17 October 2023 – Eleven days ago, the Eastern Mediterranean Region – which was already facing some of the world’s worst humanitarian disasters – was confronted with a new emergency involving Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, which has now reached catastrophic proportions.

Just as concerning is the spilling over of the conflict into other parts of the Region. The escalation of conflict on the border between Israel and Lebanon could potentially destabilize neighbouring countries and threaten the safety, health and well-being of people in the Region as a whole.

Since the conflict escalated, the United Nations, including WHO, has made repeated calls for all parties to end the hostilities and ensure the protection of civilians, health workers, patients and health facilities, as mandated by international humanitarian law. We have also called for the safe release of all hostages.

We have repeatedly called for humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing from Egypt, where our urgently needed supplies have been ready and waiting to be distributed for more than 72 hours.

We have reiterated calls for Israel to reverse its evacuation orders for 1.1 million people in northern Gaza, including more than 2000 patients in 23 hospitals. We have highlighted both the impossibility of moving critical patients without risking their death and the already dire situation in southern Gaza’s hospitals, which are entirely unable to handle additional caseloads of patients.

We have also asked for an end to hostilities on the border between Israel and Lebanon, where civilians in Lebanon have been killed and injured.

Until now, however, the conflict has continued to escalate, and the human tragedy grows.

More than 2 million people in Gaza remain under siege, cut off from all aid – including water, food and fuel supplies – and deprived of their most basic human rights. This situation is a stark example of injustice.

As the world's lead agency for public health, WHO has a moral imperative to ensure that all people, everywhere, have access to basic health services and medical treatment, without risk or restriction.

Even amid the chaos and suffering brought on by conflict and war, every person – without exception –has the right to health, a right that should be upheld in all circumstances and without exception.

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