

Independent Education Union

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Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Leader of the Government in the Senate

By email: senator.wong@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister Wong

Re: Children and educators in Gaza need our urgent support and protection

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has had a devastating impact on the safety of children and educators in Gaza. The education system has reached the point of complete breakdown with students denied access to education. Critical school infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed.

We acknowledge and support your strong advocacy for the immediate and unconditional release of all Israeli hostages held by Hamas. The terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 on Israeli civilians was reprehensible and must be unequivocally condemned.

As an education union, a core value of the IEU and our members is that all children and young people be afforded their fundamental human right to be educated in a healthy and safe environment.

Schools in Gaza have now been closed for more than 3 months and there is no timeline for the Ministry of Education to reopen schools as long as the conflict continues. More than 200 schools have been damaged according to UNESCO assessments. Hundreds of teachers and thousands of school children have been killed in Gaza.

Schools have only just begun to reopen in southern Israel due to safety concerns for students living close to the border, while many schools in northern Israel remain closed due to the threat of rocket or missile attacks by Hezbollah.

Our colleague Palestinian teacher unions, the GUPT and GUWKPS, are doing their best to support teachers experiencing appalling living conditions. However, their efforts are hampered due to the suspension of teacher salaries caused by interrupted tax revenue. The IEU will continue to support these unions through the work of our international union federation [Education International](http://EducationInternational.org).

Minister, our union appreciates the complexity of the conflict and the immense human rights and public safety challenges. We ask that you and the Government elevate the safety and wellbeing of the 600,000 students and 22,500 teachers in Gaza as a clear priority within your diplomatic efforts.

An immediate ceasefire is an essential first step towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the development of a two-state solution as supported by the Australian government.

We also ask that the government confirm the additional support that will be needed to help rebuild the Gaza schooling system and the provision of long-term medical care to children who have suffered unimaginable physical and mental injuries.

We must do all we can to ensure that children are not the victims of a conflict they had no part in.

Regards



BRAD HAYES
FEDERAL SECRETARY

cc: *Jason Clare, Federal Minister for Education, jason.clare.mp@aph.gov.au*
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