

# [***What we know about the veteran Dutch diplomat tasked with getting more aid to Gaza***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69YP-X5T1-DY7V-G4P5-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Sigrid Kaag, a Dutch politician and veteran United Nations diplomat, will take charge of the international body's effort to bring humanitarian relief to war-ravaged Gaza, the UN Secretary General announced Tuesday, filling a position created this month in a breakthrough UN Security Council resolution.

In a post on X, Kaag said that she would resign her position as finance minister and deputy prime minister of the Netherlands to take on the role of UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza.

"Peace, security, and justice have always been my motivations," Kaag said in a statement. "I have accepted this special assignment in the hope to contribute to a better future."

The appointment, which is set to take effect on January 8, comes as conditions in the besieged Palestinian enclave reach "nightmare" levels, as the chief of the World Health Organization put it after a recent visit. Shortages of power and medicine have stripped hospitals of most functioning, and the risk of famine looms over Gaza's population, humanitarian organizations have said.

Since war began on October 7 following Hamas' terror attacks, Israel has allowed a limited number of trucks to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza through Egypt's Rafah crossing. The UN has described this amount as a trickle that fails to come close to meeting the needs of the population of over 2 million.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has also accused Israel's tactics in Gaza, which include intensive aerial bombardment, as "creating massive obstacles to the distribution of humanitarian aid inside Gaza.

Kaag will now be responsible for creating a mechanism to accelerate the movement of aid into Gaza and for "facilitating, coordinating, monitoring, and verifying" the relief effort, according to the UN, including the complex process of ensuring aid trucks are screened before they enter the enclave to ensure they're not carrying non-humanitarian material.

The Security Council resolution creating the position, which called for immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza, passed last week with the abstention of the US after several days of negotiations and delays.

Seasoned diplomat, Arabic speaker

In a [*speech last month*](https://www.government.nl/government/members-of-cabinet/sigrid-kaag/documents/speeches/2023/11/09/speech-by-minister-kaag-at-the-kristallnacht-commemoration), Kaag stressed the need for "adequate humanitarian aid" to reach Gaza.

"Israel's right to exist and its right to defend itself is self-evident to us. But in these dark times, it is important that acts of war comply with international law and the humanitarian law of war in order to avoid innocent civilian victims and enable adequate humanitarian aid to be provided in time," she said.

Kaag previously worked on Palestinian issues as a senior official at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. She later went on to serve as an Assistant Secretary-General with the United Nations Development Programme and, from 2015 to 2017, as the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, according to a biography provided by the UN.

Reacting to the appointment, a Dutch government official told CNN that Kaag is seen as "very suitable" for the role.

"She is a very experienced diplomat who knows the Middle East well and also speaks Arabic. Before she went to the Netherlands for a political career, she was also a UN envoy who negotiated with Assad about giving up Syria's chemical weapons," the official said.

The Syria effort, the result of a last-minute US-Russia plan that staved off a US military intervention, was considered a success, with then US President Barack Obama hailing the destruction of Syria's declared chemical weapons stockpile as an "[*important achievement*](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/18/statement-president-completion-mv-cape-ray-destruction-syria-s-declared-#:~:text=August%2018%2C%202014-,Statement%20by%20the%20President%20on%20the%20Completion%20by%20the%20M,Syria's%20declared%20chemical%20weapons%20stockpile.)."

"The almost impossible deadlines," meant "we couldn't waste a second," Kaag told a [*Harvard interviewer*](https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/sigrid-kaag-takes-syrias-chemical-weapons) in 2014. "We were on message, on mission, looking for results that you can measure."

Kaag later held various positions in Dutch electoral ***politics***, leading the social liberal party D66 to victory in a 2021 vote, and serving in various cabinet positions, including as minister of foreign affairs and minister of trade and development cooperation.

Her tenure as foreign minister lasted only a few months; [*she resigned in September 2021*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/16/europe/dutch-minister-resigns-afghanistan-intl/index.html) after a majority of the Dutch parliament said she had mishandled the evacuation of Kabul that summer after the Taliban seized control of the country.

In her statement Tuesday, Kaag called her work with the Dutch cabinet "special and challenging," citing progress on climate change and support for Ukraine amid its war with Russia.

She had said in July that she was planning to leave ***politics***, describing a "toxic" environment of online intimidation and threats, according to Reuters.

"It becomes a battery of so-called slurs that are meant to demonize you, to deconstruct you," she said at a Council on Foreign Relations event in September. "It erodes the value of our democracy if this persists and is condoned.

Global diplomats celebrated the announcement in statements Tuesday, following months of division and deadlock in the UN Security Council about how to get aid to Gaza civilians.

Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Hanke Bruins Slot called her "the right person for this challenging role" given her "extensive knowledge" and "very broad (diplomatic) experience."

"Look forward to working closely with @SigridKaag in this new role - and to supporting her efforts to streamline and accelerate the UN's life-saving work in Gaza. There is no time to lose," US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield wrote on X.

By David Shortell, CNN

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