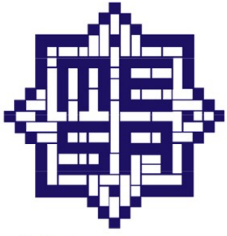


21 November 2023



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc.

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President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to call on your administration to support an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire by all parties in the occupied Gaza Strip and Israel to prevent further loss of civilian lives, to protect necessary and critical civilian infrastructure, and to ensure unimpeded access to life-saving assistance for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amidst the [unprecedented](#) humanitarian catastrophe to which they have been subjected. We [acknowledge](#) and support efforts by your administration to work with the Qatari government and others towards securing the release of the civilian hostages being held in Gaza. At the same time, we affirm that the hostages themselves are imperiled by the ongoing bombardment and ground incursion, and that the [collective punishment](#) of Palestinians to [secure their release](#) is not acceptable. We view efforts to secure a “[humanitarian pause](#)” or [temporary ceasefire](#) as wholly inadequate given the scale of the death, devastation and destruction in the Gaza Strip, and unacceptable due to the implication that attacks on Palestinian civilians will resume following the expiry of such [short-term measures](#). We also call on your administration to demand the immediate and unconditional lifting of the [siege imposed on the Gaza Strip](#) by Israel, including the restoration of water, electricity, and communication services, immediate assistance to repair damaged civilian power, water, and sanitation infrastructure, and importation of fuel. In addition, we ask that you put pressure on the Israeli government to desist from the [surveillance](#) and targeting for [harassment](#) of its Palestinian citizens and to prevent soldiers and settlers from [attacking](#), [killing](#) and [displacing](#) Palestinians in the West Bank and [East Jerusalem](#). Finally, we call on your administration to halt [weapons transfers](#) and [financial support](#) for Israel’s assault on Gaza, which may make the U.S. [complicit](#) in the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity and the failure to prevent genocide, as [some in your own administration](#) have [noted](#) through internal [dissent memos](#) and [resignations](#).

MESA is a non-profit academic membership association, founded in 1966 and headquartered in Washington DC, that fosters the study of the Middle East, promotes high standards of scholarship and teaching, and encourages public understanding of the region and its peoples through programs, publications, and services that enhance education, further intellectual exchange, recognize professional distinction, and defend academic freedom in accordance with its status as a 501(c)(3) scientific, educational, literary and charitable organization. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the flagship *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 members worldwide, the vast majority of whom reside in the United States.

We previously issued a [statement](#) on 16 October 2023 expressing our concern and anguish over the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives on 7 October 2023 and since. Therein we also reaffirmed our commitment to the equal rights of Palestinians and Israelis to live in dignity and safety. Since that time, the death, destruction, and displacement wrought by relentless Israeli siege and bombardment of, as well as ground incursion into, the Gaza Strip has [shocked scholars](#) and analysts who study the region the world over. As of this

writing, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) [reports](#) that the Israeli bombardment campaign and ground incursion has killed over [11,000](#) Palestinians, a number they have not updated since November 10<sup>th</sup> due to the collapse of services and communications, which have hampered the Health Ministry's data collection. UNOCHA has documented that [6,000 others](#) are missing and may be trapped or dead under the rubble awaiting rescue or recovery. Reports indicate that [more children have been killed](#) by the Israeli attack on Gaza than children killed this year in all of the world's most active conflict zones combined. Further, at least [104 United Nations staff members](#) in the Gaza Strip have also been killed. Over 27,000 Palestinians are injured, many of them with catastrophic injuries that go untreated as the health sector in the Gaza Strip has collapsed under Israeli bombardment. The siege imposed by Israel deprives [hospitals](#) of access to clean water and medicine, let alone electricity or fuel to power life-saving equipment such as [incubators](#) and ventilators. The absence of basic medicines, disinfectants, and [anesthesia](#) has meant that the small proportion of Palestinians able to access medical services are subjected to [unimaginably painful](#) procedures and then lack access to the [basic antiseptic](#) materials needed to keep their wounds clean.

