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Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

Written statement* submitted by United Nations Watch, 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.

[12 August 2024]

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



Accusation Israel Starves Gaza Civilians Is Patently False

United Nations Watch submits the following report examining the claim that Israel uses starvation as a method of war in Gaza. This claim was promulgated by UN officials including the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 (“the State of Palestine Rapporteur”), Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, and certain UN member states.

On March 19th, the High Commissioner said: “The extent of Israel’s continued restrictions on the entry of aid into Gaza, together with the manner in which it continues to conduct hostilities, may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which is a war crime.”¹

In her March 26th report to the Human Rights Council, the State of Palestine Rapporteur accused Israel of “deliberate starvation” of Palestinians, which she said constituted a “genocidal act.”² In a later July 9th statement, 10 UN experts including the State of Palestine Rapporteur declared: “that Israel’s intentional and targeted starvation campaign against the Palestinian people is a form of genocidal violence and has resulted in famine across all of Gaza.”³

During the March 2024 Human Rights Council session, several states including Türkiye, Bangladesh, and Brazil accused Israel of using starvation as a method of war.

On May 20, 2024, the ICC Chief Prosecutor filed an application for arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant claiming he had “reasonable grounds to believe” that Israel was “using starvation of civilians as a method of war.”⁴

This slanderous accusation was based on a March report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) claiming that famine was imminent in Gaza and that 1.1 million people there were experiencing catastrophic food insecurity.⁵ At the time, COGAT, the IDF unit responsible for coordinating humanitarian aid to Gaza, blasted that report for “multiple factual and methodological flaws, some of them serious.” Among other things, COGAT explained that the IPC significantly underreported the amount of water available per person per day in Gaza as 1 liter instead of 20 liters, lacked up-to-date data, relied on misleading information from the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry, and ignored public evidence on the availability of food throughout Gaza, including in the North.⁶ Notably, in June 2024, the IPC’s Famine Review Committee reversed its earlier famine classification stating that “the available evidence does not indicate that Famine is currently occurring.”⁷

Moreover, the humanitarian aid data easily contradicts this false accusation. Indeed, Israel has consistently facilitated the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid to Gaza since the early days of the war.⁸ As of August 12, Israel had facilitated the entry of more than 875,000 tons of aid into Gaza since the beginning of the war, including more than 740,000 tons of food and water.⁹ Even in March and April when some of the above statements were made, both UN and COGAT data showed that six months into the war, 272,000 tons of food had entered Gaza, more than double the required amount according to the WFP.¹⁰ Notably, in April, the World Food Programme (WFP) confirmed the activity in food markets throughout Gaza, including sales of humanitarian aid, contradicting claims of starvation.¹¹

Aside from facilitating the entry of aid, Israel has also undertaken steps to facilitate the distribution of the aid inside Gaza. These include construction and improvement of humanitarian routes inside Gaza, creating a humanitarian corridor, and implementing tactical pauses to enable civilians to replenish supplies.¹² Additionally, in March and April 2024, Israel acted to improve humanitarian access to the North, including facilitating airdrops¹³ and opening new land and sea routes.¹⁴ The bottom line is that if Israel was really using starvation as a method of war in Gaza, the Gaza civilian death toll would be much higher than it is after more than ten months of war.

Israel’s conduct throughout the war to facilitate aid to Gazan civilians indicates that it has gone well beyond its obligations under international law¹⁵ and proves the opposite of this accusation—i.e., that Israel is acting to prevent famine by ensuring Gazans in need have access to food.

While the humanitarian situation in Gaza is difficult due to the war started by Hamas on October 7th, it is being constantly monitored by an expert staff which includes input from international organizations and the private sector in Gaza.¹⁶ Furthermore, Israel is not acting alone. The humanitarian effort is coordinated between Israel, Egypt, the United States of America, and the UN through a joint coordination room, daily assessments, and a designated task force.¹⁷

Significantly, it is Hamas, not Israel, that is the party responsible for obstructing access to aid for Gazans. Hamas has been documented hoarding and stealing the humanitarian aid meant for Gazans, as well as shooting Gazans attempting to get aid.¹⁸ In March 2024, Hamas warned Gazans against cooperating with Israel to secure aid deliveries.¹⁹ Hamas has also attacked the Kerem Shalom crossing, a main entry point for aid.²⁰

In short, Israel's extensive efforts to ensure humanitarian aid in Gaza contradict any claims that it is using starvation as a weapon of war. United Nations Watch urges the High Commissioner, ICC Chief Prosecutor, UN the State of Palestine Rapporteur, and UN member states to speak responsibly and to refrain from making false and unsupported accusations.

We remind all UN officials that the spread of disinformation and misinformation has real-life consequences and must be addressed. We urge all UN stakeholders to be mindful of the need to foster understanding, not division.

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