MEDIA RELEASE

Education unions call for protection for students in Gaza

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The Australian Education Union (AEU), National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), and Independent Education Union (IEU) have joined together to call on the Federal Government to provide urgent winter aid and the protection of children, students and education in Gaza.

With more than 285,000 members between them from early childhood, school, TAFE and university, the unions have written to Foreign Minister Penny Wong outlining the seriousness of the situation in Gaza and requesting the Government act now, before more lives are lost this winter.

Floods have left thousands of families without shelter, with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reporting that more than 6,000 family shelters were destroyed, and more than 3,900 households were left without shelter.

Education International affiliate the General Union of Palestinian Teachers has confirmed that the floods have affected at least 55 learning spaces serving around 55,000 children. Floodwater also entered hospital departments, including a paediatric unit, and rainwater mixed with sewage from damaged networks, creating a serious public health risk.

OCHA has reported that more than 150,000 tents are ready for dispatch outside Gaza, however Israeli approvals are urgently needed to bring in shelter supplies and drainage equipment.

Even with these floods, airstrikes continue, with the Palestinian Ministry of Education reporting that eight school and university students had been killed by Israeli fire since the beginning of November including a 13-year-old year 8 student Jihad Naim Abu Teilakh, and a university student killed during the 4 November attack on the University College of Applied Sciences, which was bombed while students were present on campus.

The unions have made clear that as educators, they cannot accept that schools, universities, learning spaces and hospitals, the places that should be safest for children and students, have become sites of death and injury.

The unions are collectively asking the Australian Government to urgently call on the Government of Israel, directly and in multilateral forums, to take two immediate steps:

1. Allow winter aid into Gaza without delay, including food, water, tents, tarpaulins, blankets, drainage pumps and equipment to repair damaged sewage systems.

2. Protect children, teachers and displaced families, and take immediate measures to protect schools, universities, temporary learning spaces, hospitals and displacement sites from military strikes.

Quotes attributable to AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe:

“Children in Gaza are facing an appalling combination of flooding, homelessness, disease and continuing airstrikes. Thousands of families have lost their shelters, tens of thousands of children's learning spaces have been affected, and students continue to be killed.

“There are more than 150,000 tents ready to be delivered into Gaza, but the necessary approvals are not being granted. The Australian Government must use its diplomatic influence to urgently press for humanitarian aid and essential supplies to be allowed to reach the people who desperately need them and ensure that schools, universities and hospitals are places of safety.”

Quotes attributable to IEU Federal Secretary Brad Hayes:

“A child cannot learn under a tarp in a flood zone or study while fearing the next airstrike. Every child in Gaza deserves the safety and hope that education provides.

“Schools and universities should be places of learning, not places of danger. We are calling for urgent action to protect students and education workers and to ensure life-saving aid reaches families without delay.”

Quotes attributable to NTEU National President Alison Barnes:

“Life saving aid needs to flow to the people of Gaza immediately. The trauma being visited upon civilians will only intensify if they are denied basic shelter and food in the depths of winter.

“Education is the great enabler that allows individuals and societies to flourish, but right now the violence and destruction are simply overwhelming. We urge the Australian Government to do everything in its power to alleviate this suffering.”

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