

Israel-Hamas war

Israel calls UN a 'terror organisation' as tensions escalate over Gaza war

Ambassador to the global body accuses it of being a 'collaborator with Hamas'



Gilad Erdan's comments follow arson attacks on the headquarters of UNRWA, the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees © Eduardo Munoz/Reuters

Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv YESTERDAY

Israel's ambassador to the UN has branded the world body a "terror organisation", escalating tensions between the two sides amid the country's war against Hamas in Gaza and attacks on UN facilities in Jerusalem.

Gilad Erdan, the ambassador, said in an interview with Israel's Army Radio on Wednesday that the UN has "turned into a collaborator with Hamas . . . maybe even more than that — a terror organisation unto itself".

"It co-operates with Hamas, it provides cover for it, and [is led by] a secretary-general [António Guterres] who quickly criticises Israel," he added.

Relations between Israel and the UN have deteriorated sharply over the [course of the Gaza war](#), with mutual recriminations over responsibility for the humanitarian crisis in the shattered enclave and the alleged role of about a dozen Palestinian refugee agency employees in Hamas's October 7 attack that triggered the conflict. Israel has also alleged that militants have used UN facilities.

UN officials and agencies have been among the loudest voices highlighting the devastation wrought by Israel's retaliatory offensive against Hamas in Gaza, after the militant group's October 7 attack.

Guterres, who has repeatedly condemned attacks on humanitarian workers, warned that Gaza was becoming a “graveyard” for children and called for an immediate ceasefire.

Erdan’s remarks came after at least two arson attacks over the past week against the East Jerusalem headquarters of UNRWA, the agency for Palestinian refugees, by what the organisation described as “Israeli children and young people”.

Jewish ultranationalists had protested at the facility last Wednesday, getting close enough to pound on its gates despite the presence of police officers, according to video seen by the Financial Times.



Israel is stepping up military action in Rafah, which it claims is Hamas’s last stronghold in Gaza © AFP/Getty Images

Arieh King, the deputy mayor of Jerusalem, wrote on X last Thursday that other international facilities in the city could be attacked, describing the UN as a “Nazi [sic] organisation”.

He added that there is “no place for [the] enemy in our holy city”.

According to one person familiar with the matter, the UN lodged formal complaints about the incidents with the Israel police and foreign ministry but has received no response. The police and ministry were not immediately available for comment. No senior Israeli official has criticised King’s remarks.

King, writing on X, also “saluted” attacks on aid trucks destined for Gaza in the

ing, raising the risk of further attacks on aid trucks. Israel has also blocked humanitarian aid from reaching the occupied West Bank over the weekend. Israeli far-right activists opposed to the provision of any humanitarian relief for residents of Gaza have regularly attempted to block convoys from reaching the war-torn enclave.

On Tuesday, the Israel Defense Forces released drone footage it claimed showed gunmen operating at a UN facility in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Armed men can be seen entering white UN vehicles and firing on civilians near the compound.

Juliette Touma, UNRWA communications director, said the aid agency could not verify the authenticity of the footage but said that it was “likely” to be from a warehouse in Rafah that it was forced to evacuate last week ahead of an IDF ground incursion into the area.

Daniel Hagari, the IDF’s chief spokesperson, on Tuesday called on the UN “to urgently investigate the connection between UNRWA’s logistics centres to Hamas operatives”.

Israel has faced intensifying international criticism over its [military push into Rafah](#), which it alleges is Hamas’s last stronghold in Gaza but also home to some 1mn displaced Palestinians. Israeli officials described last week’s initial push into the outskirts of Rafah as “limited and precise,” but fears are growing of a wider operation that could have dire humanitarian consequences.

Earlier this week, a UN vehicle was hit by unidentified fire near the Rafah border crossing connecting Gaza to Egypt, which the IDF seized last week. The strike killed a former Indian army officer working for the UN and injured another foreign aid worker who was evacuated for medical treatment to Jordan. The IDF said it was investigating the incident, with UN officials attributing the damage to an Israeli tank shell.

Also on Tuesday, an Israeli air strike hit an UNRWA school in a refugee camp at Nusseirat in central Gaza. The IDF claimed the target was a “ Hamas war room ” and that more than 10 senior militants from the group were killed.

The Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on Wednesday wholly rejected a UN General Assembly resolution passed last week promoting Palestinian statehood.

“Nobody will prevent us from realising our basic right to self-defence — neither the UN General Assembly nor any other body,” Netanyahu said. Erdan was pictured shredding a copy of the UN charter after the vote.

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