



27 March 2024

Minister of Foreign Affairs

For approval by

29 March 2024

## Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Options

**BRIEFING** Decision Submission

**PURPOSE** To provide an update on New Zealand's humanitarian response to the Israel-Hamas conflict, and outline options for further support including for possible announcement during your visit to Egypt on 1 April 2024.

## Recommended referrals

Prime Minister

For information by

9 April 2024

## Contact details

NAME	ROLE	DIVISION	WORK PHONE
s9(2)(q)(ii)		Partnerships, Humanitarian, and Multilateral	s9(2)(a)
s9(2)(q)(ii)		Middle East and Africa	s9(2)(a)

## Minister's Office to complete

☐ Approved☐ Noted☐ Referred☐ Needs amendment☐ Declined☐ Withdrawn☐ Overtaken by events☐ See Minister's notes**Comments**

## Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Options

### Key points

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- Humanitarian needs in Gaza are desperate and the situation on the ground is dire. Fighting and Israeli barriers to access are hindering desperately needed aid delivery.
- So far, New Zealand has contributed NZ\$15 million in response to the conflict, split between the World Food Programme (WFP - NZ\$7.5 million), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC - NZ\$5 million), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF - NZ\$2.5 million). s9(2)(g)(i)
- The Ministry has earmarked a further NZ\$5 million for the Gaza response this financial year. There may be scope to scale this should conditions on the ground change, or if more humanitarian funding becomes available (e.g. if the Pacific cyclone season remains light).
- From the earmarked NZ\$5 million, the Ministry recommends New Zealand make an immediate targeted contribution of NZ\$1 million to the **United Nations 2720 Mechanism for Gaza**. This Mechanism is led by the UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag (former Netherlands Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister) to accelerate aid flows into Gaza. A contribution to the Mechanism would respond directly to the most salient challenge for the humanitarian response – access. Australia recently announced a contribution of AU\$2 million to the Mechanism.
- s6(a)

A further option is that further humanitarian funding could be considered alongside advice on New Zealand's annual 2023/24 payment to UNRWA.

- Alternatively, should you prefer to bring forward decisions on earmarked funding for the humanitarian response to the Israel-Hamas conflict, we would recommend either or both of these options:
  - **WFP:** NZ\$2 million to support emergency food programming; and/or
  - **UNICEF:** NZ\$2 million to support children and families.
- s6(a)
- We recommend that any Gaza announcement in Cairo is made alongside New Zealand's new contribution to the Sudan conflict response (NZ\$4 million split between the ICRC and UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR), a conflict which Egypt is also directly impacted by. s6(a)
- Funding would come from within existing baselines, drawn from the non-departmental International Development Cooperation Appropriation within Vote Foreign Affairs.

s9(2)(g)(ii)  
for Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

## Israel-Hamas Conflict: Humanitarian Options

### Recommendations

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It is recommended that you:

- 1 **Approve** a NZ\$1 million contribution to the United Nations 2720 Mechanism for Gaza to improve the flow of aid into Gaza; **Yes / No**
- 2 **Agree** to either:  
  
2a *[Recommended]* **Direct** officials to provide further advice on options for the remaining NZ\$4 million earmarked for the Gaza humanitarian response to coincide with key developments in the conflict over the coming weeks;  
  
**Yes / No**  
  
**Or**  
  
2b **Approve** either or both of:  
  
i. \$2 million for the World Food Programme's Gaza and West Bank response; and/or  
  
**Yes / No**  
  
ii. \$2 million for the United Nations Children's Fund's Gaza and West Bank response.  
  
**Yes / No**
- 3 **Note** there may be scope to scale up the balance of funding for the remainder of the financial year should conditions on the ground change, or more humanitarian funding becomes available (e.g. if the Pacific cyclone season remains light); and **Yes / No**
- 4 **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 Options

### Report

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The humanitarian situation is very dire, due to fighting s6(a)

1. The humanitarian situation in Gaza has deteriorated to a level rarely seen. Famine is imminent, with 1.1 million people (half of the population) having exhausted their food supplies and struggling with the risk of catastrophic starvation. Up to 1.7 million Gazans are internally displaced. Gender-related protection risks, violence, and the welfare of children are of major concern. Increasing calls by the international community for an immediate ceasefire, and the 25 March UN Security Council resolution demanding one, underline the scale of the crisis as a ceasefire would be by far the most effective way to allow extreme humanitarian needs to be addressed.
2. Humanitarian access remains highly constrained, primarily due to ongoing fighting s6(a). In terms of the latter, this includes s6(a) s9(2)(g)(i); unpredictable processes; and denial of humanitarian safe passage requests.
3. While air and maritime routes are now being drawn on as options of last resort, the United Nations, partners, and humanitarian leaders agree these are not meaningful substitutes to land routes and entry points. For example, a recent US-Jordan airdrop delivered 2.7 tons of food, whereas a 14-truck WFP convoy carries approximately 200 tons.

### Further humanitarian support for the Gaza and West Bank response

4. The severity of humanitarian need in Gaza warrants further New Zealand support. After considering funds available against humanitarian priorities (including the need to retain funds for Pacific and other significant global responses), the Ministry has earmarked a further \$5 million for the Gaza response this financial year.
5. There may be scope to scale up the balance of remaining funding for the financial year should conditions on the ground change or if more humanitarian funding becomes available. This could occur if the Pacific cyclone season remains light (i.e. there are no significant Pacific disasters in the coming months) then Pacific funding could be reallocated to global crises.

