



Refugee Council of Australia

20 October 2023

The Hon. Anthony Albanese
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Senator the Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Hon. Andrew Giles MP
Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers,

As the peak body for organisations working with refugees in Australia, we are writing to express our distress about the situation in Israel and Gaza, and ask that the Australian Government intervene urgently to seek an immediate end to the loss of life, to work towards a peaceful resolution in the region, and to ensure safety and social cohesion in our communities.

The Refugee Council, our members, supporters and refugee communities across Australia are deeply disturbed by the ongoing conflict. Many of our members have family and friends affected by the conflict on both sides. We condemn the terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians by armed Palestinian groups, and condemn the Israeli Defence Force's attacks on Palestinian civilians and the blockade of the Gaza strip, which has prevented water, food, electricity and urgent medical supplies from entering. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is dire, and every effort must be made to ensure essential supplies are allowed in.

The international human rights framework, including the Refugee Convention and the Geneva Conventions, were introduced to ensure that such atrocities would never again occur. It is essential that all governments call on both sides of the conflict to adhere to these principles, cease all attacks on civilians, release all hostages and ensure the protection of human rights throughout the region.

The Australian Government should do all in its power to work towards the preservation of life and a peaceful resolution to prevent the very serious threat of an even greater humanitarian catastrophe. As expressed recently by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, all major humanitarian agencies are stretched to the limits in terms of capacity by conflicts that have now displaced 110 million people – from Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine and beyond. The escalation of this conflict and prospect of further displacement must be met with a strongly human rights-based and humanitarian response, with significant injection of humanitarian funding desperately needed.

We reiterate the calls from the Australian Council for International Development for the Australian Government to work with international partners to ensure:

1. Protection of civilians
2. Negotiation for the safe release of hostages
3. Humanitarian access, including a humanitarian pause
4. A ceasefire to end rapidly escalating conflict, and
5. Renewed efforts towards a long-term diplomatic solution.

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Phone: +61 (02) 9211-9333 • admin@refugeecouncil.org.au
Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au • Twitter: [@OzRefugeeCounc](https://twitter.com/OzRefugeeCounc)
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

The Refugee Council of Australia
is the national umbrella body
for refugees, people seeking asylum
and the organisations and individuals
who support them • Founded 1981

We also note that the crisis has affected communities in Australia, directly and indirectly, causing increased fear and hostility. We are grateful for the Australian Government's leadership and quick action in arranging flights to evacuate Australians and Pacific Islands citizens from the conflict. We also welcome the recent commitment to increase security at places of worship and other community spaces. We call on the Australian Government to build on these efforts and ensure the safety of our communities and to work towards social cohesion. We condemn all hate speech and racial vilification and encourage community leaders to work towards peace in our communities.

Ultimately, we urge the Australian Government to make every effort to work towards peace in the Middle East.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Power". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Power
Chief Executive Officer
Refugee Council of Australia