

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Situation in Gaza is fast becoming untenable - UN

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by advertising. From global current affairs to art, science and culture, the documentary from the BBC World Service tells the world's stories. Search for the documentary wherever you get your BBC podcasts. This is the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service. I'm Robin Brant and in the early hours of Sunday the 15th of October, these are our main stories. The UN humanitarian chief says the situation for Palestinians in Gaza is fast becoming untenable due to Israeli airstrikes and warnings of a ground offensive. Israel says it's killed one of the key Hamas leaders behind last week's huge assault on Israelis and Saudi Arabia is reported to have suspended talks on normalising relations with Israel. Also in this podcast. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this campaign has been a heavy weight to carry and this result will be very hard to bear. Voters in Australia have overwhelmingly rejected a plan to give greater rights to the country's indigenous people in a divisive referendum. First, the United Nations says the situation in Gaza is becoming untenable. The UN says nearly a million Palestinians there have now been displaced due to airstrikes and Israel's warning that people should leave the north of Gaza. It says there was no power, clean water or fuel and food supplies were running low. The UN has

urged the Israelis to end their siege of Gaza. Israel has carried out a massive bombing campaign in the territory since the Hamas attacks eight days ago. Palestinian officials say more than 2,200 people have been killed. Muhammad is among those who have fled south from Gaza City. It's total chaos here. There is no actual plan how we're going to evacuate a large number of people here for a national without actual planning in Palestine or in Gaza. Hundreds and hundreds of people here all stuck. The situation is getting worse by the minute. I don't know what I'm going to do now. Well, the BBC has been getting voice notes from people in Gaza over the last few days, given the difficulties sometimes of getting through. This is a Gaza resident called Zina.

While I was on the way to the south, did you hear that? Did you hear that?

Did you hear that?

This is the bombing. The Israeli military targeted civilians while they were moving to the south, killing more than 70 people. Thankfully, we managed to go to a house to people we don't know actually, but like they were so generous. They were opening their doors to people so they can come into their house and to sleep in it. Medical staff in Gaza say hospitals there speak of unprecedented challenges. Mahmood Shalabi works for the aid group Medical Aid for Palestinians.

Simple painkillers aren't even provided inside the hospitals and patients are actually filling the corridors of the hospitals. Being killed in those circumstances is way better than getting wounded. When you die, you will lose your life in a split of a second, but if you are wounded in these circumstances, you are going to suffer. Our correspondent, Rushdie Abu Alouf, is in Karn Unis in southern Gaza. I had to take the journey from Gaza into southern city of Karn Unis. After the Israeli army asked all the people living in Gaza city where I used to live and in the north to go south. I am in Karn Unis since yesterday and the scene that I witnessed is really tragic. People are sleeping in the public spaces. Hundreds of thousands of people are deployed to the schools. I am in the hospital, the main hospital in Karn Unis. Also hundreds of people are taking the hospital as a refugee. Suddenly this city has to accommodate, treat and feed half a million people

this place from their northern and middle area, Gaza city. And as the Hamas officially said about 400,000 people took this journey yesterday and today. More than a million people in this city and people, the local authority here is struggling to find accommodation for the people, to find essential need, water is running out. That's the BBC's Rushdie Abu Alouf who has moved south

from his home in Gaza city to Karn Unis. To find out more about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, my colleague Andrew Peach has been talking to Lynne Elizabeth Hastings. She's the UN's Deputy Special Coordinator for Gaza but is unable to get there at the moment so she is currently in Jerusalem. A good word to describe it is catastrophic and likely to get worse now because there's no communications. It's very difficult for us to be monitoring with our colleagues.

In addition, there was an order by the government of Israel requiring approximately one million people who live in the north of Gaza to move to the south within 24 hours. Literally one million people to move in 24 hours of course is largely impossible. The United Nations is calling for a ceasefire and that's really the solution. The solution is not to destroy Gaza entirely so the civilian population has nothing to return to. Israelis are concerned about the hostages that are being held in Gaza and would also say they have every right to defend themselves from the attacks a week ago. What do you say to that? The UN has condemned the events of last week. They were horrific and we have called on the release of the hostages immediately and unconditionally. But they're just words. They're not going to get the hostages released.

