

UN to vote again on Gaza ceasefire, US plans unclear

AFP – The UN Security Council is expected to vote Wednesday on another draft resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza in its latest attempt to exert pressure to end the war.

But the draft could be blocked by the United States, Israel's main ally.

The latest draft of the resolution demands “an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire” in the war between Israel and Hamas and “the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.”

The wording has angered Israel and raised fears of a US veto.

Israeli ambassador to the UN Danny Danon has called the text “shameful,” adding: “We cannot allow the UN to tie the hands of the State of Israel from protecting its citizens, and we will not stop fighting until we return all the kidnapped men and women home.”

“For us, it has to be a linkage between a ceasefire and the release of hostages,” said Robert Wood, the deputy US ambassador. “It has been our principle position from the beginning and it still remains.”

The war was triggered by Palestinian group Hamas's assault on Israel on October 7, 2023, a stunning cross-border raid that resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said the death toll from the resulting war had reached 43,972 people, the majority civilians. The United Nations considers the figures reliable.

Of 251 hostages seized during the October 7 attack, 97 remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.

Almost all of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced by the war, which has caused a humanitarian catastrophe.

– Gaza 'will haunt' –

Since the beginning of the war, the Security Council has struggled to speak with one voice, as the United States used its veto power several times, although Russia and China have as well.

The few resolutions that the United States did allow to pass by abstaining stopped short of calling for an unconditional and permanent ceasefire.

In March, the council called for a temporary ceasefire during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, but this appeal was ignored by the warring parties.

In June, the council pledged support for a multi-stage US ceasefire and hostage release plan that went nowhere.

Some diplomats have expressed hope that following Donald Trump's election win on November 5, President Joe Biden might be more flexible in the few weeks he has left in power.

They imagined a possible repeat of events in December 2016 when then-president Barack Obama was finishing his second term and the council passed a resolution calling for a halt to Israeli settlement building in the occupied territories, a first since 1979.

The United States refrained from using its veto in this case, a break from traditional US support for Israel on the sensitive issue of settlements.

The draft being voted on Wednesday also calls for "safe and unhindered entry of humanitarian assistance at scale," including in besieged northern Gaza, and denounces any attempt to starve the Palestinians.

The Palestinian delegation at the UN has suggested this text does not go far enough.

“Gaza’s fate will haunt the world for generations to come,” ambassador Riyad Mansour warned.

He said the only course of action for the council is to call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire under Chapter 7 of the UN charter.

That chapter allows the council to take steps to enforce its resolutions, such as sanctions, but the latest text makes no reference to this option.

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