### United Nations Humanitarian and Reconstruction Mechanism

6. The Ministry recommends you announce a \$1 million contribution to the *United Nations 2720 Mechanism for Gaza* (the Mechanism). On 22 December 2023 the UN Security Council adopted a resolution appointing a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for the Gaza Strip – Sigrid Kaag – and established a mechanism to speed up the provision of humanitarian relief to Gaza.
7. Hosted by the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Mechanism is focusing on the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border crossings, in addition to the new maritime corridor from Cyprus. It is intended to be an enabler for humanitarian actors to provide more assistance faster, including those New Zealand has already funded (WFP, ICRC and UNICEF).
8. The Mechanism is at a very early stage, transitioning from design to implementation, s6(b)(ii).  
Kaag's Office has been putting the building blocks in place for implementation, including considerable diplomatic engagement with Egypt and Israel.

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9. The Mechanism is expected to: establish an integrated application system and database to prioritise and monitor deliveries (modelled on the existing UN Mechanism for Yemen, which New Zealand has funded); stand-up a document clearance and verification system as s6(a) monitor cargo flows and undertake verification, including through international monitors at aid entry and distribution points; and enhance capabilities to improve aid supply lines, transport, and storage.
10. This targeted contribution responds directly to the most salient challenge for the humanitarian response at present – access – an issue for which New Zealand has consistently advocated. It would demonstrate New Zealand's ongoing confidence in the UN-led humanitarian response and sit alongside widespread likeminded support for Kaag's mandate. It would also demonstrate solidarity with those affected and complement our calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

11. s6(b)(ii)

The Mechanism has been funded by Australia (AU\$2 million), the UAE, and the Netherlands. s6(a)

Officials consider this to be a valuable initiative. For aid to have a real-time impact there needs to be better systems in place to deliver effectively at the scale required.

12. Your visit to Egypt on 1 April 2024 presents an opportunity to announce a targeted contribution to the Kaag Mechanism, s6(a)

Combined with the planned announcement of NZ\$4 million for the Sudan humanitarian response (over 450,000 Sudanese have fled to Egypt since mid-2023), it would bring your total Egypt announcement to NZ\$5 million in new humanitarian assistance s6(a)

### Options for further humanitarian contributions (if preferred)

13. The Ministry recommends a decision on the remaining \$4 million earmarked for Gaza is taken as part of a New Zealand response to a significant future development in the crisis, or alongside advice on New Zealand's annual 2023/24 funding for UNRWA (a topic of interest for partners and domestic stakeholders). s6(a)

There will also be high interest in New Zealand's annual funding for UNRWA in the context of the conclusion of the UN's investigation and independent review (expected late-April).

14. If you agree with this recommendation, the Ministry would continue to monitor the response s9(2)(g)(i)

15. s6(a)

16. Should you therefore wish to bring forward decisions on earmarked funding for the Gaza response, s6(a) officials would recommend either or both of these options:

16.1. **UNICEF:** There are an estimated 1 million children affected by the conflict in Gaza (over 600,000 in Rafah), over a third of whom are under five years of age. UNICEF

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has a long-established presence in Gaza and is supporting urgent needs for children and their families. Its response is focused on water, sanitation, hygiene, health services, child protection, and nutrition. UNICEF's support has included fuel for water wells and desalination, wastewater treatment, 160,000 items of children's clothing, psychosocial support for over 130,000 people, and cash assistance to over 83,000 families. UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children appeal seeks US\$263.3 million (NZ\$438.5 million) and is currently 58% funded. New Zealand has contributed \$2.5 million to the appeal since 7 October 2023.

- 16.2. **WFP** continues to focus on emergency food assistance, supply chain support for bakeries (bread is a staple) and supporting partners to deliver assistance. It is a crucial part of the humanitarian response in Gaza and is meeting critical needs. WFP reached over 1.45 million people with general food assistance in February 2024, provided 29% of total aid trucks crossing into Gaza through Rafah, and delivered over 22,000 tons of food supplies in January 2024. WFP's appeal seeks a total of US\$760 million (NZ\$1.27 billion) to sustain its response for up to 1.1 million affected people per month until the end of 2024. New Zealand has contributed \$7.5 million to the appeal since 7 October 2023.
17. We assess both agencies have sufficient funding to continue operating at an appropriate scale for the foreseeable future but will need more funds in due course to sustain operations.

### Potential risks

18. In terms of risks, the possibility of aid diversion remains a potential issue 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.
19. s6(a)
20. There are ongoing extreme health and safety risks for humanitarian and medical personnel in Gaza, and to civilians accessing aid. While risk can never be completely mitigated in a conflict setting, in the Gaza response humanitarian agencies s6(a)

They are however mitigating risks to the extent possible.

### Finance

21. Funding for this activity would be sourced from within existing baselines, drawn from the non-departmental International Development Cooperation Appropriation within Vote Foreign Affairs. There remains sufficient funding to respond to emergencies in the Pacific.
22. 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

23. Should you agree to further New Zealand humanitarian contributions at this time, officials propose to work with your Office on an announcement aligned with your visit to Egypt.
24. The Ministry will continue to closely monitor the humanitarian crisis and consider how New Zealand can best support the response in future.