



1 February 2024

Minister of Foreign Affairs

For approval by

15 February 2024

### Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Support – Tranche Three

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BRIEFING      Decision Submission

PURPOSE      To seek your approval for a third tranche of humanitarian support for the Israel-Hamas conflict.

### Recommended referrals

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Prime Minister

For information by

29 February 2024

### Contact details

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s9(2)(g)(ii)

s9(2)(a)

### Minister's Office to complete

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- |  |   |                                    |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved            | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted                | <input type="checkbox"/> Referred  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs amendment     | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined             | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by events | <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's notes |                                    |

Comments

## Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Support – Tranche Three

### Key points

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- Humanitarian needs in Gaza are at extreme levels as a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict. The situation is worsened by a constrained humanitarian response, including due to ongoing hostilities and access restrictions. Despite this, humanitarian actors have demonstrated an unwavering commitment and strong ability to deliver where they can. The assistance reaching affected civilians is making a difference, but it is not nearly enough. The West Bank is also affected by the conflict and needs there have increased.
- New Zealand has so far contributed NZ\$10 million to the humanitarian response, split equally between the World Food Programme (WFP) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Given the increasing levels of need officials recommend New Zealand make a further contribution. Additional support would be consistent with likeminded partners and reflect sustained domestic public interest.
- Officials recommend contributions totalling NZ\$5 million:
  - NZ\$2.5 million to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to support vulnerable children and families; and
  - NZ\$2.5 million to WFP to support the provision of emergency food assistance.
- This funding is separate from our considerations on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). <sup>s9(2)(f)(iv)</sup>
- Given its extensive presence in Gaza, UNRWA is widely considered the 'backbone' of the humanitarian response. It plays a critical enabling and supporting role for other humanitarian actors, including UNICEF and WFP. As such, whilst our proposed funding would go to UNICEF and WFP, it is important to note that UNRWA would support both agencies, including with delivery and coordination.
- The possibility of the diversion of aid remains a key risk in all humanitarian settings that we cannot fully discount. Both UNICEF and WFP have strong systems and controls to guard against aid diversion, and to ensure that assistance reaches its intended civilian beneficiaries. Officials have engaged widely with humanitarian agencies and partner governments; none were aware of systematic aid diversion in Gaza.
- <sup>s6(a)</sup>
- There are extreme health and safety risks for humanitarian personnel, as well as for recipients in Gaza. Agencies are mitigating these risks to the extent possible; however, their ability to do so is constrained by the complex and dangerous operating environment.
- The Ministry will continue to closely monitor the humanitarian crisis. Given the scale of need it is likely further support from New Zealand will be recommended.
- Funding would come from within existing baselines, drawn from the non-departmental International Development Cooperation Appropriation within Vote Foreign Affairs.

<sup>s9(2)(g)(ii)</sup>

for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

## Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Support – Tranche Three

### Recommendations

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It is recommended that you:

- 1 **Agree** to make a further humanitarian contribution totalling NZ\$5 million to respond to extreme humanitarian needs in Gaza and the West Bank resulting from the Israel-Hamas conflict, comprising:
  - 1a A contribution of NZ\$2.5 million to the United Nations Children's Fund to provide essential assistance for children and their families; and **Yes / No**
  - 1b A contribution of NZ\$2.5 million to the World Food Programme to provide emergency food assistance. **Yes / No**
- 2 **Note** there are several risks inherent to the humanitarian response – including diversion, and health and safety – that are being mitigated by agencies to the extent possible in this complex operating environment; and **Yes / No**
- 3 **Refer** a copy of this submission to the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Christopher Luxon for his information. **Yes / No**

Rt Hon Winston Peters  
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Date:        /        /

## Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Support – Tranche Three Report

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### Humanitarian needs in Gaza are at extreme levels

1. Ongoing hostilities, mass displacement, the destruction of infrastructure, the collapse of the health system and a shortage of food and other essential items has generated an extreme humanitarian crisis in Gaza. There is no completely safe space for Gaza's 1.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs), nor an ability for them to meet basic needs. Overcrowded conditions present serious public health and protection concerns, especially for vulnerable women and children. People are starving and famine<sup>1</sup> is possible in the near term.
2. A constrained operating environment for humanitarian actors in Gaza is hindering an effective response and compounding needs. These constraints include: inadequate supply channels; an ineffective pre-approvals process to guarantee with Israel safe movement for humanitarian personnel and goods; communications blackouts; administrative barriers; movement restrictions (especially in north Gaza); and no electricity. Humanitarian agencies are doing what they can to save lives and alleviate suffering, at high risk to their staff.
3. The conflict is also affecting the West Bank which has seen an increase in violence, the displacement of at least 1,200 people, rising economic hardship, and movement restrictions that isolate communities and limit their access to essential services and employment. Humanitarian agencies are facing similar operational constraints in the West Bank.

### New Zealand should make a further contribution to the humanitarian response

4. Whilst New Zealand has already made a significant contribution of NZ\$10 million to the response, the extreme level of humanitarian need warrants further support. This would be consistent with likeminded partners, including Australia and Canada, who have announced new support in recent weeks. Officials recommend contributions to UNICEF and WFP. Both agencies are experienced and principled humanitarian actors with a demonstrated ability to deliver at scale in complex environments. They also have strong systems and controls to guard against diversion, and to ensure that assistance reaches intended civilian beneficiaries.

