

UN General Assembly votes overwhelmingly in favor of Gaza ceasefire

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United Nations, December 13 (RHC)-- The 193-member United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in war-torn Gaza.

Tuesday's resolution passed with 153 countries voting in favour, 23 abstaining and 10 countries voting against, including Israel and the United States. While the resolution is non-binding, it serves as an indicator of global opinion.

"We thank all those who supported the draft resolution that was just adopted by a huge majority," Saudi Arabia's UN ambassador Abdulaziz Alwasil said in remarks following the vote. "This reflects the international position to call for the enforcement of this resolution."

The vote comes as international pressure builds on Israel to end its months-long assault on Gaza, where more than 18,000 Palestinians have been killed, the majority of them women and children. More than 80 percent of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have also been displaced.

Relentless air strikes and an Israeli siege have created humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territory that UN officials have called "hell on earth". The Israeli military offensive has severely restricted access to food, fuel, water and electricity to the Gaza Strip.

Tuesday's vote comes on the heels of a failed resolution in the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Friday, which likewise called for a humanitarian ceasefire.

The U.S. vetoed the proposal, casting the sole dissenting vote and thereby dooming its passage. The United Kingdom, meanwhile, abstained. Unlike UNGA votes, UNSC resolutions have the power to be binding.

After Friday's scuttled UNSC resolution, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres took the extraordinary step of invoking Article 99 of the UN Charter, which allows him to issue warnings about serious threats to international peace. The last time it was used was in 1971.

But the passage of the non-binding UNGA resolution on Tuesday likewise faced US opposition.

Both the U.S. and Austria introduced amendments to the resolution to condemn the deadly Hamas attack on October 7, which marked the start of the current conflict.

Al Jazeera correspondent Kristen Saloomey said Arab countries saw these amendments as an effort to politicize the vote. They both failed to pass. "What we're hearing from many countries is that the credibility of the United Nations is on the line here, that respect for international law requires respect for humanitarian efforts," Saloomey said.

Egyptian UN Ambassador Osama Abdelkhalek called the draft resolution "balanced and neutral", noting that it called for the protection of civilians on both sides and the release of all captives.

Israel's envoy Gilad Erdan railed against calls for a ceasefire, calling the UN a "moral stain" on humanity.

"Why don't you hold the rapists and child murderers accountable?" he asked in a speech before the vote. "The time has come to put the blame where it belongs: on the shoulders of the Hamas monsters."

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has firmly supported Israel's military campaign, arguing that it must be allowed to dismantle Hamas. But as Israeli forces level entire neighborhoods, including schools and hospitals, Washington has found itself increasingly at odds with international opinion.

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