's UN Ambassador Samuel Zbogar told the General Assembly meeting. "It is destroyed. Civilians are facing hunger, despair and death," he said. "There is no reason for this war to continue. We need a ceasefire now. We need to bring hostages home now," he added.

Algeria's deputy UN ambassador Nacim Gaouaoui addressed the world's inability to stop the war in Gaza: "The price of silence and failure in the face of the Palestinian tragedy is a very heavy price, and it will be heavier tomorrow."

Al Jazeera's Gabriel Elizondo, reporting from UN headquarters in New York, said "the message is clear with these two resolutions." "Number one, UNRWA needs to be protected and their mandate needs to be protected and bolstered. Of course, Israel is trying to destroy UNRWA. They've made that very clear for many months now," Elizondo said.

"And the second message that it sends is the overwhelming majority of the world is calling for, again, an immediate ceasefire in Gaza," he said.

Israel and its staunchest ally, the United States, were in a tiny minority of countries and their representatives speaking and voting against the resolutions at the UN.

US Deputy UN Ambassador Robert Wood reiterated Washington's opposition to the ceasefire resolution in advance of the vote and criticized the Palestinians for again failing to mention Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, which killed an estimated 1,139 people and saw more than 200 Israelis taken captive in Gaza.

"At a time when Hamas is feeling isolated due to the ceasefire in Lebanon, the draft resolution on a ceasefire in Gaza risks sending a dangerous message to Hamas that there's no need to negotiate or release the hostages," he said.

In advance of the UN vote, Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon accused supporters of the resolutions of complicity with Hamas. "By demanding a ceasefire today without addressing the hostages, this assembly will once again side with those who weaponise human suffering," Danon said.

While UN Security Council resolutions are legally binding, General Assembly resolutions are not, though they do reflect world opinion.

The Palestinians and their supporters went to the General Assembly after the U.S. vetoed a Security Council resolution on November 20 demanding an immediate Gaza ceasefire.

The language of the ceasefire resolution adopted by the assembly is the same as the text of the vetoed Security Council resolution, and demands “an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire to be respected by all parties,” while also reiterating a “demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages”.

Palestinian UN Ambassador Riyad Mansour said last week, during the first day of debate in the assembly’s special session on the issue, that Gaza is “the bleeding heart of Palestine”.

“The images of our children burning in tents, with no food in their bellies and no hopes and no horizon for the future, and after having endured pain and loss for more than a year, should haunt the conscience of the world and prompt action to end this nightmare,” Mansour said.

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