### United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF)

5. An estimated one million children are affected by the crisis, 335,000 of whom are under five years of age. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of trauma, poor nutrition, sanitation, hygiene and a lack of medical treatment. It is projected that in the near term 'child wasting', the most life-threatening form of malnutrition, could affect up to 10,000 children.
6. UNICEF has a strong and long-established presence in Gaza. Its response is focusing on water and sanitation, health services, child protection, and nutrition support for children, pregnant and breastfeeding women. The agency's response has included: psychosocial support services for over 44,000 children; over 99,000 litres of fuel to run water wells and desalination plants; and cleaning services at 28 shelters, benefiting over 169,000 people.
7. Other countries funding UNICEF's response include: Australia; Canada; Denmark; Estonia; Germany; Norway; Poland; Sweden; Switzerland; and the United Kingdom. The European Commission also contributes.

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<sup>1</sup> Famine is defined by the *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification* as 'the absolute inaccessibility of food to an entire population or sub-group of a population, potentially causing death in the short term.'



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8. UNICEF's *Humanitarian Action for Children* appeal seeks US\$168.3 million (NZ\$274 million) and is currently 71% funded. Officials recommend a contribution of NZ\$2.5 million to the appeal given the significant and unique needs of children in this setting. This would be New Zealand's first contribution to UNICEF's Gaza and the West Bank appeal.
9. s6(a)

### World Food Programme (WFP)

10. Gaza's population of 2.2 million are assessed to be at 'imminent risk of famine'. Of which, 500,000 people are thought to be at 'catastrophic levels' of hunger, meaning they are likely experiencing an extreme lack of food and starvation. WFP reports these levels of hunger are unprecedented in recent history (famine was last declared in South Sudan in 2017).
11. WFP's response includes the delivery of food parcels, flour, hot meals, and nutrition supplements in Gaza for 700,000-900,000 people per month. At present WFP is focusing on ready-to-eat food, and plans to move to dry products when people regain the ability to cook, and then eventually to cash assistance once a food market resumes.
12. Other governments funding WFP's response include: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Commission also contributes.
13. The WFP's Emergency Appeal for the occupied Palestinian territories is seeking US\$314 million (NZ\$515 million) to support their operations out to April 2024 and is currently 59% funded. Officials recommend a further contribution of NZ\$2.5 million to WFP's appeal to support lifesaving food assistance. This would bring New Zealand's total contribution to the WFP response to NZ\$7.5 million.

### Potential options and future support

14. s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv)

15. **ICRC:** New Zealand has contributed NZ\$5 million to the ICRC's oPt response and officials remain satisfied with their delivery, including emergency medical services, monitoring the conditions of detention, and supporting the release of hostages. The ICRC reports s6(b)(ii) that New Zealand's funding is still being drawn on for implementation. As a result, we have not recommended the ICRC for further funding.

16. s9(2)(f)(iv)

## Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Support – Tranche Three

### Risks and other considerations

17. **Aid diversion:** The possibility of the diversion of aid remains a key risk in all humanitarian settings, especially in conflict settings, that we cannot fully discount. UNICEF and WFP both have monitoring systems in place to prevent and guard against diversion; and pursue any reports of diversion or misappropriation. s6(a), s6(b)(ii)

While there are public reports of aid warehouses and trucks being looted sporadically, officials do not consider this aid diversion, rather this reflects the sheer desperation of people in need.

18. **Impact of Hamas designation:** The military wing of Hamas is already designated as a terrorist entity under the Terrorism Suppression Act (TSA), and DPMC has developed advice to the Prime Minister on making a statutory decision to designate Hamas in its entirety as a terrorist entity under the TSA. Under the TSA, provision of material support or funds to a designated entity without lawful justification or reasonable excuse is a criminal offence. s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv)

19. **Health and safety:** There are extreme health and safety risks for humanitarian and medical personnel, and civilians accessing aid. At least 153 United Nations staff, the majority from UNRWA, have died in the conflict. While risk can never be completely mitigated in a conflict setting, s6(a)

They are however mitigating risks to the extent possible. Agencies remain committed to delivering, and while there are risks, there is no alternative way to provide lifesaving assistance to people in need.

### Finance

20. Funding for this activity would be sourced from within existing baselines. Funding is drawn from the non-departmental International Development Cooperation Appropriation within Vote Foreign Affairs. There remains sufficient funding to respond to emergencies in the Pacific, including over the remainder of the 2023-24 Pacific tropical cyclone season which ends in April.
21. These contributions could be considered under internal Ministry delegations but we are seeking your approval due to the sensitivity of the crisis and the constrained operating environment for humanitarian workers.

### Next steps

22. Should you agree to a further humanitarian contribution, officials propose to work with your Office on an announcement.
23. The Ministry will continue to closely monitor the humanitarian crisis and consider how New Zealand can best support the response. Given the scale of need it is likely further support from New Zealand will be needed.