

Burden of disease is escalating in Gaza



By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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If there is one word that would describe the situation the children in Gaza are facing at the moment, it would be “catastrophic”. There is nowhere in Gaza that is safe for children to be at this moment.



Source: Unicef.

These were the words of Kitty van der Heijden, deputy executive director of partnerships at the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef).

She was speaking at the World Economic Forum 2024 annual meeting in Switzerland on Tuesday, 16 January, where she provided a briefing on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Death, disease and deprivation are what the children of Gaza face, she said.

Women and children make up 70% of the close-on 24,000 Palestinians who have died in Gaza since 7 October 2023, with a total of 59,000 injured.

She said in addition to facing death by bombings, the unsanitary conditions and the threat of disease among Palestines living in Gaza had reached unprecedented levels, and that the situation was only escalating.

“Each person only has access to one-and-a-half to two litres of water each day - this is for everything: for cooking, for drinking water, for hygiene. The minimum standard in emergencies worldwide is 15 litres. The critical threshold for survival is three litres.”

Heijden added statistics reveal that there is one toilet in Gaza available for every 700 people, and one shower for every 7,000.

The crowded and unsanitary conditions are leading to a high disease burden, she said.

Health crisis intensifies

With 70% of the primary healthcare service infrastructure in Gaza damaged, the situation looks to only escalate. "We cannot offer them the medical care that is required," Heijden said.

She particularly appealed for the rights of pregnant women. “On average, there are 155,000 pregnant and lactating women in Gaza, and about 25% of them will need life-saving caesarian sections.”

On average, 135 babies are delivered daily in Gaza.

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Heijden's plea for ceasefire

Heijden stressed that alleviating the supply constraint on the primary supplies and medicine coming into Gaza from Egypt, needs to be a priority, particularly for "the approximately 300,000 people in North-West Gaza who have hardly received any humanitarian assistance".

Heijden appealed for a ceasefire, respect for international humanitarian law and for increased access points into Gaza through which the UN's humanitarian aid trucks could deliver basic services and medical resources.

"We cannot move from A to B if bombs are falling," she said. "We have colleagues who have lost their wives, another who pulled his son out of the rubble. They have never seen the levels of death, disease and deprivation that they are seeing now, and they're still working in Gaza."

Some never make it out alive.

Since 7 October, 152 UN staff members have been killed in the line of fire in Gaza.

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

Katja is the Finance, Property and Healthcare Editor at Bizcommunity.

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