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## Australia Joins International Push Against Israel's Aid Policies in Gaza

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In a controversial diplomatic move, Australia has joined 24 other countries in publicly rebuking Israel's approach to humanitarian aid in Gaza, citing what the group describes as "unacceptable" barriers to food and medical supplies. The joint statement, issued late Monday and signed by Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong along with officials from the UK, France, and Canada, points the finger at the Israeli government for the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians trying to access aid, and warns that international action may follow if the situation continues to deteriorate.

The signatories accuse Israel of allowing only a trickle of aid into Gaza while presiding over a model of delivery that, they claim, is putting civilians at extreme risk. Citing United Nations Human Rights Council data, the statement claims nearly 900 Palestinians have been killed while attempting to obtain food, with 674 reportedly dying near sites run by the newly established Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), a delivery network backed by the United States (US) and Israel, which has replaced traditional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the region.

In Gaza's Beit Lahia and Khan Younis, images of desperate Palestinians gathering at aid centers or mourning over the bodies of the dead have dominated headlines. The international response. Though swift has stirred deep divisions, especially about Israel's continuing military operations and blockades. Critics of the Australian government argue the condemnation fails to address the full context of the conflict, particularly Hamas's role in perpetuating violence and exploiting aid efforts for strategic gain.

The Israeli foreign ministry pushed back sharply against the statement, calling it "disconnected from reality" and asserting that Hamas, not Israel, bears full responsibility for the ongoing humanitarian crisis. In a post on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), Israeli officials pointed to Hamas's October 7, 2023, terror attack, which killed 1,139 Israeli civilians, as the spark that ignited the current war. Since then, Israeli forces have targeted Hamas infrastructure throughout Gaza in what they describe as a necessary and legitimate military response.

Despite the mounting civilian toll, over 58,000 Palestinians have reportedly died in the conflict, according to Gaza's health ministry. Israel maintains that it is Hamas that continues to prolong the war, not Jerusalem. The foreign ministry insists the militant group is obstructing ceasefire efforts, while using civilians as shields and weaponizing humanitarian aid to serve its propaganda campaign.

Compounding the criticism, the international coalition also voiced concern over rising settler violence in the West Bank and condemned Israel's controversial proposal to build a so-called "humanitarian city" within Gaza. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has gone so far as to compare the plan to a "concentration camp", language that many see as inflammatory and deeply irresponsible.

The statement emphasized that "permanent forced displacement" violates international law, echoing long-standing concerns among human rights observers. However, the language

used in the declaration has drawn scrutiny, particularly among those in Australia and other Western nations who believe that placing blame solely on Israel simplifies a complex conflict and emboldens Hamas's refusal to negotiate in good faith.

This is not the first time Canberra has stepped into the fray. Just last month, Australia sanctioned two Israeli ministers, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, known for their hardline views—drawing criticism from pro-Israel communities both at home and abroad. Critics argue these moves reflect a growing ideological shift within the current Australian government, one that seems increasingly sympathetic to international pressure rather than standing firm with democratic allies.

Ceasefire talks continue to be led by the US and Qatar, though no breakthrough appears imminent. While the joint statement reiterated support for diplomatic negotiations, it did not outline any concrete steps beyond expressing a willingness to “take further action” to secure peace and humanitarian access.

At the heart of the disagreement lies a fundamental question: Should Israel, a nation facing existential threats from terror groups like Hamas, be expected to manage humanitarian aid to its enemies without adequate security guarantees? Or is the current aid blockade, however strategic, pushing Gaza's civilians into deeper crisis and fueling long-term instability?

As Australia aligns more closely with European and Canadian foreign policy positions, many observers are left questioning whether Canberra's response is proportionate—or politically motivated. Either way, the implications for Australia's standing with its allies, and for peace in the Middle East more broadly, remain uncertain.