

Gaza crisis: joint statement by Caritas agencies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand

In a joint statement dated [13 December 2023](#), the prime ministers of Australia, Canada and New Zealand called for a ceasefire and peace in Gaza. On [15 February 2024](#), they reiterated the call, adding that they were “gravely concerned by indications that Israel is planning a ground offensive into Rafah,” which, they warned, “would be catastrophic.”

As members of the world’s second-largest humanitarian association operating in over 160 countries and as organizations that have provided aid in Gaza and the West Bank for decades, we, the Caritas agencies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, acknowledge the importance of these statements and share the prime ministers’ assessment.

A month on, however, we are disturbed to note that Israel is not heeding their call to “listen to the international community,” and that the plight of vulnerable civilians in Gaza is worsening rapidly.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [reports](#) over 31,300 people killed and over 73,100 injured in Gaza. Moreover, starvation has become a very real danger. Already 27 people, including 23 children, have died of malnutrition and about half a million people are facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity.

Given this context, **we urge the Government of Australia to restore funding to UNRWA** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), in line with the policies of [Canada](#) and [New Zealand](#).

While the provision of aid to the besieged people of Gaza by any means is welcome, it is our consensus that air drops, in addition to being undignified, are like proposed maritime deliveries in being neither viable nor sustainable. A single truck can deliver [up to 10 times as much aid](#) as an airdrop. As the World Food Programme’s [deputy executive director said](#), “Airdrops are a last resort and will not avert famine. We need entry points to northern Gaza that will allow us to deliver enough food for half a million people in desperate need.”

Therefore, [Caritas Australia](#), [Development and Peace — Caritas Canada](#) and [Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand](#) urge the prime ministers and governments of Australia, Canada and New Zealand to deploy all diplomatic, political, legal and economic means possible to immediately bring about:

- **A permanent end to hostilities** by all parties in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel
- **The release of all hostages and arbitrarily detained people** by Hamas and the Israeli authorities
- **The establishment of guaranteed humanitarian corridors** to permit the safe and efficient delivery of food, water, fuel and relief supplies and the free movement of aid workers

These measures are urgently needed to prevent famine, additional destruction and the further regional spread of the conflict.

As the people of Gaza mark the holy periods of Lent and Ramadan, we call on our prime ministers to act on their conviction “that a sustainable ceasefire is necessary to finding a path towards securing lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians.”