The collective punishment inflicted by Israel on all Palestinians in the Gaza Strip is given clearest expression by Israel's declared [siege](#) of the territory, which has cut the entire population off from food, water, fuel, medicine, electricity, and adequate sanitation, as well as periodically [blocking all communications](#) in the territory. The [hunger](#) and [thirst](#) now ubiquitous in Gaza represent a direct threat to the survival of the entire besieged population of over 2.3 million civilians. International medical agencies and the World Health Organization warn that the collapse of sanitation and the lack of access to potable water produce a very real risk of the [spread of infectious diseases](#). Indeed, recent rain in the Gaza Strip has given rise to [further fears](#) of waterborne diseases and bacterial infection as of this writing. The [trickle](#) of humanitarian aid permitted to enter the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing with Egypt is not sufficient to meet more than the needs of a [tiny proportion](#) of the population—reportedly as [little as 4%](#) of the daily need for food and clean water was being met. Such humanitarian aid has rightly been deemed inadequate by [international organizations and humanitarian agencies](#). Even this aid has more recently been ground to a halt by the total absence of fuel and the ongoing blackouts on communications, making it impossible to transfer or coordinate the delivery of humanitarian goods.

More than [1.7 million](#) Palestinian civilians have been forcibly displaced and this internally displaced population in the Gaza Strip has continued to be subjected to bombardment in the areas of south and central Gaza to which they were directed to move by Israeli military officials. Most recently, Israel has now [issued new orders](#) for the evacuation of the city of Khan Younis — itself the site of heavy bombardment in recent days, despite earlier Israeli orders directing Palestinians forcibly dislocated from north of Wadi Gaza [to that area](#). [Gaza City](#), the [largest Palestinian city](#) in the world, has been [reduced to rubble](#) and [its population](#) subject to [forced dislocation](#). Now the next largest city in the Gaza Strip — the [population of Khan Younis](#) included 400,000 residents prior to the arrival of [tens of thousands of internally displaced Palestinians](#) from the north — is also at risk of being depopulated. The ongoing Israeli bombardment and ground incursion of the Gaza Strip is concentrating the surviving population from among the over 2.3 million Palestinian residents of the territory into an ever-smaller proportion of their land,

cut off from the very [barest essentials](#) for subsistence. In [this context](#), Israel's announcement of brief, sporadic "humanitarian pauses" to allow additional civilians to flee areas of heavy bombardment has been described by one United Nations official as "[cynical and cruel](#)." The [resolution](#) passed by the United Nations Security Council on 16 November 2023, calling for further "humanitarian pauses," cannot protect or sustain a population subjected to these conditions. In the words of the head of the World Health Organization, Israeli actions ensure that "[nowhere and no one is safe](#)" in the Gaza Strip.

Alongside the immediate death, destruction, deprivation and dislocation imposed on the entire population of the Gaza Strip, the catastrophic damage to civilian infrastructure in the territory may imperil the ability of Palestinians therein to access basic necessities even after a ceasefire for as much as a generation. The destruction of [residential infrastructure](#) and the health sector — most recently exemplified by the encirclement, siege, [raid](#) and military occupation of the [largest hospital](#) in the Gaza Strip — has rendered nearly half of the territory of the Gaza Strip [unlivable](#). Another clear example of the ongoing toll wrought by the Israeli military onslaught is the destruction of the educational sector in Gaza. UNOCHA reports that [300 school buildings](#) in Gaza have been damaged by bombardment, representing more than 50% of all schools in Gaza. The [625,000 school-age children](#) in Gaza have no access to education, no prospect for the resumption of this school year and no clear path for future access to schooling. The [higher education sector](#) in Gaza has also been decimated with the 88,000 university students in the territory left with little chance of ever completing their studies. Israeli bombardment has all but destroyed three of the largest universities in the Gaza Strip: [the Islamic University of Gaza](#), [Al-Azhar University](#), and the North Gaza branch of [Al-Quds Open University](#) have all sustained massive damage, including the complete destruction of numerous higher education buildings. The Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research estimates that more than [four hundred](#) university faculty and students have been killed. As we warned in our statement of 16 October, the cumulative effect of Israel's attack on Gaza imperils, among much else, "even the possibility of access to education for generations of Gazan children and students into the indefinite future."

