



Statement Deploing the Inaction of the International Community to Stop Genocide in Gaza, with Special Reference to the Role of the United States

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The Lemkin Institute regards with dismay and sorrow the inaction and apparent powerlessness of the “international community” towards the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. In complete darkness, without food and water, sheltering from falling bombs and missiles, the people of Gaza cry out to the world for help only to be abandoned by the powerholders who could make a direct and immediate difference. This is a failure of humanity of the highest order and sharp indictment of the current global system. The Lemkin Institute calls for a thoroughgoing rethinking of global institutions and of the world’s clearly broken genocide prevention protocols in the face of the Western abrogation of all commitments to a rule- and law-based international order.

Amid widespread death and destruction after over 40 days of constant bombing, the Israeli military continues its ground invasion of the Gaza Strip, causing daily an ever larger loss of innocent lives. Israel’s ground invasion began late Friday, October 27 with furious fighting engulfing northwest Gaza as the death toll in the Strip approaches 15,000. The invasion brought hostage negotiations between Hamas and Israel, mediated by Qatar, to a grinding halt. Amid the chaos, leaked military documents outlined an Israeli plan to forcibly transfer millions of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to Egypt. A plan of this sort is an obvious case of forced population transfer, a war crime, which, in this context, also amounts to genocide.

A furiously rising death toll in Gaza comes while Zionist settlers attack villages and forcibly displace hundreds of Palestinians in the West Bank, all with the clear permission of the Israeli military. Several villages have been entirely depopulated by settlers while thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank—not the Gaza Strip—have been detained without charge or trial.

Despite the intolerable horror and anguish being faced by Gazans, which is visible to anyone on social media, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has rebuffed the desperate cries of over two million Palestinians on four separate occasions. Led primarily by Israel’s chief ally on

the UNSC, the United States, Western nations have rallied around opposition to ceasefire and even to a paltry ‘humanitarian pause.’

In genocide prevention, actions speak louder than words. World leaders should know by now that blind support of heavily militarized, extremist states such as Israel will lead to mass atrocity, especially when state leaders are publicly framing their rhetoric in zero-sum, existential terms. And yet, the very Western leaders who should be encouraging their ally Israel to de-escalate are doing the opposite. In fact, the Biden administration has forbidden the use of the term “de-escalate” by all government officials.

A clear example of intentional US obstructionism was the vote during the October 18 session of the UNSC. While expressing concern for the situation in Gaza, the US representative to the UN nonetheless voted “no” to a resolution drafted by Brazil calling for an immediate cessation of Israel’s bombardment. In contrast, 12 of the 15 Council members voted in favor of the resolution. Russia and the United Kingdom abstained. The United States, as a permanent member of the Council, chose to use its veto, ending any chance of the resolution's passage.

We are in a dark moment of human history, one that will not soon be forgotten. For Palestinians, this will be a second Nakba, with perhaps an even worse outcome, such as the complete erasure of a Palestinian presence in historical Palestine. For the world’s institutions, this will be an inexcusable failure on the level of the failure in Rwanda in 1994, but this one taking place *after* world institutions and governments committed themselves to the Responsibility to Protect doctrine and numerous genocide prevention protocols and measures. For the United States, the genocide in Gaza will spell the end of any credibility it may still have had since the 2003 invasion of Iraq in claiming to stand for international peace and security.

There are, however, hopeful signs in this dark time, which point to an emerging world system that could improve on what we currently have.

In a demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinian people and as a rebuke of the Security Council, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) overwhelmingly voted for an immediate cessation of fighting in Gaza.

Voting on October 27, following the UNSC’s failures, the UNGA demanded a humanitarian truce leading to a durable ceasefire. A total of 120 nations supported the ceasefire resolution, while 45 abstained, and 14 voted against. Predictably, those voting against were the United States and Israel, joined by several island nations beholden to US aid as well as several EU countries, namely Austria, Croatia, and Czechia.

Following multiple failed sessions, the UNSC finally adopted a resolution on 15 November regarding the devastation in Gaza. The Council voted with 12 nations in favor and 3 abstaining, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia. Language in the resolution condemns the taking of hostages and the collective punishment of civilians:

[The Council] calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas and other groups, especially children, as well as ensuring immediate humanitarian access...calls on all parties to refrain from depriving the civilian population in Gaza of basic services and aid indispensable to their survival, consistent with international humanitarian law.

On 24 November, after over seven weeks of war, Hamas and Israel had reportedly agreed to a temporary ceasefire. The deal will include the release of as many as 50 hostages held by Hamas, in exchange for up to 150 women and children held by Israel, without charge, in Israeli prisons. Reports from the ground indicate Israeli forces immediately broke the truce when firing on Gazans attempting to return to their homes in the North of the Gaza Strip. Hamas has released 105 hostages as of December 5.

