Famine risk increases as Israel makes Gaza aid response virtually impossible

June 4, 2024

TWO-THIRDS OF POPULATION NOW SQUEEZED INTO LESS THAN A FIFTH OF THE GAZA STRIP.

Israel's relentless air and land bombardment and deliberate obstruction of the humanitarian response is making it virtually impossible for aid agencies to reach trapped, starved civilians in Gaza, Oxfam said today, as the latest ceasefire deal negotiations continue.

A lethal combination of closed border crossings, ongoing airstrikes, reduced logistical capacity due to evacuation notices and a failing Israeli permission process that debilitates humanitarian movement within Gaza, have created an impossible environment for aid agencies to operate effectively. With the Rafah Crossing closed since 6 May, Kerem Shalom is the only crossing that thousands of humanitarian aid trucks queued at Rafah could be re-routed to use, but inside is an active combat zone and extremely dangerous. Long delays in Israeli approval to collect and move any aid that enters, means that missions often have to be aborted.

Over one million people have fled Rafah into Al Mawasi, Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis. 1.7 million people, more than two-thirds of Gaza's population, are now estimated to be crammed into an area of 69 km2 – less than a fifth of the Strip. Despite Israeli assurances that full support would be provided for people fleeing, most of Gaza has been deprived of humanitarian aid, as famine inches closer. Last week, Israeli attacks killed dozens of civilians in tents in areas it had declared "safe zones". As the humanitarian situation within Gaza deteriorates even further and more children die of starvation and disease, Oxfam said that:

- A food survey by aid agencies in May found that 85 per cent of children did not eat for a [illegible] e the survey was conducted, with dietary
- [illegible] wasi, there are just 121 latrines for over 500,000 people – or 4,130 people having to share each toilet.

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- Just 19 per cent of the 400,000 litres of fuel a day needed to run the humanitarian operation in Gaza – including transportation, the provision of clean water and sewage removal – is being allowed in and is not delivered every day.
- According to the UN, aid deliveries have dropped by two-thirds since Israel's invasion of Rafah. Since 6 May, just 216 trucks of humanitarian aid entered via Kerem Shalom and were able to be collected – an average of eight a day
- It's estimated that hundreds of commercial food trucks are entering daily via the Kerem Shalom crossing. Although important for increasing food availability in Gaza, the consignments include items like non-nutritious energy drinks, chocolate and cookies, and food is often sold at inflated prices that people cannot afford. Lack of dietary diversity is one of the key drivers of acute malnutrition and has been assessed as 'extremely critical' in Gaza
- People are paying nearly $700 for the most basic tents and there is so little space left, that some have been forced to set up tents in the cemetery at Deir al-Balah

Sally Abi Khalil, Oxfam's Middle East and North Africa Director said "By the time a famine is declared, it will be too late. When hunger claims many more lives, nobody will be able to deny the horrifying impact of Israel's deliberate, illegal and cruel obstruction of aid. Obstructing tonnes of food for a malnourished population while waving through caffeine-laced drinks and chocolate is sickening.

"Israel claimed weeks ago that it would provide full humanitarian support and medical assistance to civilians it had told to move. Not only is this not happening, its ongoing impunity, bombardment and deliberate obstruction have created unprecedented and impossibly dangerous conditions for humanitarian agencies to operate."

As the occupying power, Israel is legally obligated not to restrict or delay the entry of goods required to meet the basic needs of Gaza's residents, and must actively guarantee the continuous and uninterrupted supply of all aid.

Meera, an Oxfam staff member in Al-Mawasi who has been displaced seven times since October said "This area was designated a humanitarian zone, but there is nothing humanitarian about the situation here. The conditions are unbearable, there is no access to clean water, people are forced to rely on the sea.
"These people deserve so much better. Children should be in school, not worrying about how to support their families. Babies should be sleeping in warm beds, not exposed to insects."

Oxfam is calling for an immediate, permanent ceasefire to end the death and destruction, full and permanent access of all ground crossings for humanitarian aid to be delivered at scale and the release of all hostages and unlawfully detained Palestinian prisoners.

NOTES TO EDITOR:

1. Rafah Crossing has been closed since 6 May, with over 2,000 aid trucks – the majority of which are carrying food – stuck in a 28-mile traffic jam back to the Egyptian city of Arish.
2. Approvals for aid agencies to move to collect aid and refuel trucks inside Gaza have to be confirmed by the Israeli Coordination and Liaison Administration (CLA).
3. The details of the food survey by the Nutrition Cluster – made up of aid agencies working in Gaza, including Oxfam – are in this OCHA update from 27 May.
4. It is estimated that at least 550,000 people are now in Al-Mawasi. Currently just 121 toilets have been installed. Using a conservative figure of 500,000 people equates to 4,132 people for every
   toilet.
5. The humanitarian operation in Gaza needs 400,000 litres of fuel per day, but since Rafah crossing was closed, from 6 – 27 May, of the 8.8 million litres required, only 1.6 million litres has entered.
6. The UNRWA tracker shows Kerem Shalom crossing aid deliveries that entered and were able to be collected from 6 – 31 May
   In March, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report found that famine was imminent by May in northern Gaza and that half of the entire population (1.1 million people) are expected to face catastrophic food insecurity by mid-July.
7. Daniel Hagari, Israeli Government spokesperson, made this statement on 6 May regarding humanitarian support

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