Well, we don't know that. There are a lot of efforts to get the hostages out. We are also calling for humanitarian assistance to be unconditional. Both issues are humanitarian and one very central principle of humanitarian law is that it is delivered unconditionally. What do you think of the images we're seeing today of Hamas trying to stop people from leaving? Not everyone wants to leave. Hamas doesn't want people to leave and they're blocking the road. People should be able to flee if they want to just as they should be able to stay in their homes if they want to without threat of bombardment. Is it not better that people are moving because it's going to save lives? What we say about Gaza is there's really no safe place regardless of whether or not you stay or you move. Tell me a bit about the work you're trying to do on water and other essential supplies. We have probably close to 350,000 people in shelters in about 92 shelters, which actually 50 of them are not equipped to be shelters. But in any event, water is always in short supply and part of that reason is because most of the water needs to be desalinated. The Israelis cut off both the electricity and the water, which means that even if there was water, there's no electricity for the desalination plants to run, which means the water is running out and it will probably run out in the next two days. What we're seeing is, of course, is an entire collapse of the health system at a time when you have so many people who are injured and in need of medical attention and operations. There's no refrigerators, so food, spoils, and then when you have a situation where there's a lack of water, never mind not being able to drink it, it really raises questions of hygiene and the outbreak of various diseases.

Do you think Egypt is doing enough to help people who want to get out of Gaza?

We are working with Egypt in terms of trying to get people out and trying to find solutions.

I do think that Egypt, like it or not, Gaza is on their border and it is in their best interest to make sure people in Gaza are able to live a productive and perhaps even one day a joyful life.

Lynn Elizabeth Hastings, the UN's Deputy Special Coordinator for Gaza.

The Israeli military says it has killed a Hamas commander who led part of last week's incursion, in which 1,300 Israelis were killed. Ali Qadi is the second Hamas chief to have been killed in a day. He died in a drone strike. Earlier, the Israeli military said it had killed the head of Hamas' aerial operations, Murad Abu Murad. He said to have played a significant part in directing the attack on Israeli civilians last Saturday. Meanwhile, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has visited troops near the border with Gaza. Video footage shows Mr Netanyahu wearing a bulletproof vest, talking to heavily armed soldiers as he visited two of the Kibbutz settlements targeted by Hamas. A spokesman for the Israeli Defense Forces, known as the IDF, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner, said Israel was adhering to international rules.

Our obligation is to work and operate within the laws of armed conflict, that is, our framework of operation as a professional military. And we are doing everything in accordance to the law and in order to implement our directive, our mission to remove Hamas as the terrorist organization that leads Gaza. So I would say it's a combination of the need, the military necessity, on one hand, balancing the civilian needs, the humanitarian needs. And indeed, that is why we're telling people, you know, you have to go south. The IDF has spent much of the past week maneuvering tanks, artillery and infantry units into position in the south of the country near the border with Gaza. Later on Saturday, it released a statement giving more details about its possible ground offensive into Gaza. I heard more from our Middle East correspondent, Tom Bateman, who's in Jerusalem. This is probably, I think, the most detailed statement that we've seen from the Israeli military about what they're doing, the forces that are being amassed around the Gaza perimeter. So they talk about, I mean, the fighting, obviously, that's already taken place since the Hamas attacks a week ago and how it took, you know, some time for the fighting there

to reach a point where they felt they had cleared the area. But now they say they're, what they describe as a critical juncture, say the Israeli military is gearing up for what they call a comprehensive offensive and say that their plans encompass a synchronized multifaceted offensive involving air, sea and land assets. Now they then go on to talk about how there is a big logistics operation to potentially expand the area of combat and quite a lot of work being done to basically get kit and ammunition to the front line. But I think what this says is they feel they're almost in a point where they are ready. And I think that matches what we saw from Benjamin Netanyahu

wearing a flak jacket, visiting soldiers on the perimeter there. And as you said, asking if they were ready, telling them that the future, as he described it, is on its way. So it feels like this thing is probably now fairly imminent. Whether that means hours or days is still harder to tell because there have still been messages from the military about the sort of expandability of the deadlines they've been giving Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to flee their homes.