Beyond the Israeli bombardment and ground incursion against Gaza, the Israeli government has also enabled a massive escalation in settler and soldier violence against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. UNOCHA already reported that the first nine months of 2023 had witnessed a substantial increase in settler violence against Palestinians, the forcible displacement of more than [1,100 Palestinians](#) and the depopulation of villages in the West Bank, enabled by the indifference or complicity of the Israeli military. Since 7 October, the pattern of settler and soldier violence has [further escalated](#), resulting in the deaths of [over 200 Palestinians](#), in the West Bank. With international attention diverted to Gaza, settlers supported by Israeli soldiers have succeeded in depopulating [fifteen Palestinian communities](#) in the West Bank, while Israeli authorities have conducted [mass arbitrary arrests](#) of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, subjecting those detained to [severe mistreatment](#). Similar reports of [abusive detention conditions](#) have also emerged for Palestinian citizens of Israel arrested for their [social media posts](#) as part of an accelerating campaign of surveillance and [harassment](#) by Israeli officials within Israel's internationally recognized borders. You have said in a recent [opinion piece](#) that you have been "emphatic with Israel's leaders that extremist violence against Palestinians in the West Bank must stop," that those responsible

must be held accountable and that your administration might issue visa bans against those who attack civilians in the West Bank. While we welcome these commitments, they do not go far enough, notably failing to acknowledge how the [Israeli government facilitates](#) soldier and settler attacks against Palestinian civilians, seemingly using violence as an informal tool to seize ever more Palestinian territory.

Our membership is comprised of the leading scholars, analysts, researchers, and experts on the Middle East in the humanities and social sciences based in North America (and beyond). There is a growing consensus among [human rights organizations](#), [international law experts](#) and, indeed, many of the scholars in our membership, that the Israeli attacks on and siege of Gaza constitute [war crimes](#) and [crimes against humanity](#) and that, taken together with [statements](#) by [Israeli officials](#), may amount to [acts of genocide](#). Similarly, settler and soldier violence targeting Palestinians in the West Bank contribute further to a pattern of widespread and systematic human rights violations that may amount to crimes against humanity. Finally, the campaign of government [surveillance](#) and [public harassment](#) of Palestinian citizens of Israel compounds the record of persecution of Palestinians in all areas under Israeli government control.

As a scholarly community we join the many other [organizations](#), [groups](#), and [communities](#) across the United States and globally—including [many civil servants](#) working in your administration—in calling on your government to demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional lifting of the siege on the Gaza Strip to bring to an end this carnage. We demand that you support United Nations Security Council action in the service of such a permanent ceasefire. We further call on your administration to demand that Israel desist from and prevent the pattern of human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We also join [those](#) who have called for your administration to halt all further financial assistance and especially weapons transfers to Israel in light of Israel's [violations of international humanitarian law](#), the [indiscriminate bombardment](#) of Gaza, and the applicable [U.S. laws](#) governing conventional arms transfers. [Polls](#) have shown that a majority of voters in the United States support calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and reject your administration's policy of unconditional support for Israel.

In closing we reiterate our call on your administration to act immediately to secure a permanent and unconditional ceasefire and lifting of the siege on the Gaza Strip to [protect the lives](#) of millions of Palestinians today and to salvage any hope of a peaceful future in which the equal rights of Palestinians and Israelis to live in dignity and safety may be realized.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



Aslı Ü. Bâli

MESA President

Professor of Law, Yale Law School

MESA Letter regarding ceasefire of Gaza

21 November 2023

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CC:

The Honorable Antony Blinken

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U.S. Department of State

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Mr. Jake Sullivan

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