

Caritas Australia, statement on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, 27th October.

\$15m in funding must reach millions of civilians facing multiple threats to life.

Caritas Australia welcomes the Australian Government's announcement of an additional \$15m in funding to support those impacted by the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

We also strongly support comments from Hon Penny Wong regarding the essential nature of humanitarian pauses, as to date nowhere near enough aid has entered Gaza.

Women and children represent 68 per cent of the fatalities in Gaza since October 7th.

Children make up around half the population in the region and are particularly vulnerable to dehydration, starvation, disease, and exposure to the elements. This is a major concern given 42 per cent of homes have been destroyed, and with food, water, and vital medicines in disastrously low supply.

So far, the volume of humanitarian aid let in amounts to about 3 per cent of what entered Gaza prior to the conflict. That is not, and could never be, enough to keep Gaza's civilian population alive in the face of such overwhelming challenges.

Particularly vulnerable too are around 20,000 pregnant women. There are reports of caesareans being performed on severely injured mothers, but without painkillers, clean water, and power for hospitals, these surgeries will become impossible. This would have devastating consequences for these women and their children.

As clean water runs out people are also beginning to drink unsafe supplies. As this continues, we fear disease will run through large communities of displaced people creating a public health disaster.

To avert this, governments must continue to place pressure on humanitarian access supported by a ceasefire. Caritas Australia has signed the [#CeasefireNow](#) petition alongside hundreds of organisations worldwide and would urge politicians to take note of the overwhelming support for this call from the humanitarian sector.

Humanitarian aid properly administered could profoundly impact the lives of innocent civilians enduring unspeakable suffering in Gaza.

The Caritas network has been working in the region for over 50 years, with offices in Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank. Hundreds of staff in Caritas partner agencies have been providing humanitarian services, including health and psychosocial support, for decades. Many, including 32 international staff, were on the ground when conflict broke out and are waiting for safe access to resume their work. Vital supplies of medicine, food, water, and shelter also wait at the border, but more will be required to provide ongoing support. To date, Caritas partners have been able to provide cash support for over 7,000 families and are supporting four churches sheltering 1,200 people.

The global church community also continues to mourn the loss of 18 lives, including a Caritas Jerusalem staff member and her family, during the bombing of The Church of Saint Porphyrius.

We echo the sentiments of Pope Francis, who said that "war always is a defeat, it is a destruction of human fraternity," and call strongly for humanitarian needs to take precedence over conflict.

Without intervention, hunger, dehydration, and disease could take an unimaginable toll on Gaza's most vulnerable within days, or even hours. The need is urgent and humanitarian assistance must be prioritised.