Tom Bateman talking to me from Jerusalem. The US government has advised its citizens in Gaza to move south towards the Rafa crossing with Egypt. The only entry and exit to Gaza that is not controlled by Israel has been closed since the Palestinian side was hit by an Israeli airstrike on Tuesday. A State Department spokesman said US citizens should be ready at the crossing for its possible reopening as there may be little notice and crossings may be for a very limited time. Let's go north now to the border between Israel and Lebanon. We are repeatedly reporting from this area because there's constant concern that it may be where another front opens in the conflict between Israel and neighbouring militants. In this area it is Hezbollah, an organisation close to Iran

but also one regarded as a terrorist organisation by both the US and the Arab League that is considering whether it wants to enter the war. Since Hamas launched its assault on Israel just over a week ago there have been sporadic attacks across Israel's border with Lebanon. I heard more from our correspondent Anna Foster who's in the area. It is incredibly tense and actually the sort of thing that we've seen in the last few days at any other time would have been a real topic of conversation. It is a huge escalation that we've seen along this border. It is nothing compared to what would happen if Hezbollah decided to try and open up a new northern front in this war. But these regular exchanges of fire that we're seeing in the early hours of this morning we saw some men come across the border from the Lebanese side to the Israeli side. They were fired on by Israeli forces. We've seen 30 mortars fired across the border again from Lebanon into Israel today. We've seen an Israeli response day after day here on the northern border. We are seeing these exchanges of fire that are very unusual and people are questioning whether that is a precursor to this conflict spreading north and opening up a new front which would be catastrophic not just for Israel for Lebanon but for the whole of the Middle East. And just to be clear as well you've mentioned a limited but nonetheless an incursion by militant fighters coming across the border to Israel. That's happening is it? It is. It's happened a couple of times this week. It's in small numbers two or three each time but the fact that they are getting across that border wall in the north we saw a couple of days ago there were Israeli Defence Force members that actually engaged them and in fact two Israeli soldiers, two to three Israeli soldiers were killed. We do know that one of them was a very senior Israeli soldier. So it is happening you know part of this is fire and part of this are individuals coming across the border not in the numbers that we saw of course coming out of Gaza breaking through the pyramid offence and coming into southern Israel from Gaza but nonetheless we are seeing as well as that fire we are seeing individuals from Palestinian Islamic jihad and Hezbollah we're seeing that sort of constant consistent engagement here on the northern border. But also in terms of where you are what you've seen the people you may have spoken to in the time you've been there are there civilians Israeli people who are moving out are they taking measures in anticipation of some kind of military escalation there? The vast majority actually are moving out the communities that we've been to those who can are leaving we were in one small town called Shlomi yesterday population of about 8,000 and three-quarters of them have left already of those that are left others are packing their bags and preparing to leave. Ana Foster speaking to me from close to the Israel-Lebanon border now there appears to be a significant diplomatic development today from Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of Israel's retaliation against Hamas. Riyadh is reported to have suspended discussions on the possible normalization of ties with Israel. The decision is said to have been taken on the same day the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met his Saudi counterpart in the latest stop on his 48-hour tour of the Middle East. So what is normalization and why for some would it be so important to the future of Israel and Saudi Arabia? That's a question I put to our Middle East regional editor Mike Thompson. Up until now well in fact as we speak Saudi Arabia has no diplomatic relations with Israel so no embassy in each other's capitals so no formal ties at all so that's what's meant by normalizing you say well most countries do talk diplomatically and do have embassies in each other's countries so that is what will

happen if this normalization deal eventually happens. But at the moment it would appear that because of the events of the last week that Saudi Arabia is stepping back and putting the process that's been going on mostly behind the scenes on hold is that where we are now? It is indeed yes Saudi's been quite outspoken about what it sees on the of the mass displacement of Palestinians and attacks on what it calls defenseless civilians. Up to now it hasn't said much other than urge restraint but that was quite telling and at the moment of course US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken is touring the region he's been in Saudi earlier today and he was really hoping that they would be on side both to help the region get together principally actually as a bulwark against Hamas and Iran but this sort of situation obviously it hasn't been helping. Is it your assessment that this is a move coming out of Riyadh because it feels compelled to do this or it genuinely wants to use this as a way of expressing its dissatisfaction with what's going on and does it I suppose most importantly mean that this normalization process now is frozen or is this a postponement or what is it? I think it's suspended I think eventually it should still proceed again but the problem for Arab leaders at the moment if you take Saudi for instance amongst the Saudi population as in many other Arab countries however the governments feel pragmatically about trying to get on with Israel a lot of the population is outraged about what they're seeing what's happening in Gaza and it really at the moment would be pretty much untenable for Saudi to now establish diplomatic relations with Israel at a point like this.

Mike Thompson over the last week we've tried to bring you a cross-section of eyewitness testimony from both sides of this conflict many of the interviews have been harrowing.

