



Statement on humanitarian action and the situation in Palestine

Geneva-Based humanitarians and scholars of humanitarianism
November, 2023



On the 31st of October 2023, professors and participants in the Master of Advanced Studies in Humanitarian Action at the Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies - humanitarian professionals most of whom have a strong field experience and knowledge of the Middle East - came together to discuss the current situation in Palestine and Israel. The discussion was structured around four general questions:

1. How do you react to the recent events in Israel and Palestine?
2. What kind of questions do they pose to humanitarian values, to



humanitarian organisations, to humanitarian workers?

3. What kind of responses could we conceive in such a difficult situation to promote the humanitarian values and inspire the action of the humanitarian organisations and humanitarian workers.
4. In light of those events, what is the significance of humanitarianism and humanitarian action in today's world?

Based upon opinions shared during this discussion, the following statement, initially meant to appear on the Centre's webpage, was produced. Since the Centre's Direction refused its publication and in line with the [International Humanitarian Studies Association's call](#) for Humanitarian Studies scholars to "speak truth to power and counter any silencing mechanism that jeopardizes academic freedom and the freedom of expression", we are grateful to Allegra Lab for accepting to have it reproduced here.

As practitioners and scholars of humanitarianism, as citizens of the world, as human beings:

We are horrified by the action of Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the response by the government of Israel.

We are devastated by the escalation of violence in Gaza and the suffering of people in Israel and Palestine.

We extend our solidarity to those suffering and grieving the loss of loved ones in Israel and Palestine.

We are disturbed by the obstacles faced by the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations to fulfill their mandate and protect the rights and dignity of people in Gaza who are victims of methodical violence.

We are distressed by the continuous pervasive violation of the fundamental principles of human rights and international humanitarian law in Palestine, in



particular in Gaza where UN authorities have mentioned a real threat of “mass ethnic cleansing” and even “genocide.”

We are convinced that no peace in Israel and Palestine can be achieved as long as the political rights of the Palestinians are not recognized. Violence will not stop until the conditions that produced it are addressed.

We are deeply concerned by the limitation of freedom of expression and censorship in Western democracies, where peaceful expression of solidarity with Palestinians have been repressed, as well as by the growing number of both antisemitic and Islamophobic acts in Europe and North America.

We emphasize the importance of situating the recent events in the continuous loss of Palestinian lands as a result of Israel’s settlement policies and more broadly of considering the historical and political context of the actions of Western states before, during and after World War II, as well as the process of colonization and decolonization in the Middle East and elsewhere.

As practitioners and scholars of humanitarianism, as citizens of the world, as human beings:

We observe how the recent events in Israel and Palestine reveal that the rules of international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles inspiring humanitarian action are disregarded or violated by some of the most influential members of the international community.

We refer to the difference between *jus ad bellum* (the conditions for initiating war) and *jus in bello* (the conduct of warring parties) and the fundamental principle of proportionality in the use of force in an armed conflict as stated in the law of war, in Palestine, Israel and elsewhere.

We consider that the double standards applied by Western governments in Palestine, Israel and elsewhere are weakening their credibility in the defense of



democracy, human rights and international humanitarian law.

We are acutely aware that humanitarianism, as a set of values, and humanitarian action, as a set of practices, cannot resolve systemic violence and have shown limited capacity to address global inequalities and injustices past and present, in Palestine, Israel and elsewhere.

We nevertheless express our profound attachment to the ethical and political principles founding humanitarianism and humanitarian action.

Beyond our feeling of powerlessness and our discouragement, our sadness and our grief, we express our renewed commitment to promote global equality and justice in today's world.

Julie Billaud, Alessandro Monsutti and the participants of the MAS in Humanitarian Action at the Geneva Center of Humanitarian Studies.

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