



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Widespread hunger in the Gaza Strip, and families are becoming increasingly desperate in their search for food

14 December 2023

14 December 2023

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), Al Mezan and Al-Haq warn of a real and unprecedented famine in the Gaza Strip, which began in northern Gaza and Gaza City as a result of the 69-day Israeli military offensive coupled with a tight siege preventing food and water supplies from reaching most people in Gaza.

The situation monitored by our teams confirms that tens of thousands of families in the Gaza Strip spend their entire day and several days without a meal and that they share crumbs of the little that's available, due to the lack of distribution of the already limited humanitarian aid entering Gaza. Most of the humanitarian aid is concentrated in Rafah, since the start of the Israeli ground invasion in Khan Younis.

The 2.3 million residents of Gaza have serious daily challenges in accessing food and water, and our staff is no different. Our colleagues are reporting their inability to secure their families' food needs. After 69 days of the military offensive, markets and shops no longer have goods, and humanitarian aid is limited and does not reach the entire population. It mainly reaches shelters that are overwhelmed with hundreds of thousands of displaced people. Flour distribution is very slow, and hundreds of thousands of families are still waiting for their share.

According to our teams, residents are forced to wait for more than 10 hours near distribution centers, which are currently confined to the city of Rafah, and sometimes they return to their families empty-handed.

Our organizations indicate that the manifestations of hunger are evident in northern Gaza and Gaza City, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are located, most of whom have suffered repeated and multiple displacement under continued Israeli shelling and mass killing. Each time they evacuate they are forced to leave behind their belongings and goods, including little food-related items they may have.

Except for the very limited number of aid trucks that entered northern Wadi Gaza during the days of the humanitarian truce “pause”, aid access to the northern Gaza district and Gaza City stopped completely after the end of the “pause” on December 1, 2023. Israeli shelling and attacks intensified, especially on Jabaliya and Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza, and the neighborhoods of Shujaiya and Al-Zaitoun in eastern Gaza, this was accompanied by a worsening of the humanitarian crisis.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), within one week (the days of the truce), the programme was able to deliver food aid to approximately 250,000 individuals north of Wadi Gaza, meaning that even during the days of the truce, no aid reached hundreds of thousands in Gaza city and its north. It is estimated that about 700,000-800,000 people are currently located in northern Gaza and Gaza City.

According to information obtained by our teams from some co-workers in other organizations, **residents in northern Gaza and Gaza City are suffering from real hunger, and some of them go for several days without a meal, with no shops or markets available, and no humanitarian aid available.**

During the past few days, the Israeli occupying forces attacked many shelters set up inside schools in Gaza City and the northern Gaza district, amidst ongoing shootings, field executions, abuse and arrests. They then forced the remaining displaced people to evacuate these shelters, and in most cases forced them to leave their belongings, including any limited food supplies they had. With each evacuation, people lost more supplies, and some have been displaced more than 10 times in a row.

The hunger crisis is also rampant in southern Wadi Gaza, at varying levels in different areas, depending on the level of intensity of the Israeli attacks. Currently, the suffering in Khan Younis is very high compared to other areas south of Wadi Gaza.

We have received testimonies that the distribution of meals has ceased in the majority of UNRWA-run shelters and that families are struggling individually to provide for their needs.

According to the follow-up of our teams, the families who remained in their homes or shelters in the areas witnessing a ground invasion by the Israeli occupying forces are trapped inside those homes and shelters without receiving any assistance or food supplies, in addition to being exposed to the risk of shelling and targeting.

Our organisations confirm that hundreds of thousands of families are unable to obtain milk for their children, as well as hundreds of children who are fed formula milk of a specific type that is not available.

According to WFP , 9 out of 10 people across the Gaza Strip spend a whole day, day and night, without eating anything, stressing that the threat of hunger is widespread and families are becoming increasingly desperate in their search for food.

According to our teams, with the depletion of all goods from the markets, residents who have money resort to buying from others who had received aid in previous times and are willing to sell them. These goods are bought at very high prices, which most residents cannot afford.

Before the Israeli aggression, the unemployment rate was 45% in the Gaza Strip, and around 67% among young people and graduates. Following the aggression, almost everyone became unemployed, and most of those who used to rely on daily wages, such as drivers, barber shop owners, and workers in factories, shops, bakeries and restaurants, are now without income. Additionally, the majority of public employees have not received their salaries, so the vast majority of the population does not have any money to buy scarce daily necessities which have increased dramatically in price.

Hundreds of thousands of people in shelters are waiting for assistance from UNRWA, government institutions such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, or charities and individual initiatives. Unfortunately, these institutions wait for the arrival of food and assistance through the crossing. As a consequence, residents may have to wait for a day or even longer to receive a meal or limited canned food to stave off the hunger of their children.

According to our teams, due to the scarcity of food, people limit their meals to one per day. The preparation of these

meals involves significant efforts, which includes collecting fire-burning materials like firewood and cardboard, as alternatives to cooking gas, which has been unavailable since the start of the aggression. Adding to these challenges, the rainy and cold weather has further exacerbated people's suffering. Thousands of tents have been flooded, and residents have no winter clothes.

Here we recall the statement of the Israeli "Defense Minister" Yoav Galant on October 9, 2023: "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed," he said, stating that it was all part of Israel's battle against "human animals." This statement represents an official and declared acknowledgement by the Israeli government of its genocidal campaign, imposing starvation, in parallel with killing and destruction, in an almost unprecedented silence by the international community amounting to complicity.

The Israeli occupying forces also shelled hundreds of bakeries, shops, food stores, markets and poultry farms and destroyed thousands of dunums of agricultural land, which indicates the existence of an executive decision to deprive Palestinian civilians of the benefit of the few remaining foodstuffs in the Gaza Strip and starve the population.

It is evident that Israel, the occupying power, uses starvation as a method of warfare, and uses it as a tool of collective punishment, revenge against civilians, and pressure for political concessions.

Our organisations recall that international humanitarian law prohibits starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare, as stipulated in Article 54(1) of Protocol I to the four Geneva Conventions, which is classified as part of customary international humanitarian law.^[1]

In the face of this catastrophic reality, our organizations remind the international community of its responsibilities in the face of a systematic starvation process targeting 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza. We further demand the opening of safe humanitarian corridors and the unconditional delivery of aid throughout the Gaza Strip.

We reiterate that the primary way to end this humanitarian crisis in Gaza is through serious and immediate action to stop the Israeli military aggression on the Gaza Strip, protection of Palestinians from the unfolding genocide, and effective measures to ensure accountability for war crimes, unfolding genocide, and all violations committed by Israel against the Palestinian People.

[1] See Rule 53 of the Customary Rules.