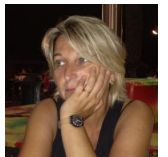

Gaza Strip, seven humanitarian workers killed while delivering aid. Stilli (Italian NGOs), “unacceptable attack on solidarity”

“It’s an intolerable attack on solidarity and humanitarian agencies”, said Silvia Stilli, president of AOI, an umbrella organisation of Italian NGOs, commenting to SIR on the killing in Gaza of seven humanitarian aid workers from the United States-based NGO World Central Kitchen (WCK) founded by Spanish chef José Andres. The seven aid workers, that were from the UK, Australia, Poland and Palestine, as well as a US-Canada dual citizen, were killed in an air raid by the Israeli army after delivering food supplies to the starving population. According to information released by the NGO they worked for, “the WCK team was travelling in two armoured vehicles bearing the WCK logo, and despite “coordinating movements with the IDF, the convoy was hit as it left the Deir al-Balah warehouse where the team had unloaded more than 100 tonnes of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route.” Earlier in the day, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu conceded: “Unfortunately, there was a tragic case of our forces unintentionally hitting innocent people in the Gaza Strip,” “It happens in war, we will investigate it right to the end. We are in contact with the governments, and we will do everything so that this thing does not happen again.”



“This was an attack on solidarity and on humanitarian organisations, which must be defended in their role as relief agencies under international humanitarian law,” Stilli reiterated. “It is an unacceptable attack that the international community must investigate and take appropriate measures. The CEO of the Italian NGOs has seen the dramatic footage of the attack, shared with her by other aid workers: “It was not a bomb that fell or something that happened suddenly. They were young aid workers. Their helmets fell off, they were shot under their vests at the waist.” She continues, distraught: “What happened is unbelievable, it’s unbelievable. The Israeli army deliberately killed people just after they had delivered humanitarian aid. We demand condemnation and denunciation from the international community and strong measures against the Israeli army. We express our solidarity with the organisation and all our colleagues.” **The Israeli military was aware of the movements of the aid convoy.** As is customary for people working in conflict zones, the aid workers had made arrangements with the Israeli army to inform them of their movements. “This is common practice everywhere,” explains Stilli, “even when we sent two containers that entered through Rafah, with aid and AOI funds raised through the Egyptian Red Crescent and the Palestinian Red Crescent. Everyone informs the Israelis about the delivery of aids. The International Court of Justice has made it clear that humanitarian aid must be allowed in and distributed to the population. As if the blockades weren’t enough, now aid workers are being targeted, it’s terrible. Also because nobody is doing it in secret, it’s all out in the open.” **“Unblocking humanitarian aid.”** The AOI CEO reiterated the demand to “unblock humanitarian aid”, also because “everything is about to happen in Rafah. Soon, in addition to hunger, people will die of typhus, they will run out of drinking water. Civilians in Rafah are not protected. Enough is enough!”. Commenting on the risk of the Israeli army admitting mistakes while continuing to commit serious war crimes, she said:

“There can be no more talk of mistakes. Was it a mistake to attack people on their way to collect food? Or killing seven aid workers?”

“All international law and humanitarian law regulations are gone,” she remarked, “and we honestly cannot understand what is happening to the governments of the world. They are expressing condolences and sorrow, but that is not enough: they must take immediate action, because it is not possible to tolerate a war without rules, where everything is admissible”. “We have been expecting

the final escalation for weeks, with almost 2 million people in Rafah in a condition of death foretold," she says. "That's what we fear, coupled with the sheer lack of security for aid workers. Our ongoing programmes are being interrupted, and for what reason? We are caught between despair and horror. And we cannot understand what is happening.

What will be the future of aid workers, how will they be protected? It's the tragic unanswered question."

There is some hope that this incident will at least herald a breakthrough towards a ceasefire and the distribution of aid. "We continue to fundraise, deliver aid and hope that those who deliver it will not be murdered. Not least because our local staff continue to work in a state of total insecurity, all the more so because they are Palestinian." **World Central Kitchen, "unforgivable attack. We will suspend all operations."** "This is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable," said World Central Kitchen CEO Erin Gore. The seven aid workers were from this non-governmental organisation. World Central Kitchen announced that it was suspending its operations in the region with immediate effect. "We will make decisions about the future of our work soon." "I am heartbroken and appalled that we - World Central Kitchen and the world - lost beautiful lives today because of a targeted attack by the IDF. The love they had for feeding people, the determination they embodied to show that humanity rises above all, and the impact they made on countless lives will forever be remembered and cherished," said Erin Gore.

Patrizia Caiffa