



SOS Alert Gaza - Update #7 - Man-Made Famine

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The Lemkin Institute is appalled at the reprehensible situation transpiring in Gaza. We condemn the actions taken by the Israeli government and its collaborators, who target Palestinians seeking refuge and aid. Denial of aid and resources entering Gaza has created a nightmarish situation and is a clear indicator of genocidal intent.

At a time when many Palestinians would otherwise choose to fast for the holy days of Ramadan and Easter, the idea of ‘fasting’ makes no sense as the region descends into starvation and famine. Any celebrations of these holidays were also somber and filled with grief for people who have lost everything, including many family members. Prior to the current siege of Gaza, the Israeli government was allowing only a bare minimum of necessities to enter the strip. Since the 7 October attack by Hamas, Israel has increasingly denied aid entering the enclave. It claims that, for security purposes, it is necessary to impose draconian limitations on the type of humanitarian aid allowed. Restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities include a list of banned items, including anesthetics, ventilators, water filtration systems, and even sleeping bags and children’s toys. This approach has predictably led to a comprehensive blockade of desperately needed humanitarian resources sent into Gaza, so much so that 70% of people in northern Gaza are now experiencing “catastrophic hunger.” Meanwhile, the area overall is similarly experiencing mass starvation, where an estimated 677,000 people are facing acute malnutrition. Due to these unsustainable circumstances, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 2728 in late March, demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, as well as the unconditional release of all hostages taken during the Hamas attack.

United Nations agencies have warned of the risk of famine in Gaza since December 2023. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a tool used to analyze and improve food scarcity, a society is “considered to be in famine when 20% of households have an extreme lack of food, 30% of children suffer from acute malnutrition, and at least two adults or four children per every 10,000 people die daily.” By February 2024, over 575,000 Gazans – an

estimated quarter of the population – were “one step away from famine.” As it stands today, 1 in 3 children under 2 years of age are extremely malnourished in the north, with over 13,000 children already killed in the strip since October. And, importantly, by May 2024, it is projected that outright famine will occur throughout Gaza. Food scarcity in the region has become so dire that Gazans and aid workers alike face violence when even scant resources are provided.

On 28 February, a convoy of trucks arrived in northern Gaza, bringing much-needed aid to residents there. As desperate Gazans flocked to the trucks, Israeli forces fired on the crowds, triggering a chaotic stampede. A doctor who went to the scene of the chaos attested to seeing dozens of bodies with gunshot wounds and bags of flour drenched in blood. The Gaza Health Ministry said in a statement that over 100 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces, and over 700 were injured. Two weeks later, a convoy bringing resources to northern Gaza once again ended in the death of Palestinians seeking aid. The Gaza Health Ministry said that at least 20 people had been killed and more than 150 injured in the event and accused Israeli forces of carrying out an attack against “a gathering of civilians waiting for humanitarian aid” near the Kuwait traffic circle in Gaza City.

More recently, 7 workers from the World Central Kitchen were killed, and a UNICEF convoy struck as they were en route to deliver humanitarian aid. Although Israeli forces have conducted an internal investigation that claims the act was due to a grave mistake, international leaders, including US President Joe Biden, have acknowledged the killing was “not a stand-alone incident.” In response, World Central Kitchen CEO Erin Gore declared: “This is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war.”

Man-made famine being used as a weapon is not new to Gaza nor to the concept of genocide. Numerous international bodies have formally recognized such historical atrocities as the Holodomor in Ukraine, as well as the contemporary crisis in Sudan today, as part of a larger genocidal strategy reliant upon forced famine and starvation. For example, since 2006, dozens of UN member states, the European Parliament, and over 30 states within the US have recognized the Holodomor as a genocide perpetrated against Ukrainians by the Soviet government in the 1930s. More recently, the famine occurring in Sudan today has also been widely condemned by members of the international community. Consequently, and in alignment with its Genocide Convention of 1948, the United Nations formally outlined the obligation to protect civilians when using hunger as a weapon of war in 2018.

The recognition of hunger as a weapon of war and genocide is due to its fatal implications. When one experiences starvation, the immune system begins to break down, leading to decreased immunity and severe abdominal complications. Studies show that people can only survive without food or water for several weeks. Gazans have been facing extreme hunger for several

months now. Without nutrients such as fat and cholesterol from food, the production of testosterone, estrogen, and other hormones is negatively impacted. Early mortality in children is particularly difficult to remedy. Forced famine, then, not only reflects life force atrocities perpetrated against younger generations of civilians but also those perpetrated against adults of childbearing age.

There is also the question of intent. Top Israeli government officials have used extremist rhetoric on numerous occasions when it comes to supplying aid to Palestine, which can be interpreted as genocidal. For instance, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant specified in October 2023 that the “complete siege on Gaza” would include a halt to all food and water supplies, while former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet asserted that he “would not provide water to his enemies.” Current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also engaged in such rhetoric, writing on Twitter (the precursor to X) that the ongoing hostilities constituted a battle against the “children of darkness.” Netanyahu’s recent response to the killing of World Central Kitchen’s aid workers was similarly cynical: “This happens in war.”

Whereas the loss of life does happen in war, as does food scarcity, a deliberate, manufactured famine that systematically targets civilians happens in genocide. A recent report by Francesca Albanese, the U.N. Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, also frames the famine in Gaza as genocidal in scope. The report states, “Israel’s ongoing offensive in Gaza qualifies as genocide on at least three counts of the UN Convention on Genocide: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part.”

Supporting the Special Rapporteur’s claims, on March 28, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) initiated additional legal measures to prevent the spread of famine and ordered Israel to conform to its obligations under the UN Genocide Convention. In its provisional measures, the ICJ recognized that “the catastrophic living conditions of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have deteriorated further” and that “Palestinians in Gaza are no longer facing only a risk of famine, as noted previously, but that famine is setting in.” The Court further ordered Israel to take all necessary and effective measures to ensure, without delay, the immediate provision at scale of resources to Gazans. With regards to the Israeli military, it emphasized that it “not commit acts which constitute a violation of any of the rights of the Palestinians in Gaza as a protected group.”

Direct responsibility to impose an immediate ceasefire rests upon both the Israeli government and Hamas. It further falls upon Israel abandoning its planned offensive into Rafah, which could drive over 1 million people — half of Gaza’s population — into catastrophic hunger and potentially cause famine in the south. If, as Defense Minister Gallant claimed on 7 April, Hamas

has “stopped functioning as a military organization throughout the Gaza Strip,” what is the military purpose of invading this city, given the suffering and death it will undoubtedly cause?

Reiterating the Lemkin Institute’s latest [SOS Alert for Gaza from 30 March](#), we emphatically condemn Israel for its continued refusal to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, including aid that is paid for by the United States. The obstruction of aid not only puts the Netanyahu government in violation of the above-mentioned UNSC Resolution 2728, as well as the International Court of Justice’s provisional orders in *South Africa vs. Israel*, but also renders them ineligible for further US security assistance under the provisions of the Humanitarian Aid Corridors Act.

Beyond this, governments around the globe must immediately halt the transfer of weapons to Israel. The Lemkin Institute applauds a recent [open letter](#) to the Biden administration by US lawmakers that denounces unconditional weapons transfers at this time as “unjustifiable.” We further remind the administration that the United States, in its quest to become a shining ‘city on a hill,’ must immediately comply with US law relating to arms exports and humanitarian aid, including 22 U.S. Code § 2314, Section 502B(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act, and Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act.

The international community must do more to prevent genocide from unfolding. Failure to act betrays UN member nations’ commitment to the Genocide Convention and leaves an indelible stain on the legacies of those who are complicit in this crisis.