Events started when Hamas launched its attack on Israel eight days ago on a Saturday morning some of the first victims of those attacks were young people who were at the supernova festival not far from the border with Gaza more than 260 bodies were then subsequently recovered from the festival site. Sharon is a 22 year old Israeli photographer who was working at the festival she told my colleague Matthew Ann Rolly Waller what she witnessed and I must stress that some of the following is a difficult listen. The day that I got to the festival I got there with two friends from from Facebook that give me a lift to the festival and all night I spent taking photos of beautiful people with beautiful music so many colorful humans and as the sun started to rise up I remember that I went back a few steps from the main stage and I tried to take a shoot of the sunrise above the the main stage and then the music stopped. I look up at the sky and I see that everything is lit up like fireworks bombs and rockets above our heads people are screaming and crying in terror not knowing what's up and what's going to happen next. I remember that I went to the backstage to take my belongings and go and find my friends to go back home with. I remember that I begged them to say that we will hide underneath the car from the bombs and they said no let's go I got into the car and we started driving as we were driving black smoke covered all the area and we heard bombs getting closer and closer we heard gunshots but we didn't understand what was going on and I know that you told our producer that in those initial moments you of course hid and then you got into the car and then you started driving and you said to our producer you know now that if you stayed one minute two minutes more that you too would have been killed here. The second that we got on the road the shooting started on the left side of the road we turned right and they turned left all the people that went left got slaughtered as we were driving right we went we drove and we saw shelters on the side of the roads with so many people inside of them and again I asked the driver to stop to get into the shelter because that's the thing that makes the most sense in that situation and instead of getting into the

shelter my driver decided to keep on going and just drive home and about two minutes after that we heard booms as strong as hell could imagine behind us because the terrorists got to the shelters and they bombed them with grenades. When we got to the highway there was a police car that pulled up behind us and put up a barrier and apparently those were terrorists too.

The things that happened in this music festival are beyond despicable. I have friends that didn't come home yet. I have friends that have seen things so terrible. I can see how upsetting, how raw it still feels. We're only seven days from all of this and I know you took so many photographs at the time from that festival. Have you started to look at them? Can you look at them? In the first two days the government reached out to the photographers from the festival and they asked us for the photos to recognize bodies and I tried the best that I could to go back and hope from where I could. So I went to the photos and I couldn't. After a hundred faces I just couldn't anymore. I gave the camera to a friend and told them to upload the photos. So the answer is no. A week went past the incident and I can't look at the photos because I don't know. I don't know who's alive and who's dead. And when you look at the situation now we have all the signals suggesting there's going to be a massive response in terms of a ground incursion, all of that. What are your thoughts in terms of just broadly what the response should be?

I think my own opinion does not matter. I think that the people that are in charge are taking the best decisions they can right now. I want peace. I want people to feel safe in their homes. I want people to feel safe in their countries and I just hope safety will reach us all.

That was Sharon, an Israeli photographer who was at the Supernova Festival speaking to my colleague Matthew and Wally Waller. Okay, still to come.

Millions of people in the Americas catch a glimpse of a dramatic solar eclipse.

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Welcome back to the Global News Podcast. Voters in Australia have overwhelmingly rejected a plan to give greater rights to the country's Indigenous people in a divisive referendum.

All six states voted no to the proposal. It would have changed Australia's constitution, which is more than a century old, and created a body to advise the federal government.

Katie Watson reports from Sydney. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese promised this referendum as a way to unite Australia, but in what was often a bruising campaign, it did just the opposite. It was not the result he had hoped for.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this campaign has been a heavy weight to carry, and this result will be very hard to bear. So many remarkable Indigenous Australians have put their heart and soul into this cause, not just over the past few weeks and months, but through decades, indeed lifetimes of advocacy. This referendum has made clear the need for Australia to find ways to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and reduce inequalities they face in education, health and poverty. But it's also forced Australians to reflect on their country's colonial legacy, how to move forward despite an often violent history and to forge a different future. That work is set to continue, no doubt with uncomfortable

