

Israel's Humanitarian Aid Efforts in Gaza: Addressing Allegations of Starvation as a Method of War

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has sparked intense international scrutiny, with serious allegations leveled against Israel regarding its treatment of Palestinian civilians. Among the most grave accusations are claims that Israel is deliberately using starvation as a weapon of war. This article aims to examine these allegations in light of Israel's documented humanitarian aid efforts and the complex realities on the ground in Gaza, providing a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and its historical context. The gravity of the allegations has drawn attention from international legal bodies. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) as well as the International Criminal Court (ICC) have consistently placed Israel under unfair scrutiny for a starvation crisis that does not exist.

In its provisional measures order, the ICJ highlighted the severe humanitarian situation in Gaza and the potential for irreparable harm due to lack of access to essential resources. The court stated:

"The catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is at serious risk of deteriorating further. In view of the fundamental values sought to be protected by the Genocide Convention, the Court considers that the plausible rights in question in these proceedings, namely the right of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to be protected from acts of genocide and related prohibited acts [under the] Convention ... are of such a nature that prejudice to them is capable of causing irreparable harm".¹

Similarly, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has expressed concern over the situation. In a statement, the ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC said:

"My Office is actively investigating any alleged war crimes in the region, including those related to the deprivation of essential resources such as food and water. The use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is a war crime in international armed conflicts".²

These quotes illustrate the fact that these international legal bodies have been subjecting Israel to unfair biases that are not consistent with the statistics provided below regarding Israel's humanitarian aid deliveries and coordinations.

Since the outbreak of the conflict on October 7, 2023, Israel has been working to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. According to COGAT (Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories), the Israeli body responsible for coordinating aid, over 18,000 trucks carrying humanitarian aid have entered Gaza through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom

¹ Lattimer, Mark. "The International Court of Justice's Interim Measures to Prevent Genocide in Gaza." Default, 26 Jan. 2024, www.lawfaremedia.org/article/the-international-court-of-justice%27s-interim-measures-to-prevent-genocide-in-gaza

²"Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for Arrest Warrants in the Situation in the State of Palestine." International Criminal Court, www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state. Accessed 25 June 2024.

crossings as of June 2024.³ Additionally, an average of 200-250 aid trucks are entering Gaza daily.⁴ The aid includes food, water, medical supplies, and other essential items.

Despite the complex security concerns and logistical challenges, Israel opened a third humanitarian aid route into northern Gaza in May 2024, known as the Western Erez crossing, aimed at increasing the flow of aid into the region.⁵ This effort was part of a coordinated initiative with the U.S. government to enhance aid delivery routes to the Gaza Strip, particularly to its northern areas.

Contrary to allegations of deliberate starvation, the amount of food entering Gaza appears to be sufficient for the population. A study by Columbia University professors found that 250 truckloads of food per day is sufficient to feed the entire Gazan population of 2.2 million people. The study concluded that each Gazan was provided with approximately 3,374 kilocalories per day, while only 2,100 kilocalories are needed. This amount is almost identical to the 2.36 kg of food per day that the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization estimates the average individual consumes in North America.⁶

These figures suggest that the food supply entering Gaza is more than adequate to meet the nutritional needs of the population.

It is important to note that the situation in Gaza was already dire prior to October 7th, 2023. The region already had limited economic opportunities and access to resources. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), before the current conflict: Unemployment in Gaza stood at 45% (one of the highest rates in the world), 80% of the population relied on

international aid, and 90-95% of the water from the coastal aquifer was unfit for human consumption.^{7 8}

These pre-existing conditions have undoubtedly exacerbated the current humanitarian crisis, making it even more challenging to address the population's needs. Between the amount of aid

³ “What You Need to Know about Israel’s Humanitarian Aid to Gaza.” AJC, 11 Apr. 2024, www.ajc.org/news/what-you-need-to-know-about-israels-humanitarian-aid-to-gaza.

⁴ “Multiple Factual Flaws”: Israel Contests Un-Backed Report on Imminent Famine in Gaza | The Times of Israel, www.timesofisrael.com/israel-contests-un-backed-report-assessing-imminent-famine-in-gaza/. Accessed 25 June 2024.

⁵ Robbins, Elizabeth. “Israel Opens Third Humanitarian Aid Crossing into Northern Gaza.” FDD, 13 May 2024, www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/05/13/israel-opens-third-humanitarian-aid-crossing-into-northern-gaza/.

⁶ Frantzman, Seth J. “Experts: ICC and UN Blamed Israel for a Famine That Never Happened in Gaza - Exclusive.” The Jerusalem Post | JPost.Com, www.jpost.com/israel-hamas-war/article-806739. Accessed 25 June 2024.

⁷ “Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: What You Need to Know.” The IRC, www.rescue.org/article/crisis-palestine-what-you-need-know#:~:text=Even%20before%20October%207%2C%20almost,Bank%20now%20require%20humanitarian%20assistance. Accessed 25 June 2024.

⁸ Over 90% of Water in Gaza Strip Unfit for Drinking | b’tselem, www.btselem.org/gaza_strip/20140209_gaza_water_crisis. Accessed 25 June 2024.

that Israel has provided since October 7th and the amount of resources Gaza lacked prior to October 7th, claims that Israel is using starvation as a method of war are baseless and egregious.

