



# US CALLS FOR VOTE FRIDAY ON UN RESOLUTION DECLARING THAT IMMEDIATE GAZA CEASE-FIRE IS 'IMPERATIVE' - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*Photo: Israeli soldiers move on the top of a tank near the Israeli-Gaza border, as seen from southern Israel, Thursday, March 21, 2024*

The United States called for a vote Friday on a newly revised and tougher U.N. resolution declaring that "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is "imperative" to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to more than 2 million hungry Palestinians.

In the previous draft, the Security Council did not make such a declaration. Instead, it would have supported international efforts for a cease-fire as part of a hostage deal.

The new draft obtained Thursday by The Associated Press "determines" — which is a council order — "the imperative of an immediate and sustained cease-fire," with no direct link to the release of hostages taken during Hamas' surprise attack in Israel on Oct. 7. But "toward that end" it would unequivocally support diplomatic efforts "to secure such a cease-fire in connection with the release of all remaining hostages."

After the 15 Security Council members met behind closed doors Thursday afternoon to discuss Gaza, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said when asked if the U.S. draft would be adopted: "I am optimistic. That's why it took us so long, because we worked so hard."

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador, Dmitry Polyansky, told reporters that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pressing for an immediate cease-fire and if the resolution calls for an immediate cease-fire "we will, of course, support it."

But he questioned the wording of the U.S. draft, asking: "What's an imperative? I have an imperative to give you \$100, but ... it's only an imperative, not \$100."

"So, somebody's fooling around, I think, (with the) international community," Polyansky said. "We are not satisfied with anything that doesn't call for immediate cease-fire. I think everybody is not satisfied with this. Even Secretary Blinken is not satisfied."

Blinken is on his sixth urgent mission to the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war began, discussing a deal for a cease-fire and hostage release as well as post-war scenarios.

Nate Evans, the spokesman for the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, issued a statement while the Security Council was holding closed Gaza consultations announcing that the U.S. would bring the resolution to a vote Friday morning.

"This resolution is an opportunity for the Council to speak with one voice to support the diplomacy happening on the ground and pressure Hamas to accept the deal on the table," Evans said.

Meanwhile, the 10 elected members of the Security Council have been drafting their own resolution that would demand an immediate humanitarian cease-fire for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began March 10, to be "respected by all parties leading to a permanent sustainable cease-fire."

It also would demand "the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages" and emphasize the urgent need to protect civilians and deliver humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza Strip.

That draft had not yet been put in "blue," which is the final form required for a vote.

France's U.N. ambassador, Nicolas de Riviere, told reporters that "there is a desire to take action, no one want to procrastinate, so we hope that a decision can be made by tomorrow evening."

"We need a cease-fire right now," he said. "There are two options: Either the U.S. text is adopted and then we'll move to the next phase of this crisis management, or the text is not adopted and then the draft of the elected members will come to the table and put to the vote, and I hope it will be adopted."

The Health Ministry in Gaza raised the death toll in the territory Thursday to nearly 32,000 Palestinians. It doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel that triggered the war, and abducted 250 people. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 people hostage as well as the remains of 30 others.

The international community's authority on determining the severity of hunger crises warned this week that "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza, where 70% of people are experiencing catastrophic hunger. The report from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative, or IPC, warned that escalation of the war could push half of Gaza's total population to the brink of starvation.

The U.S. draft would express "deep concern about the threat of conflict-induced famine and epidemics presently facing the civilian population in Gaza as well as the number of undernourished people, and also that hunger in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels." It would emphasize "the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to civilians in the entire Gaza Strip" and lift all barriers to getting aid to civilians "at scale."

Israel faces mounting pressure from even its closest allies to streamline the entry of aid into the Gaza Strip and open more land crossings and for a cease-fire. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to move the military offensive to the southern city of Rafah, which he says is a Hamas stronghold. Some 1.3 million displaced Palestinians have sought safety in Rafah.

The final U.S. draft eliminated language in the initial draft that said Israel's offensive in Rafah "should not proceed under current

circumstances." Instead, in an introductory paragraph, the council would emphasize its concern that a ground offensive into Rafah "would result in further harm to civilians and their further displacement, potentially into neighboring countries, and would have serious implications for regional peace and security."



For the first time in a U.N. resolution, the U.S. draft would condemn "all acts of terrorism, including the Hamas-led attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, as well as its taking and killing of hostages, murder of civilians, and sexual violence, including rape."