

## Statement by Minister Jean Asselborn regarding the situation in Gaza following the terrorist attacks by Hamas (13.10.2023)

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The Luxembourg Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Jean Asselborn, would like to recall his position on current events in Israel and Palestine, as expressed on RTL Tele on Tuesday 10 October, as well as in a tweet in the early morning hours of Sunday 8 October, just after the start of the terrorist attack:

"Minister Asselborn reiterates that he condemns in the strongest possible terms the barbaric terrorist attacks and atrocities committed in recent days by extremist Hamas militants against countless innocent civilians in Israel. Minister Asselborn fully aligns himself with UN Secretary General Guterres who stated that nothing can justify these acts of terror and the killing, maiming and abduction of civilians. The Minister stands by the many victims of these heinous attacks and unequivocally reaffirms Israel's right to defend itself. He calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages.

In parallel, Minister Asselborn is also calling for de-escalation and a cessation of hostilities. Like Secretary General Guterres, he is deeply distressed by the announcement of a complete siege of the Gaza Strip, with no electricity, fuel, water or food for 2.3 million civilians, which are trapped and helplessly exposed to the current air raids without shelter.

The call by Israel to 1.1 million people in Northern Gaza to evacuate towards the South within 24 hours is deeply troubling. The United Nations have reacted to say that such a movement cannot take place without devastating humanitarian consequences. Minister Asselborn joins the United Nations in strongly appealing 'for any such order, if confirmed, to be rescinded, avoiding what could transform what is already a tragedy into a calamitous situation'.

Jean Asselborn appeals to Israel to act in full compliance with international law and to ensure the protection of civilians. The civilian population in Gaza is not Hamas and it cannot be held responsible and punished collectively for the horrors committed by the latter.

While it is paramount to ensure that no EU funding is diverted to Hamas, vital humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian population has to be maintained. An estimated 220,000 Palestinians are now sheltering in 92 UNRWA facilities across Gaza, in very dire conditions. It is of utmost importance that rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access and safe passage for the civilian population be restored without delay and that fundamental international humanitarian law be respected. As Secretary General Guterres has stressed, the protection of civilians is essential and must be maintained at all times. UN premises and all hospitals, schools and clinics must never be targeted.

While Israel must conduct its legitimate security operations to defend itself from terrorism, humanity and the values of human life and dignity should always be upheld, in accordance with international humanitarian law. As Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on 12 October at the press conference after the meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu in Tel Aviv: 'We democracies distinguish ourselves from terrorists by striving for a different standard – even when it's difficult – and holding ourselves to account when we fall short. Our humanity – the value that we place on human life and human dignity – that's what makes us who we are.'

There is a serious risk that this conflict will turn into a regional conflagration, as the United Nations has warned. The recent exchanges of fire along the Blue Line and the recent attacks reported from southern Lebanon are very worrying. Any spillover of the conflict must be prevented. This also applies to the West Bank, where the increase in settler violence and the forced transfer of Palestinian communities has reached alarming levels. Israel, as the occupying power, is bound by international law to ensure the protection of civilians, even when conducting military operations.

Finally, Minister Jean Asselborn reiterates that these dramatic events underline the urgency of finding a political settlement to this conflict, which for generations has been a source of misery and grief for both Israelis and Palestinians. A comprehensive, just and lasting peace, based on the two-State solution within the pre-1967 borders, with two democratic States living side by side, while maintaining the status quo on the holy sites of Jerusalem, is the only viable way to achieve this objective.

Luxembourg's Foreign Minister remains firmly committed to a peaceful resolution of this conflict that safeguards Israel's right to security, while respecting the Palestinians' right to self-determination. Only a meaningful political process can bring an end to this devastating cycle of violence and senseless loss of life."