Reports indicate that Hamas has been interfering with aid distribution within Gaza. According to various sources, including the United Nations:

Jordanian Aid Convoy Hijacking:

On May 2, 2024, Hamas hijacked a major humanitarian aid shipment from the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization. The aid, which had transited through Israel's newly-opened Erez crossing, was seized by Hamas after the Jordanian military unloaded it inside Gaza. The U.S. State Department condemned the act, noting that the aid was eventually recovered by the United Nations, but the incident marked a significant case of aid diversion by Hamas.^{9 10}

Drone Footage of Aid Theft:

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) released drone footage showing Hamas operatives hijacking aid trucks, beating civilians, and transporting the stolen supplies to a Hamas stronghold. The footage depicted men loading humanitarian supplies onto a pickup truck and using force against civilians. This visual evidence highlighted the systematic nature of Hamas's interference with aid distribution.¹¹

General Reports of Aid Diversion:

According to various reports, including those from the United Nations, Hamas has been consistently hijacking aid trucks entering Gaza. These reports indicate that Hamas militants often divert supplies intended for civilians to their fighters or sell them on the black market. This practice has been a significant obstacle to effective aid distribution within Gaza.¹²

The types of aid being stolen reportedly include: food supplies, medical equipment and medicines, fuel (which is critical for powering hospitals and water desalination plants), and building materials. This interference significantly complicates the humanitarian situation, making it more difficult to ensure aid reaches those most in need.

Not only do the aforementioned findings indicate that Israel is actively trying to provide sufficient humanitarian aid to Gaza, recent reports from the Famine Review Committee (FRC) of The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) state that the available evidence does not support the notion that there is a famine in Gaza. The IPC is a multi-partner initiative that works to classify the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition across the globe. The IPC is used by governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders to inform

⁹ Robbins, Elizabeth. "Israel Opens Third Humanitarian Aid Crossing into Northern Gaza." FDD, 13 May 2024, www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/05/13/israel-opens-third-humanitarian-aid-crossing-into-northern-gaza/.

¹⁰ Algemeiner, The. "Hamas Tried to Steal Gaza Aid Shipment from Jordan, US Says." Algemeiner.Com - The Fastest Growing Jewish Newspaper in America. Your One Stop Source for All News and Commentary from Israel and the Jewish World, Jewish Art, Jewish Culture, Jewish Music, Analysis, Opinion, Blogs and More..., 3 May 2024, www.algemeiner.com/2024/05/03/hamas-tried-steal-gaza-aid-shipment-jordan-us-says/.

¹¹ "IDF Releases Footage of Hamas Beating Civilians and Stealing Aid in Gaza Strip." YouTube, 12 Dec. 2023, youtu.be/LnVST02SFfc.

¹² Danon, Danny. "The Paradox of Humanitarian Aid to Gaza." POLITICO, POLITICO, 31 Jan. 2024, www.politico.eu/article/paradox-humanitarian-aid-gaza-israel-hamas-war/.

decision-making for better food security policy and programming. In March, 2024, the FRC reported that “Famine is now projected and imminent in the North Gaza and Gaza Governorates and is expected to become manifest during the projection period from mid-March 2024 to May 2024.”¹³ This report was used in the ICJ’s statement in March telling Israel to improve humanitarian aid into Gaza.¹⁴ However, the FRC has now stated in their June report that “the available evidence does not indicate that famine is currently occurring.”¹⁵ Following this update from the FRC, Arif Husain, the chief economist at the UN World Food Programme, commented on the situation in a press briefing. Husain stated that there is a lack of reliable and supported evidence to confirm the sentiment that Israel is intentionally starving Palestinians. He stated there are currently no proven statistics pertaining to deaths by starvation in Gaza and added “It’s not even a matter of being available. I don’t think that they are even collected.”¹⁶ This exemplifies the fact that misinformation about Israel is rampant. Israel has remained committed to providing Gaza civilians humanitarian aid and yet cannot escape the false allegations of causing a genocide through the utilization of starvation as a method of warfare.

While the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains challenging, the data on aid deliveries and food supplies facilitated by Israel contradicts allegations of deliberate starvation or the use of hunger as a weapon of war. The evidence suggests that Israel is making significant efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza’s civilian population, despite the ongoing conflict. The complexities of aid distribution within Gaza, including the reported interference by Hamas, highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of the situation. As the conflict continues, it is crucial for all parties to prioritize the protection of civilians and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need efficiently and effectively.

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¹³ Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip, March 2024, www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Famine_Committee_Review_Report_Gaza_Strip_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Feb_July2024_Special_Brief.pdf. Accessed 2 July 2024.

¹⁴ No Famine in Gaza, Previous Assumptions Were Wrong, Though Risk Remains, Key Report by UN-Linked Group Finds | The Times of Israel, www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/no-famine-in-gaza-although-risk-still-high-key-report-finds/. Accessed 2 July 2024.

¹⁵ Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip, June 2024, www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Famine_Review_Committee_Report_Gaza_June2024.pdf. Accessed 2 July 2024.

¹⁶ Weissman, Miri. “UN Official Admits No Evidence of Famine in Gaza.” [Israelhayom.Com](http://israelhayom.com), www.israelhayom.com/2024/06/30/un-official-admits-lack-of-data-on-famine-in-gaza/. Accessed 2 July 2024.

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