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## Press release

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*Gaza: Joint appeal by development organisations*

### **Federal Council must actively support unrestricted humanitarian aid**

**The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is disastrous. Swiss development organisations are calling on the Federal Council to endorse the joint declaration by over 20 countries and to immediately do everything in its power to ensure that humanitarian aid can be provided without restriction and impartially.**

While the first trucks carrying aid supplies have reached the Gaza Strip again this week, the Israeli government continues to restrict vital aid to the civilian population. The number of trucks currently entering the Gaza Strip is far from sufficient to meet the needs of the 2.1 million residents. Simultaneously, the Israeli army is maintaining its ground offensive initiated at the start of the week. It is conducting air strikes in the densely populated coastal strip, forcing the civilian population to evacuate to increasingly smaller areas. Humanitarian facilities and convoys are repeatedly attacked. The situation of the civilian population has reached catastrophic proportions - decisive, internationally coordinated action is required without delay.

The Israeli plan for the provision of humanitarian aid that has become known in recent days is alarming for several reasons: The goods are to be distributed in four "hubs" exclusively in the south of the Gaza Strip and under the sole control of Israel. Long access routes through unsecured and destroyed areas where fighting is still ongoing are placing people in need and aid workers at risk. Aid would be severely restricted and would only be accessible to those undergoing a security check by the Israeli army. Private security companies are to replace independent humanitarian organisations. This plan fundamentally contradicts the neutrality principle of international humanitarian law and links humanitarian aid to political and military objectives. Humanitarian aid must not be instrumentalised by parties to the conflict.

Caritas Switzerland, the Swiss Church Aid (HEKS/EPER), Helvetas, Terre des hommes, Swissaid, Solidar Suisse and Alliance Sud are calling on the Federal Council to work for the immediate and unrestricted access to humanitarian aid for the civilian population in need and respect for international humanitarian law at various levels

- Switzerland must join the joint donor statement on humanitarian aid to Gaza signed by over 20 countries. In this declaration, the foreign ministers of the signatory states - including Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Australia and Canada - call on Israel to "allow a full resumption of aid into Gaza immediately and enable the UN and humanitarian organisations to work independently and impartially to save lives, reduce suffering and maintain dignity."
- This week, the Federal Council expressed their concern about the situation in the Gaza Strip. However, simply showing concern is not enough. The Federal Council must make a strong case to Israel for unhindered access for humanitarian aid and resolutely oppose the erosion of humanitarian principles that can be observed - through all political and diplomatic means.
- The Federal Council must work to ensure that humanitarian principles are fully respected and protected. Independent organisations are needed to ensure that basic principles of

humanitarian aid such as neutrality, impartiality and independence can be upheld. This is not guaranteed with the new Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which is based in Geneva. As the depositary state of the Geneva conventions, Switzerland must firmly distance itself from any attempts to instrumentalise humanitarian aid for political and military purposes.

- The Federal Council must do everything in its power to put an end to the violence and the ongoing destruction. Switzerland must commit to advocating strongly for an immediate ceasefire, the protection of the civilian population in Gaza and the West Bank and the release of civilian Israeli hostages.

The people in Gaza need help - now. This is also urgently evident in the projects of Swiss NGOs with their partner organisations in the concerned areas. Switzerland must live up to its humanitarian tradition and promote strict compliance with international humanitarian law.

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