conversations ahead. Katie Watson. Major tourist attractions in the French capital have been evacuated because of security fears. The fatal stabbing of a school teacher on Friday has prompted the authorities there to deploy thousands of soldiers to carry out patrols. The government has suggested a link to events in Gaza and Israel. Hugh Scofield has more. Nerves are fraught over the risk of Middle East violence spilling into France, so when there was an anonymous bomb warning at the Louvre today, the place was evacuated. A few hours later, the same thing happened at the Palace of Versailles, there two visitors were told to leave. Yesterday's deadly knife attack in Arras was a brutal reminder to the country of its own recent history of Islamist violence. The big fear now is that if Palestinian death counts rise dramatically after Israel moves into Gaza, then there could be reprisal attacks against Jewish or other targets here in France. Hugh Scofield reporting from Paris. A change of pace now because the British actor Michael Cain has announced he's retiring from acting at the age of 90. Born into a working class family in South London, the film star went on to appear in more than 160 films over an eight decade long career. The last of which of those movies has just been released. Here's Paul Moss. What's it all about Alfie? He made his name playing tough guys and charmers like the Lothario Alfie. I always say make a married woman laugh and you're half way and there was the vengeful brother in Get Carter. He was also a soldier in Zulu and a secret agent in The Black Windmill. But later life saw Michael Cain display newfound versatility with roles like the smitten professor in educating Rita. Yet through all these he often chose parts which reflected his working class roots. He was among a cohort of post-war performers refusing to adopt the traditional plummy tones of British thespians. And that continues in his latest film The Great Escaper. Though playing a long retired soldier seems to be what persuaded Sir Michael it was time to quit. The only parts I'm going to get now are old men and I thought well I might as well leave with all this. I've got wonderful reviews. What am I going to do to beat this? The answer apparently is to start a new career. At the age of 90 Sir Michael Cain has written his first novel. It's the story of a London detective chasing Colombian gangsters. Just the sort of character he himself might once have played. Paul Morse Sir Michael Cain. Millions of people in the Americas have been catching a glimpse of an annular solar eclipse. The spectacular event has been visible in parts of the US, Mexico, Central and South America. These two broadcasters from the American Space Agency NASA witnessed it along with crowds in New Mexico. Well our America's regional editor, Leonardo Rocha, has more on this celestial event. Some people have been preparing for months for the occasion. Families have traveled to add the probability of finding clear skies was higher such as the Atacama Desert in Chile, the north of Brazil or the south of the United States. The whole event lasts no longer than five minutes but those who have witnessed it were in awe of the spectacle. The event is called an annular eclipse because the moon blocks out most of the sun leaving a thin ring or annulars of light. Leonardo Rocha. Now let's end on a music legend. One of the most famous names in pop music, Madonna has just launched her latest world tour here in London and you won't need to sit through new material because it's greatest hits only. It nearly didn't happen though because the 65 year old fell seriously ill just a few months ago. Our music correspondent Mark Savage spoke to her longtime musical director Stuart Price ahead of the opening night.

40 years of music.

13 UK number one singles and 72 top 40 hits.

How do you squeeze all of that into one two-hour concert?

So that is a big challenge and the answer is you try and pick all the stuff that serves the story best.

Stuart says the show will have a documentary aspect telling Madonna's story through her music and her archive. Everything from I think being a young woman in New York all the way through motherhood, spiritual awakenings, the ups and downs. This is the first concert Madonna gave after she signed a record deal in New York in 1983. From those humble beginnings she has revolutionized the presentation of live music with lavish and innovative staging.

Stuart says the new concert won't be an exception.

Probably for the first time there's not a band in the traditional sense.

There are live musicians that perform at different parts of the show.

What we realize is that the original recordings in a lot of senses are stars of the show.

Madonna I dare you to do a world tour and play your greatest hits.

Four decades? That's a lot of song. You think people would come to that show?

Madonna anointed her celebration tour with this YouTube video in January.

Rehearsals started in April.

Day one hell week.

But in June she was rushed to hospital with a serious bacterial infection.

The opening night of the concert was delayed by three months.

Madonna has very high expectations of how much hard work people will put into something.

It's very uncompromising that sense but she's as hard on herself as well.

The person that is going to take the stage and perform this looks incredible, sounds incredible, performs incredible as well.

The proof will come with the opening show in London.

The rest of the world tour is projected to make more than £100 million at the box office.

Mark Savage reporting on Madonna who at the age of 65 is back.

That's all from us for now but there will be a new edition of the Global News podcast later.

If you want to comment on this podcast or the topics covered in it,

including maybe how you can do a piece on Michael Cain and not talk about the Italian job, well you can send us an email.

The address is globalpodcastatbbc.co.uk.

You can also find us on X, formerly known as Twitter, at Global NewsPod.

This edition was mixed by Jonathan Greer.

The producer as ever was Liam McCheffrey, the editor, Karen Martin.

I'm Robin Brandt, until next time, goodbye.