

# HALF A MILLION CIVILIANS CAUGHT IN NORTHERN GAZA 'SIEGE WITHIN A SIEGE'

Press Releases

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Oxfam is gravely concerned for the lives of around 500,000 Palestinians, alongside any of the more than 200 Israeli and other national hostages, currently trapped in a “siege within a siege” in northern Gaza.

Israeli forces have imposed a near-complete stranglehold on Gaza City and the northern region, effectively cutting the enclave in half from the border wall to the sea. A member of Oxfam's staff shared a harrowing account from her family yesterday:

“Escaped death twice today. (We feel) like rats in a cage. Gaza City is closed off, and we hear that people travelling to find shelter in the south were targeted in an airstrike and killed. It sounds like they’re going to bomb the hell out of the area. Shifa, is a nightmarish hell hole, with sewage overflowing. Flies are like bodybuilders, enormous, they’re so big and swarm everywhere, impervious to our attempts to swat them. The “zanana” (the sound of military drones) is loud and never leaves the sky.”

Oxfam humanitarian worker Alhasan Swairjo, who managed to contact colleagues from where he is sheltering with his family in north Gaza yesterday, recorded a voice-note that said:

“We are sharing resources with ten other families. The markets are almost empty. There’s no fresh food across all the city. We depend on canned food. The bread markets have no electricity and only a limited amount of fuel - one day, two days, five days - we don't know. We

are making bread at home but don't know in next few days if we will have enough cooking gas. Our children are suffering, they don't understand why we moved, why Israel is shooting us. We cannot give a good explanation why all this is happening. Now we're fighting to survive, our children are fighting to survive.”

Israel's decision to deprive civilians in Gaza of items essential to their survival, such as food, water, fuel, medicines, and other aid, amounts to collective punishment and a violation of international humanitarian law. Its evacuation order of 13 October does not diminish the protected status of civilians who are unable or unwilling to leave and itself is likely inconsistent with Israel's legal obligations given the additional dangers it created.

Communications are so patchy leaving no means for proper, independent accountability. Civilians should never be the target of attacks and, if they choose to remain in their homes, they have the right to do so in safety. Oxfam believes that there is the risk of further atrocious cost to civilian life in northern Gaza.

Oxfam is funding and in intermittent contact with a number of partner organisations still operating in southern Gaza, getting some locally-sourced aid to families. However humanitarian support is virtually impossible in the north.

The more than two million people now squeezed into the southern part of Gaza are also facing an unsafe, chaotic and uncertain situation, with insufficient water, food, medicines and fuel.

The one crossing point at Rafah to and from Egypt is open to a virtual trickle of aid, yesterday increased to 102 trucks after much diplomatic wrangling, but is nowhere near enough to meet the massive and ever-growing needs of people. The wheat flour supply in Gaza is now so low that it could run out within a week.

Oxfam has condemned Hamas for its 7 October attack and in killing 1,400 Israelis, mostly civilians and the taking of over 200 hostages – all of which breached international humanitarian law; all hostages held by Hamas and armed groups should be released immediately and without conditions.

Oxfam condemns Israel for its evacuation of northern Gaza – which amounts to forcible transfer – and its military airstrikes and ground war that have claimed more than 9,000 Palestinian lives and injured countless more, 6,086 of them women and children as of 2 November. The military crisis between Israel and Hamas and subsequent siege has caused a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war, a crime under international humanitarian law, and which is not being mitigated by the resumption of a small amount of aid via Rafah.

Oxfam is calling for an immediate cease fire, granting of humanitarian access and aid, and for the international community to push for an end to Israel's prolonged occupation of Palestinian territory, including lifting of the Gaza blockade.

## Ends

**For more information and interviews, please contact the Oxfam GB Media Team:**

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## Notes to editor

The full voice note from our colleague Alhasan Swairjo in northern Gaza is available [here](#)

## PRESS CONTACT

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