



**Lessons from the Gaza Joint  
Response and their  
implications for the future of  
humanitarian action**



*Thursday 19 June | 13:00 – 14:00h CET | The Hague | Chatham  
House Rule*

*Summary report*

Humanitarian action finds itself in the most extreme context in Gaza, with International Humanitarian Law being violated daily, leading to major suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the destruction of the region. Civilians, civilian infrastructure and aid workers are under attack and humanitarian aid is blocked and controlled by Israel. The lack of response, or outright support, by the international community leads to a level of impunity that could well create precedent for humanitarian action in other contexts, or in general. What does the situation in Gaza mean for principled humanitarian action, what does it do to the credibility of humanitarian actors, and where is this bringing the humanitarian sector?

The second Gaza Acute Joint Response started in January 2025 and has been operational across the Gaza Strip. It aims to provide urgent humanitarian assistance, protect vulnerable communities, alleviate the burden of food insecurity, restore essential healthcare services, and address the severe mental health and psycho-social challenges facing those affected by the crisis. Led by War Child, with partner organisations, the initiative focuses on WASH services, healthcare, food security, multi-purpose cash assistance, and protection. The extreme circumstances and the inaction by the international community have created major dilemmas for the organisations that are part of the Joint Response. On June 19, 2025, KUNO and the Dutch Relief Alliance organised this meeting under Chatham House Rule to discuss the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the challenges faced by organisations.

The first speaker, an aid worker from Gaza, reflected on the human rights violations against Palestinians and the dehumanisation of Palestinians. One of the most remarkable achievements of humankind was the establishment of a system which aims to protect people in times of war regardless of race, gender or colour. In Gaza, a collapse of this system is happening as human rights are constantly being violated. The worst crime during the Second World War was the dehumanisation of the Jewish people. The world said never again. Unfortunately, it is happening again with the dehumanisation of Palestinians in Gaza and the Occupied Territories. Since the start of the war, over fifty-four thousand people have lost their lives, of whom a third are children. In the face of this genocide, Western regimes are choosing not to take action against these crimes. What is happening in Palestine will not stop there; it will spread to other countries, and it will become acceptable to dehumanise other populations worldwide.

The second speaker, a humanitarian from an INGO, stated that it is crucial to continue talking about Gaza, especially in light of attention being diverted to the Israel-Iran conflict. Palestinians have been facing an existential crisis since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. With the Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations mandate to establish a Jewish homeland, the basic rights of Palestinians have been denied. Western nations have been facilitating, aiding and abetting, or at the very least accepting the actions of Israel with complete impunity. Israel is making a mockery of international law. Under the Genocide Convention, states are supposed to act to prevent genocide as much as for its punishment<sup>1</sup>. Still, only strongly worded statements have been made. Israel has been obstructing aid and delegitimising the humanitarian system. Aid has been blocked from reaching Gaza for over one hundred days. Aid is now being weaponised through the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, with people being forcibly displaced and murdered in military zones daily. The Dutch Relief Alliance Joint Response started in the brief period of ceasefire. Since then, health facilities have been displaced four times, child protection programmes have had to intermittently stop activities, and access to repair water wells has been restricted. Humanitarian workers are in constant danger. Some have been displaced multiple times and do not have access to food. The international community has failed the humanitarian system. The speaker closed with the statement *"if we allow this to happen, it can also happen in other places"*.

The commentator of the session, an academic in the field of humanitarian studies, reflected on the earlier interventions: the world has allowed this to happen because of racism. Humanitarianism is incapable of addressing racism and settler colonialism because of the humanitarian principles; the system fails to call out injustices which keep racism in place. Palestine has been systematically turned into a humanitarian crisis by Israel – the crisis is politically made. The humanitarian system needs to not only place humanity at its centre but also needs to come from a position of anti-racism. It has not done a good job in its way of communicating and using the right language. Here, care needs to be made to not unintentionally erase Palestine through reference to Gaza and the West Bank.

## **Reflection and discussion**

The humanitarian system has been paralysed in Gaza by design. Participants called out the double standards: Russia was condemned for attacking Ukraine, but the Western countries support Israel and its war crimes. Civilians are the ones paying the price for this. During these times, it is important for international organisations to listen to Palestinians and to reflect on their use of language and practices. Palestinians have been calling out for decades to international humanitarian actors to boycott (Israeli products), divest (cut financial ties) and sanction. In addition, by respecting decorum, such as not using the word 'genocide', the international community contributes to the narrative of dehumanisation of Palestinians.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 1, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)

The audience questioned what child protection services are operational in Gaza. However, there is no real child protection there, as it is impossible to deliver aid. *"What protection can you give to children from bombs?"* Aid workers are traumatised by the danger and displacement. When the war ends, humanitarians need to start thinking about healing the children.

When participants asked what could still be done, it was answered that the humanitarian system is running on its last fumes. The response can continue at certain times, but with continuous interruptions and few supplies. The only protection that is being offered is through providing clothes and hygiene materials, since people have not been able to wash themselves in months. Aid workers do not know where to go from here.