

## **Statement by Refugee Council of Australia, 10 November 2023**

On 20 October 2023, Refugee Council CEO [Paul Power wrote to the Prime Minister](#), Foreign Minister and Minister for Immigration to express our distress about the situation in Israel and Gaza, and ask that the Australian Government intervene urgently to seek an immediate end to the loss of life, to work towards a peaceful resolution in the region, and to ensure safety and social cohesion in our communities.

As the crisis continues and worsens, the Refugee Council echoes the calls by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Pope Francis, and many other world leaders for an urgent and immediate ceasefire, for the release of all hostages, and for humanitarian corridors to open so that aid and assistance can reach the civilians suffering in Gaza.

Secretary-General Guterres criticised the bombardment of refugee camps, hospitals, and other shelters, recognising that civilians in Gaza, including children, cannot find safety anywhere. He also condemned Hamas' use of civilians as human shields and their indiscriminate rocket launches into Israel. The Pope has again called for a ceasefire and for efforts to stop the conflict from growing. The pontiff renewed his call for the preservation of life, for the injured to be rescued and for aid to urgently get to the people in need in Gaza, especially for the children facing a grave future.

The Refugee Council echoes these concerns, noting that our members, supporters and refugee communities across Australia are deeply disturbed by the ongoing conflict. Many of our members have family and friends affected by the conflict on both sides. We condemn the terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians by armed militant Palestinian groups, and condemn the Israeli Defence Force's attacks on Palestinian civilians and the blockade of the Gaza strip, which has prevented water, food, electricity and urgent medical supplies from entering. The humanitarian situation in Gaza grows more dire each day: the bombing of refugee camps and other places for civilian shelter is deeply disturbing.

Every effort must be made to ensure essential supplies are allowed in and that the bombardment stops. The immediate and unconditional release of all hostages is also essential and requires a coordinated effort to achieve.

As we shared in our letter to the Prime Minister in October, the Refugee Council reiterates the calls from the Australian Council for International Development for the Australian Government to work with international partners to ensure:

1. Protection of civilians
2. Negotiation for the safe release of hostages
3. Humanitarian access
4. A ceasefire to end rapidly escalating conflict, and
5. Renewed efforts towards a long-term diplomatic solution.

We also note that the crisis continues to affect communities in Australia, directly and indirectly, causing increased fear and hostility. We are grateful for the Australian Government's leadership and quick action in arranging flights to evacuate Australians and Pacific Islands citizens from the conflict. We also welcome the recent commitment to increase security at places of worship and other community spaces. We again call on the Australian Government to build on these efforts and ensure the safety of our communities and to work towards social cohesion. We condemn all hate speech and racial vilification and encourage community leaders to work towards peace in our communities.

The Refugee Council urges the Australian Government to increase its efforts to work towards peace in the Middle East.