

# As Israel insists on using starvation as weapon, famine in northern Gaza must be officially declared



Yazan al-Kafarneh, a 10-year-old Palestinian child who suffered from malnutrition, receives medical treatment at a hospital in Rafah on February 28, 2024. The child later passed away. (Jihad al-Ashrafi, Anadolu Agency - GettyImages)

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Israel-Palestinian Territory

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**Palestinian Territory** – Given that Israel has blocked the entry of goods and aid to the hundreds of thousands of besieged residents in the northern Gaza Strip for more than 50 days now, the relevant international and UN organisations must formally declare famine in the region. Israel's

use of starvation as a weapon is one component of its ongoing genocide in the Strip, which also includes mass killings and forced displacement.

Due to the illegal Israeli blockade on the enclave, 10s of thousands of Palestinians, including dozens of patients in three hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip, are in immediate danger of starvation or long-term health consequences.

Israel has been blocking the flow of any humanitarian aid into northern Gaza since 25 September. By blocking the entry of all goods, beginning on 1 October, and launching a massive military assault against all citizens of Jabalia and Beit Lahia four days later, Israel has successfully divided the North Gaza Governorate from the rest of the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli occupation forces targeted and bombed hundreds of homes and shelters in the North Gaza Governorate over the course of 36 days, killing approximately 1,900 Palestinians and injuring over 4,000 more. Tens of thousands of people were forced to leave the governorate, while 10s of thousands more still reside in its homes and shelters.

The people who are still in North Gaza are living under an immobilising siege, are being deliberately and continuously bombed, and are without food, water, and medical supplies. Anyone who tries to flee in search of these necessities is targeted by Israeli drones and killed.

The Euro-Med Monitor field team has documented shocking testimonies from Palestinians forced to leave the northern Gaza Strip regarding the intense hunger and scarcity of food there. The team cautions that this foretells a rise in the prevalence and spread of hunger, severe malnutrition, and related illnesses, particularly among the elderly, children, and expectant mothers.

Palestinians have not recovered from earlier waves of starvation that appeared at different times at the end of last year and multiple times in the preceding months, and they are currently facing the worst of Israel's starvation, bombing, and displacement campaigns.

Due to Israel's illegal blockade on the entire northern Gaza Strip, including Gaza City, 10s of thousands of people who were forced to flee the North Gaza Governorate and initially sought safety in the Gaza City Governorate are now unable to purchase basic necessities. This is due to

both the lack of humanitarian aid allowed to enter the northern governorates of the Strip and to the high costs brought on by the shortage of supplies there.

The situation in the southern Gaza Valley is not much better, because Israel still places severe restrictions on the ability of traders to enter the area, restricts the number of aid trucks allowed in, and frequently gives armed gangs and thieves cover to seize a significant portion of aid from the trucks in Israeli-controlled areas, preventing them from reaching their destinations. Israel has effectively destroyed public order in the Gaza Strip, killing numerous people in charge of protecting humanitarian aid and distributing it equitably.

All residents of the Gaza Strip are now reliant on foreign humanitarian aid due to a lack of employment opportunities, cash liquidity issues, and the collapse of local production capacity. Consequently, halting such aid would mean denying them access to food and other necessities that are essential to their survival.

Since Israel has been committing the crime of starvation and using it as a means to carry out its genocide against the Palestinian people with the goal of eradicating them, the world is accountable for the famine crisis that Israel has caused in the Gaza Strip. Given the likelihood of dozens of deaths among the hungry every day, the international community is cautioned that this crisis is nearing its peak.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification System's Famine Review Committee, a specialised body that evaluates and authorises famine classifications in nations experiencing severe food crises, issued an alert on Friday that warned of the gravity of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and its rapid deterioration. It also raised concerns about the imminent and high risk of famine in the northern part of the Strip specifically and the urgent need for the international community to act within days—not weeks—to lessen the severity of this humanitarian disaster in the northern Gaza Strip.

Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor counters that it is time to formally declare famine in the Gaza Strip, particularly in the north, which is experiencing an unprecedented siege, bombardment, and deprivation of all basic necessities for survival. This declaration would require the international community to fulfill its moral obligations and take all of the necessary legal actions against Israel, such as punishing it with sanctions, preventing it from receiving weapons, and

acting quickly to establish a humanitarian corridor and bring in aid and supplies to prevent thousands of Palestinians from starving to death.

The international community has both an ethical and legal responsibility to stop the spread of famine in the Gaza Strip. This includes calling things by their proper names and officially declaring the famine in the Strip in order to ensure the provision of immediate supplies of life-saving aid. The delay in this official declaration, i.e. the decision not to take new, serious steps to pressure Israel to lift its illegal blockade of the Strip and stop its crimes there, will undoubtedly result in further obstructions of life-saving aid that will lead to worsening poverty, malnutrition, starvation and deaths.

Israel must be pressured to restore health, water, and sanitation services in the Gaza Strip and to supply safe, nourishing, and sufficient food for the entire Palestinian population there by providing parents with baby formula; treating cases of starvation, malnutrition, and related diseases; allowing the entry and movement of life-saving materials through crossings and land routes immediately, quickly, and effectively; and restoring local production systems and the entry of commercial goods. All of these actions are necessary, especially in the north, as is the urgent restoration of Palestinians' access to humanitarian aid and services across the entire Strip.