



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement delivered on behalf of the Benelux countries by

Ambassador Philippe Kridelka, Permanent Representative

**United Nations Security Council – Open debate – “The situation
in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”**

New York, 23 January 2024

Monsieur le Président,
Excellences,

Je vous remercie d'avoir organisé ce débat important et je salue les efforts entrepris par la présidence française du Conseil en vue d'obtenir des résultats concrets dans les dossiers dont celui-ci est saisi.

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the three Benelux countries: the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and my own country, Belgium.

Whilst aligning ourselves fully with the statement of the European Union and notwithstanding our respective and **well-known national positions on the conflict**, the Benelux countries would like to take this opportunity to focus solely on the implementation of the mandate of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator.

We welcome the expeditious appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Senior Coordinator and will fully support her in her endeavors.

M. President,

1. We are deeply concerned by the **dire humanitarian** situation in the Gaza Strip and its grave impact on the civilian population, especially the disproportionate effect on children. International humanitarian law must be respected by all parties at all times. Civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, should never be a target.

2. With regards to this dire humanitarian situation, including the levels of acute food insecurity, we would like to stress **3 urgent points of action** that require immediate operational steps by the parties involved. We hope that the appointment of Ms. Kaag will be instrumental for their implementation, and we call on the members of this Council and the entire UN membership to fully support her.
 - i. The first point is **access** : All relevant border crossings and all other feasible options must be fully used. Humanitarian actors should have full, unimpeded and safe access to the whole of Gaza, notably via safe corridors throughout the Strip. Access arrangements should be facilitated and streamlined as much as possible.

 - ii. My second point is **volume** : Based on improved access, delivery to Gaza needs to be drastically increased, in order to meet the actual needs. Clearing and monitoring procedures need to be simplified in order to enable humanitarian organizations to deliver aid effectively and efficiently. Of course, humanitarian aid will not be enough to reverse the worsening hunger among the population. The restoration of a

- functioning market, allowing for essential supplies to enter Gaza and private actors to operate, should also be a priority.
- iii. The third point is **trust** : We are confident that, through her actions, Ms. Kaag will also be able to improve the level of trust between the concerned parties. We call on those parties to allow her to operate effectively, to engage with her in good faith and to provide her with the necessary room to achieve tangible results for civilian population in Gaza.

M. President,

3. The successful implementation of the Coordinator's mandate is an objective we should all commit to. As a first minimum imperative, the focus should lie on the implementation of an **immediate temporary humanitarian ceasefire** and on the creation of the **conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities**.
Furthermore, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of all **hostages**.

M. President,

4. Under **international humanitarian law** the parties have clear **obligations** regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance. Resolutions 2712 and 2720 are unequivocal: *"the parties should allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at a scale required directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip"*. Parties must also ensure the functioning of critical infrastructure and provide essential services. Israel and the

other actors on the ground have an **obligation of results**. Now is the time to deliver!

5. Finally, we look forward to the Coordinator's to expeditiously establish a **UN mechanism** for accelerating the provision of humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza *"with the goal of expediting, streamlining, and accelerating the process of providing assistance while continuing to help ensure that aid reaches its civilian destination"*, also taking into account the specific needs of women and girls. We again call on all members of this Council and the parties to work constructively with Ms. Kaag and her team in this regard.

I thank you.