Children of Gaza between life and death: the results of the Israeli starvation policy



The Starvation of Gaza: How Hunger Became a Weapon of War

Since October 7, 2023, the Israeli occupation has waged a war on the Gaza Strip that has relied on aerial bombardment, ground invasions and the systematic destruction of hospitals. Yet one of its most devastating weapons makes no sound: **starvation**. Deliberately depriving more than two million people of food, water, fuel and medicine has become one of the defining war crimes of this assault.

Using food as a means of control is not new in Gaza. Since the occupation of the Strip in 1967, Israel has controlled what enters Gaza's food basket, and since 2007 it has imposed a land, air and sea blockade that kept the population dependent on what was allowed through the crossings. Over the decades, farmland along the border was turned into a restricted "buffer zone," fishermen were confined to narrow limits at sea, and access to clean water steadily declined. Understanding this long policy is essential to understanding the famine that followed.

What changed after October 2023 was the scale. Farms, orchards, greenhouses, wells and bakeries were destroyed. By August 2025, the UN-backed hunger monitor reported that an estimated **98% of Gaza's cropland was damaged, inaccessible, or both**, livestock had been decimated and fishing was banned. After the invasion of Rafah in May 2024, the Rafah crossing — Gaza's main lifeline to Egypt — was shut as well.



"No Food, No Fuel": Israeli Officials Announce a Total Siege

From the first days of the war, senior Israeli officials openly declared their intention to cut Gaza off from the basics of life:

- **October 9, 2023 — Defense Minister Yoav Gallant:** "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly."

- **October 2023 — Energy Minister Israel Katz** ordered water, electricity and fuel supplies to Gaza cut off, declaring that "what was will not be."
- **October 17, 2023 — National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir:** "As long as Hamas does not release the captives it holds, the only thing that should be sent into Gaza is hundreds of tons of explosives from the Air Force, not a single gram of humanitarian aid."
- **October 18, 2023 — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** announced that Israel would not allow humanitarian aid in the form of food and medicine to enter Gaza from its territory.



A War Crime Under International Law

These statements reveal a clear intent to deprive Palestinians in the besieged Strip of what they need to survive. International law has a name for this. Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute defines as a war crime "intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects

indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies."

This is no longer only an argument. On **November 21, 2024**, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and former defense minister Yoav Gallant, finding reasonable grounds to believe they bear criminal responsibility for the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare — the first time in the Court's history that this charge has been brought.

The official rhetoric was echoed across Israeli media and social networks, with calls to "wipe out" Gaza and "level it to the ground." At a press conference on October 12, 2023 — the day before Israel ordered 1.1 million people in northern Gaza to leave their homes within 24 hours — President Isaac Herzog said: "It is an entire nation out there that is responsible," rejecting the idea that Gaza's civilians were uninvolved.

This incitement accompanied the most violent assault on Gaza since 1948. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, as of October 2026 **more than 74,000 Palestinians have been killed and over 175,000 wounded**, with thousands more still missing under the rubble — and killings have continued even after the ceasefire of October 11, 2025. Most of the civilian infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged, entire neighborhoods have become uninhabitable, the vast majority of the population has been displaced — many of them repeatedly — and most hospitals have been forced out of service.



Strangling Aid and Targeting UNRWA

UN agencies have repeatedly warned that the aid reaching Gaza is "a drop in the ocean" of what is needed. Oxfam reported early in the war that people in northern Gaza were surviving on an average of just 245 calories a day — less than a can of beans.

At the same time, Israel waged a campaign against the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the backbone of humanitarian work in Gaza. In a Knesset discussion in January 2024, Noga Arbel, a former Israeli foreign ministry official, declared: "It will be impossible to win the war if we do not destroy UNRWA, and this destruction must begin immediately." In October 2024, the Knesset passed laws banning UNRWA's activities.

After the invasion of Rafah, all crossings were effectively closed, and even the temporary sea pier built to bring in aid stopped working.

Famine Confirmed

What Palestinians had warned of for months was officially confirmed on **August 22, 2025**. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the UN-backed global hunger monitor, announced that famine (IPC Phase 5) was confirmed in Gaza Governorate, including Gaza City — the first famine ever confirmed in the Middle East. More than half a million people were facing catastrophic conditions of starvation, destitution and death, and the IPC described the famine as entirely man-made. UN relief chief Tom Fletcher blamed Israel's "systematic obstruction" of aid. The IPC projected that at least 132,000 children under five would suffer acute malnutrition through June 2026.

Israel rejected the findings, with the prime minister's office calling the report "an outright lie."



Deadly Remnants: Explosives Among the Hungry

Hunger has also exposed Gazans to another danger. Gaza's Government Media Office has repeatedly accused the Israeli army of leaving explosive remnants in homes and areas it withdrew from, and local reports have described children being injured by explosive objects that resemble canned food, picked up by people desperate for anything to eat. UN News has described booby-trapped objects resembling food as "a new terror" for Gazans.

Note: some widely shared videos claiming Israeli jets dropped "explosive food cans" were examined by fact-checkers, who identified the objects as standard containers for landmine fuzes. Whatever their origin, unexploded ordnance — estimated to make up a significant share of the munitions dropped on Gaza — remains a lethal threat, especially to children.

Children Pay the Highest Price

Under the eyes of a world that has failed to act, the children of Gaza suffer on every front — bombing, displacement, siege and starvation. The footage below documents their reality.


Ali Alattar

Sources

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