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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement submitted by Association of Iranian Short Statured Adults, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status\***

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 August 2025]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



# **The Unprecedented Water and Sanitation Crisis in Gaza: A Grave Human Rights Emergency**

## **Introduction**

The Gaza Strip, home to over 2.3 million Palestinians, is currently enduring one of the most severe humanitarian crises in modern history. Years of ongoing conflict combined with an extensive blockade have resulted in the near-total collapse of vital infrastructure, particularly in the water and sanitation sectors. This catastrophic situation has escalated into a public health emergency with devastating consequences for the fundamental human rights of Gaza's population, including their rights to life, health, and an adequate standard of living.

The blockade, coupled with repeated military assaults on critical water and sanitation facilities, has severely damaged and degraded water treatment plants, sewage networks, and distribution systems. The intermittent electricity supply and acute fuel shortages have led many water production and treatment facilities to either shut down entirely or operate at dangerously low capacities.[1] Consequently, access to safe drinking water has plummeted to less than 10% of the minimum required, forcing many families, including vulnerable groups such as children, women, and the elderly, to travel hazardous distances to obtain just a few liters of potable water daily[2].

The lack of safe water not only directly threatens public health but has also precipitated a sharp increase in waterborne diseases, including cholera, diarrhea, hepatitis A, acute respiratory infections, jaundice, and skin infections. Vulnerable populations—particularly pregnant women, young children, and the elderly—bear the brunt of this crisis. Additionally, the breakdown of sanitation systems and sewage overflow pose dire environmental health risks and undermine sustainable development, jeopardizing the future wellbeing of Gaza's residents.

## **Legal Dimensions of the Water Crisis in Gaza**

The restriction of Gaza's residents' access to safe drinking water and essential sanitation services constitutes a clear violation of fundamental human rights and may amount to collective punishment under international law.

As Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, stated in his 2023 statement, the water and sanitation situation in Gaza is unprecedentedly critical and is being used as a "silent but deadly bomb" against civilians[4]. He emphasized that the blockade and the cutting off of fuel and essential equipment for water purification by Israel constitute a blatant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, leading to a worsening public health situation and an increase in waterborne diseases, particularly among children and women. According to his interview with Anadolu Agency on 6 May 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur stated that Israel's attacks on Gaza's water infrastructure have reduced per-capita water access to just five liters a day, describing the deprivation of drinking water as "a silent but lethal bomb"[5]. Furthermore, he warned against discriminatory policies and a system of water apartheid that have been imposed on the Palestinian people for decades, considering these actions crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute[6]. He also condemned Israel's use of water as a weapon of war and the denial of adequate and safe water access to the people of Gaza, urging the international community to take urgent action to end this crisis and ensure the human rights of Gaza's population

This assessment is supported by numerous non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, which have documented deliberate policies that exacerbate humanitarian suffering in Gaza. [7]

The right to safe and clean water and sanitation is explicitly recognized as a human right by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/292[8] and detailed in General Comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [9]. This right

guarantees equitable, non-discriminatory, and sustainable access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic use.

International humanitarian law, particularly the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, prohibits the destruction or targeting of objects indispensable to civilian survival, including water sources and sanitation infrastructure in conflict zones [10]. Deliberate attacks against such civilian infrastructure constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and warrant criminal prosecution.[11]

Moreover, the prolonged deprivation of essential water and sanitation services threatens the right to life and the right to health, protected under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).[12] The ongoing blockade and military operations that restrict fuel, spare parts, and equipment needed for maintenance and repair of water infrastructure compound this violation, amounting to a breach of obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.

