



17 October 2023

## **Statement**

### **45 Australians Trapped in Gaza Strip**

The General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific is now aware of 45 Australians trapped in the Gaza Strip, facing extreme difficulty as they attempt to leave and come home to Australia.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have confirmed to His Excellency Izzat Abdulhadi, Ambassador of the State of Palestine and Head of the General Delegation of Palestine in Canberra, in a meeting yesterday that all Australians in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel are eligible to be repatriated to Australia.

Unfortunately, while the process of repatriation has been applied to Australians in Israel with relative ease, this is not the case for Australians trapped in the Gaza Strip. Australians have been urged to move towards the Rafah border crossing in southern Gaza – the only way out of Gaza other than the Erez crossing between northern Gaza and Israel, which Israel has closed until further notice. Regrettably, Israel's forced closure of the Rafah crossing is still ongoing, and the Rafah crossing has been repeatedly bombed by Israeli airstrikes. This has left countless Palestinians, including Australians and other foreign nationals, waiting in fearful uncertainty to escape from the besieged Gaza Strip and Israel's relentless onslaught.

We urge the international community, including Australia, to put pressure on the Israeli government to guarantee safe passage through the Rafah crossing so that foreign nationals, including Australians, may return home. The international community must demand restraint, and urge the Israeli government to cease its relentless bombardments against the Palestinian civilian population, at least until this evacuation process can be safely completed.

The Palestinian community in Australia, especially those originally from Gaza, have huge concerns regarding the fates of their loved ones in Gaza, and are asking the Australian government ensure the safe repatriation of their relatives as soon as possible. One such individual who is in contact with Australian families in the Gaza Strip has informed the General Delegation of Palestine that many Australians trapped in Gaza are very fearful of being identified, and wish to remain anonymous except to direct government contacts. These Australian families fear that, if they are identified, their evacuation plans, if any, will be compromised and they will not be able to be repatriated as easily or at all.

*For more information, please contact the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific.*