Gaza: Famine reaches catastrophic levels as sharp rise in death rates documented



A photo of Jenan Saleh al-Skafi, 4 months old, taken just days before she succumbed to malnutrition on Saturday, 3 May 2025, at Al-Rantisi Hospital in Gaza City

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Israel-Palestinian Territory

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Palestinian Territory - A sharp rise in adult death rates was documented among residents of the Gaza

Strip, alongside alarming levels of child mortality, during the longest continuous total siege imposed by Israel since the beginning of its genocide campaign.

The escalating famine in Gaza reached catastrophic proportions amid the ongoing, illegal total blockade imposed by Israel for 62 consecutive days, preventing the entry of humanitarian aid, medicines, and basic supplies.

Dozens of deaths have been reported from malnutrition or lack of medical care. The latest is a four-month-old infant, Jenan Saleh al-Skafi, who died of severe malnutrition at Al-Rantisi Hospital in western Gaza City – amid what is called the worst campaign of systematic starvation in modern history.

All states and relevant international organisations must take immediate action to break Israel's unlawful siege on Gaza by land, sea, and air. The siege is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and a tool of starvation used in the ongoing genocide against the civilian population.

> **"The world buries its head in the sand, waiting for 'ceasefire negotiations,' forgetting that humanitarian aid is a non-negotiable right and that**

The complete closure of all crossings must end immediately, ensuring the unhindered and effective entry of food, water, and medicine, before cases of acute malnutrition escalate into even more deadly and widespread life-threatening conditions.

no justification can excuse starvation

Lima Bustami, Euro-Med Monitor's Legal Department Director

Since 2 March, Israel has prevented all commercial and humanitarian supplies from entering the Gaza Strip. Food stocks are nearing depletion, and prices have soared by over 500% since October 2023, exacerbating malnutrition, particularly among children, pregnant women, the sick, and the elderly – the most vulnerable groups affected by the crisis.

The consequences of this policy are not confined to the present; they undermine the future of Palestinians as a national community by producing an entire generation threatened by long-term physical, psychological, and cognitive impairments, stemming from chronic malnutrition, the collapse of healthcare, and ongoing collective trauma.

These outcomes are not incidental. They reflect a deliberate policy aimed at disrupting the natural development of individuals and society, and dismantling the biological and social foundations of the Palestinian community. This reveals a clear intent

to destroy – one of the defining hallmarks of the crime of genocide under international law, especially when executed through slow, cumulative tools such as siege and systematic, sustained starvation.

Lima Bastami, Director of the Legal Department at the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, stated: “The crime of starvation in Gaza is fully-fledged and committed in broad daylight; it requires no investigation committees or judicial rulings to prove it. It is enough to note that Israel has closed all crossings into the devastated Strip for over two months, completely banning the entry of food, medicine, and goods – a well-established reality openly acknowledged by Israeli officials without fear of accountability. Gaza is filled with irrefutable evidence of the crime’s horror: the emaciated bodies of people and children, tens of thousands lining up daily at charity kitchens, and the escalating death toll from hunger, malnutrition, and associated diseases.”

She added: “Despite this, the world buries its head in the sand, waiting for 'ceasefire negotiations,' forgetting that humanitarian aid is a non-negotiable right and that no justification can excuse starvation. Some states are directly complicit, but even silence or negligence constitutes active participation in perpetuating this crime. Every state, without exception, bears a legal and moral obligation to lift the blockade, ensure the flow of supplies, and save lives immediately.”

According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, around 60,000 children require urgent treatment for severe malnutrition, and approximately 16,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women are in desperate need of healthcare, while families across the Strip face unimaginable hardship amid a worsening hunger crisis, ongoing displacement, a collapsed healthcare system, and relentless Israeli military attacks.

Community kitchens in Gaza, once a critical lifeline for hundreds of thousands of displaced and needy individuals, have been among the sectors most severely impacted. Previously distributing tens of thousands of meals daily, they have now ceased operations entirely, with nothing left to distribute, exacerbating the devastation in the face of a sweeping famine.

The severe Israeli blockade has caused a persistent and critical shortage of essential foods necessary for survival, including grains, proteins, and fats. It has also destroyed and disrupted what remained of Gaza's agricultural and food infrastructure through bombardment and direct military occupation. Many residents have been forced to sell their essential belongings to buy food, a clear indicator of the collapse of their coping mechanisms.

Families across Gaza have been compelled to drastically reduce their daily meals, leading to a significant decline in the population's body weights, with the majority now relying almost entirely on the few available canned goods, in the absence of fresh,

nutritious food. Furthermore, families have come to depend on charitable kitchens for their daily meals, which the Israeli army has increasingly targeted in airstrikes, in a deliberate attempt to deprive the population of even the most basic access to food.

The term "famine" is a technical classification referring to widespread malnutrition and deaths related to hunger resulting from the inability to access food. International standards define three main conditions for an area to be declared in a state of famine:

- At least 20% of the population is suffering from extreme levels of hunger.
- 30% of children are experiencing acute wasting (severe thinness relative to their height).
- A doubling of the mortality rate compared to the normal average — that is, one death per day for every 10,000 adults, or two deaths per day for every 10,000 children.

The crime of starvation committed by Israel against civilians in the Gaza Strip constitutes one of the most extreme and brutal forms of genocide, stripping victims of their health and dignity. It is not limited to the deprivation of food but also seeks to eliminate the population's ability to survive by destroying livelihoods, blocking humanitarian aid, targeting sources of production, and disrupting supply chains.

All states, individually and collectively, must uphold their legal responsibilities and act urgently to halt the genocide occurring in Gaza by all available means. They must take effective measures to protect Palestinian civilians, enforce immediate and complete lifting of the siege, ensure the free movement of people and goods without arbitrary restrictions, and open all crossings unconditionally. Concrete steps must also be taken to save Palestinians from slow death and forced displacement, including implementing an urgent and appropriate humanitarian response to meet immediate needs, such as providing temporary and dignified shelter.

The international community must impose economic, diplomatic, and military sanctions on Israel for its grave and systematic violations of international law. This includes banning the export and import of arms to and from Israel, halting military cooperation, and freezing the financial assets of officials implicated in crimes against Palestinians. It must also suspend trade privileges and bilateral agreements that grant Israel economic advantages, thereby increasing pressure to end its crimes.

States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must fulfil their obligation under Common Article 1 to respect and ensure respect for the Convention in all circumstances. They must act to halt Israeli policies that violate the most basic humanitarian standards and threaten the lives of millions of civilians.

The International Criminal Court must expedite its investigations and issue arrest warrants against Israeli officials involved in international crimes committed in Gaza. Furthermore, it must recognise and address the atrocities committed by Israel as genocide without equivocation. States parties to the Rome Statute are reminded of their legal obligations to fully cooperate with the Court, ensure the execution of arrest warrants, and bring perpetrators to justice, denying them impunity once and for all.

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