



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

On World Water Day, Gaza Faces Famine: Al Mezan, Al-Haq, and PCHR Warn that Israel's Water Restrictions are Prohibited Acts of Starvation and Genocide

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This year on 22 March, the United Nations marks World Water Day, under the theme: [leveraging water for peace](#). However, in the occupied Gaza Strip, this day is marred by the severe water restrictions imposed by Israel. These restrictions are deliberately designed to inflict conditions of life on the Palestinian people in Gaza calculated to bring about their physical destruction, and for this reason they must be considered genocidal acts.

As early as November 2023, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, [warned](#) that Israel “must stop using water as a weapon of war.” South Africa has also noted the denial of [water](#) as a genocidal act in the International Court of Justice case on the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

As we mark World Water Day, the [IPC Global Initiative](#) has raised the alarm that Gaza has reached catastrophic levels of starvation and is approaching famine.

Before Israel began its genocidal military campaign against Gaza, less than [3%](#) of water in Gaza was considered fit for human consumption. This dire situation stemmed from a multitude of interconnected factors. Over-extraction of groundwater, sewage infiltration, lack of effective environmental management, and repeated Israeli military attacks on water and sanitation infrastructure have led to increased pollution and salinity of the groundwater upon which Gaza's population depends.

Previous Israeli military attacks on Gaza have systematically targeted critical water infrastructure, as documented by [Al Mezan](#) and [Al-Haq](#). Gaza's water crisis has been exacerbated by Israel's illegal closure and blockade spanning 17 years. For example, through closure policies, Israeli authorities have prevented the entry into Gaza of [water purification chemicals](#) and equipment necessary to maintain and repair what was Gaza's already vulnerable water systems and infrastructure. These policies have effectively pushed all basic services in the Gaza Strip, including water and sanitation facilities, to the brink of collapse long before 7 October 2023.

Restricting Water as a Weapon of War

We reiterate that Israel's weaponization of water and policy of starvation are violations of international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL), which may also constitute war crimes. Particularly, Israel's targeting of Gaza's water supply, water installations and water-related installations which are recognized as [objects indispensable for the survival of the population](#) under IHL is not only used as a weapon that furthers its subjugation efforts but is also used as a means to further its policy of using starvation as a means of warfare—a war crime.

Under IHL, the [prohibition of starvation as a means and method of warfare](#) also includes water. Before the ongoing genocide, Israel [dictated how much water and calories Palestinians in Gaza were allowed to consume](#). Since October 2023, and in fulfilling its threats to starve Palestinians, Israel has made it almost impossible for aid trucks to enter Gaza and has on several occasions [killed desperate, starving Palestinians](#) who attempted to secure food and water from the few aid trucks that did succeed in entering the northern areas of the besieged Gaza Strip.

Denying Water to Destroy the Palestinian People in Gaza

Two days into the current aggression, Israel cut off its already minimal water supply to Gaza, with expressions of genocidal intent. On 9 October 2023, Yoav Gallant, Israel's Minister of Defense, [stated](#): "We are imposing a complete siege on [Gaza]. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel – everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly". This was followed by the Coordinator of the Government in the Territories (COGAT) Maj. Gen. Ghassan Alian [announcement](#) that, "Israel has

imposed a total blockade on Gaza, no electricity, no water, just damage. You wanted hell, you will get hell". On 12 October 2023, Israel Katz, then Israel's Ministry of Energy, [said](#), "For years we supplied Gaza with electricity, water and fuel. Instead of saying thank you, they sent thousands of human animals to slaughter, murder, rape and kidnap babies, women and the elderly - that's why we decided to stop the flow of water, electricity and fuel and now their local power station has collapsed and there is no electricity in Gaza."

On 17 November 2023, the OHCHR had already [warned](#) that around 70% of Gaza's population was drinking salinized and contaminated water, with [UNRWA](#) estimating that public sewage pumping stations, 60 water wells in the south, the two main desalination plants in Rafah, two main sewage pumps in the south, and the Rafah wastewater treatment plant had all ceased operations. This denial of water further impacts hygiene and sanitation, without which [gastrointestinal diseases, respiratory and skin infections](#) are being allowed to thrive in Gaza, with a looming fear of a cholera outbreak which according to the World Health Organization, can [kill](#) within hours if left untreated.

As stated by the [World Food Programme](#), in Gaza, "[f]ood and safe water have become incredibly scarce and diseases are rife, compromising women and children's nutrition and immunity and resulting in a surge of acute malnutrition. People are already dying from hunger-related causes." As Gaza plummets into [famine](#), UN Humanitarian Coordinator, [Jamie McGoldrick](#) has warned that the lack of "spare parts for water and sanitation systems, generators, solar panels, and chemicals to treat water" are amongst the "key drivers of the malnutrition crisis".

A Deliberate Famine, Israel is Intentionally Starving Palestinians in Gaza

As of 22 March 2024, it has been [reported](#) that Israel is provoking a famine in Gaza which is expected to become a reality between March and May. On 18 March 2024, the World Health Organization [warned](#) of the imminent famine, stating that “[w]ithout a significant and immediate increase in deliveries of food, water and other essential supplies, conditions will continue deteriorating. Virtually all households are already skipping meals every day and adults are reducing their meals so that children can eat.”

Further, following the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Report](#) published on 18 March 2024, [Oxfam](#) has stated that “[t]his new report shows that the catastrophic levels of hunger and starvation in Gaza are the highest ever recorded on the IPC scale, both in terms of number of people and percentage of the population. Never before have we seen such rapid deterioration into widespread starvation. Northern Gaza is days away from famine and the rest of Gaza faces a similar fate. Children are already dying of malnutrition and starvation under the gaze of the international community. Since December, the number of people in Gaza who have plunged into catastrophic levels of hunger, has nearly doubled.”

On World Water Day, our organizations call for concrete actions from the international community aimed at:

- Ending Israel’s 17-year blockade and closure of Gaza and the dismantle its illegal occupation and apartheid regime, ensuring the full and unimpeded supply of water into the Gaza Strip;
- Imposing sanctions and arms embargoes on Israel;

- Holding corporations domiciled in their jurisdiction accountable for pillage of Palestinian water in the occupied Palestinian territory and water apartheid;

We further call on the International Court of Justice to hold Israel to account for breaches of the Provisional Measures Orders and continuing acts of genocide and to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for Yoav Gallant and Israel Katz, for being key architects in weaponizing water in Gaza and facilitating the current famine, as an act of genocide.