

5 August 2025

TO:  
Commission Vice-President and High  
Representative Ms Kallas  
Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness  
and Crisis Management Ms Lahbib

[Letter sent by e-mail]

**ETUC and UNI Global Union Letter to Commission Vice-President and High  
Representative Kallas and Commissioner Lahbib following the interception of the  
humanitarian ship Handala**

Dear High Representative Kallas,  
Dear Commissioner Lahbib,

We write on behalf of both the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which represents 45 million workers, and UNI Global Union, which represents 20 million workers from over 150 different countries.

We wish to express our strong protest and deep concern about the illegal interception and detention of the humanitarian ship Handala by Israeli forces on 27 July. This underscored once more that without immediate action by governments and international institutions – especially the European Union – the crisis will deepen, and many more lives will be lost.

The Handala was carrying humanitarian aid – baby formula, nappies, food and medicine – to a Gazan population facing famine because of Israel's ongoing blockade. After its capture in international waters, the ship's crew, peace activists, human rights defenders, trade unionists and one of our own colleagues from UNI Global Union, endured harrowing conditions, including physical violence, before the last member was released on 31 July.

Their detention wasn't an isolated incident. It is part of a strategy of intimidation and coercion to stop humanitarian aid from reaching Gaza. It is a strategy that the EU cannot ignore.

The Israeli authorities' deliberate policy of starvation and the attacks against the civil population constitute a grave breach of international law and human rights norms. The EU must back up its commitment to a global rules based order by helping ensure compliance with the orders of the International Court Justice and we call upon the European Union and all its institutions to take immediate action by using all of the measures available to it to put pressure to end the blockade and demand peace.

The EU is currently Israel's number one trading partner, and we reiterate our appeal that the European Commission must act on its assessment that Israel has violated human rights and advance sanctions, including the suspension of the EU-Israel Association

Agreement. According to the Commission own findings and reliable international sources, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which says cooperation is based on “respect for human rights and democratic principles”, is being violated.

The EU must put all possible pressure on Israeli government to ensure that aid can reach Gaza safely and unhindered, condemning unequivocally any attacks on civilians seeking essential supplies at aid distribution points. The EU must demonstrate the political courage to back its rhetoric on human rights with tangible consequences.

It is a stain on our European and Global conscience to stand by while the death toll of innocent civilians continues to mount, including those killed by Israeli forces while seeking food, water and shelter at aid distribution points.

The release of the Handala crew is cause for relief but not celebration – not while the humanitarian crisis persists. The EU must seize this moment to act decisively and courageously. It must send a message that violations of human rights and international law have consequences.

The time for talk has passed. The time to act is now.

We restate our calls for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and a just and lasting peace based in the two State solution.

Yours sincerely,



Esther Lynch,  
General Secretary of the ETUC



Christy Hoffman,  
General Secretary of UNI Global Union