The Lemkin Institute further wishes to highlight the brave protesters across the world who continue to show up in the tens of thousands to do some of the most important genocide prevention work that can be done. The world belongs to all human beings; each one of us deserves to live in dignity and security in our distinct identities. When leaders do not represent this fundamental right to life in their actions, we must hold them accountable and make our voices heard across the world's many borders and identities.

Leading the brave charge for clarity and conscience in condemning the ongoing genocide is the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. On October 24, Mr. Guterres made a powerful statement to the UNSC, calling for an immediate ceasefire while citing the historic and continued oppression of Palestinians. Contrary to the accusations of Israel's representative to the UN, Guterres did in fact condemn Hamas on multiple occasions. Guterres, beholden to decisions made by the UNGA and UNSC, spoke truth to power:

It is important to also recognize the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing...

...I mourn and honour the dozens of UN colleagues working for UNRWA – sadly, at least 35 and counting – killed in the bombardment of Gaza over the last two weeks...

...Finally, we must be clear on the principle of upholding human dignity. Polarization and

dehumanization are being fueled by a tsunami of disinformation. We must stand up to the forces of antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and all forms of hate.

The Palestinian representative to the UN praised the speech, while Israel condemned Guterres. Israeli representatives to the UN later donned Holocaust-esque gold stars on their chest in protest. The display was so inflammatory that Yad Vashem — The World Holocaust Remembrance Center — denounced the stunt.

Craig Mokhiber, now former Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, is another courageous soul standing for what is right. On October 28, writing to the UN High Commissioner in Geneva, Mokhiber tendered his resignation, effective immediately, in protest of the UN's impotence in halting the genocide in Gaza. Mr. Mokhiber is a lawyer specializing in international human rights law, has served the UN in multiple capacities since the 1990s, and acted as senior human rights advisor in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Sudan.

In his resignation letter, Mr. Mokhiber attested to the UN's inaction:

High Commissioner, we are failing again.

...the current wholesale slaughter of the Palestinian people, rooted in an ethno-nationalist settler colonial ideology, in continuation of decades of their systematic persecution and purging, based entirely upon their status as Arabs, and coupled with explicit statements of intent by leaders in the Israeli government and military, leaves no room for doubt or debate...Across the land, Apartheid rules.

This is a text-book case of genocide...What's more, the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and much of Europe, are wholly complicit in the horrific assault.

Moral dissent has also reached the ranks of the US State Department, Josh Paul formerly oversaw weapons transfers to allies. In response to the indiscriminate air campaign and unabashed US support for the assault, Mr. Paul resigned from his position and has continued to speak out. Paul says over the years he made a number of moral calculations on whether the 'good' he was doing was outweighing the 'bad.' Following the October 7 assault by Hamas and subsequent Israeli response, Paul began to draft his resignation letter:

I cannot work in support of a set of major policy decisions, including rushing more arms to one side of the conflict, that I believe to be shortsighted, destructive, unjust, and contradictory to the very values that we publicly espouse, and which I wholeheartedly endorse: a world built around a rules-based order, a world that advances both equality and

equity, and a world whose arc of history bends towards the promise of liberty, and of justice, for all.

The Lemkin Institute honors António Guterres, Craig Mokhiber, and former US State Department official Josh Paul for their commitment to human rights, just peace, and fighting to end an ongoing genocide. In a joint statement November 6, the leaders of 18 UN agencies called for an immediate ceasefire. The Lemkin Institute stands with these brave individuals.

We call on Western powers, namely the United States, to heed the calls of the UNGA, the Secretary-General, and officials around the globe declaring their opposition to genocide. We stand with brave Jewish protestors who refuse to allow their faith to be used to justify a genocidal war.

The Lemkin Institute laments the inaction of the broader international community and calls on its members to heed the cries of the voiceless. Over 14,506 people, including 6,150 children, have been killed by Israeli airstrikes and shelling since October 7, with over 2,500 still buried under the rubble. The assault has produced an acute humanitarian crisis; experts warn water is running out in the besieged enclave; some might soon succumb to hunger and thirst.

At the Lemkin Institute, we will always center threatened communities in our framing, especially those experiencing genocide, and will continue to work with good faith partners build a world that can prevent genocide. In this vein, while condemning the UNSC, we at the Lemkin Institute praise the UNGA and its 120 member states who stood in opposition to the genocide in Gaza. We urge these countries to adopt genocide prevention as a core principle of their foreign and domestic policies in a push to get prevention on the international agenda. We further urge that they continue to put pressure on institutions and states who are complicit in the genocide in Gaza so that we have a greater chance of reducing harm, saving the Palestinian people, and holding perpetrators accountable.

The Lemkin Institute recalls the words of writer James Baldwin: “The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe; and I am beginning to suspect that whoever is incapable of recognizing this may be incapable of morality.”