



## **Open Statement: Women Demand Urgent Action and Accountability for Gaza Crisis**

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security issues this open statement to call on the Australian Government as part of the international community to undertake every effort to ensure an immediate and permanent ceasefire and to hold the Israeli Government accountable for the failure to protect and prevent attacks on civilians, aid workers, medical staff and journalists in Gaza. The Coalition expresses its solidarity with all Palestinian women who have been disproportionately impacted by the ongoing conflict, occupation and humanitarian crisis yet continue to demonstrate tremendous leadership, courage, and resilience.

The Coalition has received first-hand accounts from women's rights activists within Palestine and the diaspora, detailing the extreme hardships endured by Palestinian women and their families and the failure of the international community to protect and prevent the loss of civilian lives in accordance with the central tenets of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The Coalition calls on the international community to ensure the rights and priorities of women in Gaza and the West Bank are urgently addressed and that concrete steps are taken to guarantee their safety and protection.

The Coalition notes that the situation in Gaza is at crisis point, with the forced evacuation of over one million people and counting in Rafah and the closure of the humanitarian corridor between Egypt and Gaza. [UNFPA](#) has stated that: "The scale and speed of death and destruction in Gaza are unparalleled", impacting every aspect of daily life. There is truly no safe space left in Gaza, as the events on Monday, May 27, 2024 made clear, when an Israeli air strike killed at least 45 people in an area designated as a 'safe zone.' The strike ignited a fire that tore through a tent city sheltering Palestinians already displaced by the conflict.

The relentless devastation, grief and suffering inflicted on the people of Gaza has reached critical levels, as the situation worsens each day. Over two million residents face severe food insecurity, overcrowded living conditions, and minimal access to essential resources. Recent military actions have had devastating consequences: [90% of schools have been destroyed](#), [every university](#) has been bombed, and many hospitals are out of service. Of the 35,000 deaths in Gaza since the conflict began, [52%](#) are [women and children](#).

Palestinian women are calling for a new narrative, which recognises that the current crisis stems from a 16-year blockade of Gaza by the Israeli Defence Force, and the longstanding occupation of Palestinian territories. The effects of the conflict on essential services for women and children were already severe before the war due to the blockade, and they have only worsened as the conflict persists. Palestinian women in Gaza are facing extreme difficulties in accessing healthcare—especially prenatal and maternal services—and are living in constant fear of displacement and violence. The deliberate targeting of healthcare facilities has affected an

estimated [50,000 pregnant Palestinian women and 20,000 newborn babies](#). The conflict has become [“a sexual and reproductive health catastrophe.”](#)

Women are also facing immense obstacles in accessing necessary medication, with some having to relocate multiple times to obtain medical care and the last remaining maternity hospital in North Gaza now under siege. [More than 540,000 women and girls of reproductive age are at increased risk due to poor access to life-saving services, clean water, and sanitation](#). Restrictions on the entry of vital medical supplies into Gaza continue to degrade the already limited health services available.

These deliberate actions constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law and severe infringements on the basic rights and well-being of Palestinian women and their families. The complete neglect of the WPS agenda in Gaza is having devastating consequences, as [stated](#) by Australia’s Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative at the Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations, at the UN Security Council Open Debate on WPS in October 2023, reiterating the message of the United Nations Security General in his annual report on WPS.

[Reports from UN experts highlight alarming human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls](#), including arbitrary detention, severe beatings, sexual assault, and atrocities such as arbitrary executions and disappearances. The WPS Coalition also notes the reported acts of sexual violence against Israeli women and girls that also require proper investigation and accountability as a matter of international criminal law. These egregious acts demand not only condemnation, but also immediate and decisive action to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent further acts of violence.

Amidst these troubling violations, the Coalition shares the deep concerns of Palestinian women [about the denial of dignified burials for victims of violence in Gaza as a core demand for justice](#). Palestinian women face the anguish of not being able to properly lay their loved ones to rest, compounding their suffering. This denial violates international humanitarian principles and underscores the urgent need for accountability and respect for fundamental rights.

We call upon the Australian Government to address the complete neglect of the WPS agenda and to take decisive and immediate action to protect and uphold the rights of Palestinian women and their families. As called for by all peace activists and Palestinian women leaders, we specifically urge the government to:

- Ensure accountability for sexual and gender-based violence by all parties, including protecting women and girls, holding perpetrators accountable, and enhancing support services with safe reporting pathways and humanitarian access;
- Intensify diplomatic engagement for a just resolution to the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which must include unwavering advocacy for the inclusion of Palestinian women and their rights in all peace negotiations;
- Provide a substantial increase in humanitarian aid to Gaza, including for the specific health and well-being needs of affected women and children;
- Uphold international mechanisms and legal frameworks for accountability, including respect for the findings of the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court; and

- Halt the transfer of any weapons, ammunition and parts used in the manufacture of arms where the Israeli Defense Force is the end user, and advocate for an international arms embargo against Israel to mitigate the growing impact on Palestinian civilians.

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security stands united in advocating for the protection and rights of Palestinian women in Gaza and the West Bank, urging immediate action to address the dire humanitarian situation and to ensure accountability for human rights violations. We call on the Australian Government to provide leadership to ensure that the WPS Agenda is not neglected and that immediate action is taken to meet its obligations to address the humanitarian needs and rights of women and children in Gaza.

#### About us:

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security ('the Coalition') is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Australia, Asia and the Pacific region and globally. The Coalition brings together activists, feminists, practitioners, humanitarian actors and those with first-hand experience working on gender, peace and security. Coalition members have wide-ranging expertise in gender and peace.

#### Signatures:

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