## **Current Humanitarian Situation and Statistics**

- Over 97% of Gaza's groundwater is contaminated and unsuitable for drinking or hygiene purposes, primarily due to sewage leakage, saltwater intrusion, and the impacts of military operations on natural resources.
- Only 40% of water treatment and distribution facilities remain operational, and without reliable fuel supplies, these systems are expected to cease functioning entirely within weeks.[13]
- Average daily per capita consumption of safe water has plummeted to between 3 to 5 liters, far below the minimum standard of 15 liters per day as recommended by the WHO.
- The number of waterborne diseases has surged sharply; WHO reports a significant rise in diarrheal diseases and infections related to contaminated water, especially among children under five[14].
- Over 85% of Gaza's water and sanitation networks have been damaged or destroyed due to military attacks, with 2,263 kilometers of pipelines and 47 critical pumping stations out of service, and all wastewater treatment plants have ceased operations.
- Thousands of families are forced to queue for long hours at water distribution points, exposing them to risks from ongoing hostilities and lack of security[15].

## **Practical and Feasible Recommendations**

Effective pressure from states and the United Nations on Israel to end the policy of starving and depriving the people of Gaza of water is a prerequisite. Only after such pressure can the following practical and feasible measures be implemented:

1. **Immediate Lift of the Blockade:** Facilitate the unrestricted and rapid entry of fuel, spare parts, and essential equipment necessary for the operation and repair of water and sanitation infrastructure.
2. **Deployment of Mobile Water Treatment Units:** Utilize portable, renewable energy-powered water treatment technologies, such as solar-powered desalination units, to provide safe water in multiple locations across Gaza.
3. **Strengthening Healthcare and Emergency Services:** Increase financial and technical support to humanitarian and medical organizations to equip health centers with necessary resources to manage waterborne diseases and provide adequate care.
4. **Regular and Equitable Distribution of Safe Water:** Coordinate with international and local agencies to ensure consistent and equitable supply of potable water to affected families, prioritizing vulnerable populations.

5. Independent Monitoring and Legal Accountability: Establish independent committees to monitor water and sanitation conditions and investigate potential violations of international law, ensuring accountability for perpetrators.
6. Public Awareness and Education Programs: Implement widespread community education initiatives focusing on optimal water use and hygiene practices to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

The Gaza water and sanitation crisis represents a stark violation of international human rights and humanitarian law. The denial of safe water access poses an existential threat to millions and exacerbates suffering in an already dire humanitarian context. It is incumbent upon the international community, and this Council in particular, to respond urgently with concrete measures to protect the rights and dignity of the people of Gaza. The international community bears a legal and moral responsibility to ensure respect for these rights and to act decisively to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

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1) [https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/gazas-taps-running-dry-fuel-crisis-deepens-daily-struggle-families?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/gazas-taps-running-dry-fuel-crisis-deepens-daily-struggle-families?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

2) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/12/19/extermination-and-acts-genocide/israel-deliberately-depriving-palestinians-gaza>

4) [https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/israel-must-stop-using-water-weapon-war-un-expert?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/israel-must-stop-using-water-weapon-war-un-expert?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

5) [https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/157083?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/157083?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

6) <https://www.waterdiplomat.org/story/2024/10/un-special-rapporteurs-decry-militarisation-water-and-current-humanitarian-situation>

7) [https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/israel-opt-israel-must-lift-illegal-and-inhumane-blockade-on-gaza-as-power-plant-runs-out-of-fuel/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/israel-opt-israel-must-lift-illegal-and-inhumane-blockade-on-gaza-as-power-plant-runs-out-of-fuel/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

8) A/RES/64/292. UN General Assembly, 2010

9) E/C.12/2002/1. (CESCR, 2002) Also available at:

[https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/water/docs/CESCR\\_GC\\_15.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/water/docs/CESCR_GC_15.pdf)

10) <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977>

11) <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf>

12) [https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1976/01/19760103%2009-57%20pm/ch\\_iv\\_03.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1976/01/19760103%2009-57%20pm/ch_iv_03.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

13) [https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/gazas-taps-running-dry-fuel-crisis-deepens-daily-struggle-families?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/gazas-taps-running-dry-fuel-crisis-deepens-daily-struggle-families?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

14) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/12/19/extermination-and-acts-genocide/israel-deliberately-depriving-palestinians-gaza>

15) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/12/19/extermination-and-acts-genocide/israel-deliberately-depriving-palestinians-gaza>