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World Court: Israel Needs to Allow UN Aid into Gaza

Critical for Governments to Publicly Support, Fund UNRWA

(The Hague) – [Israel](#) should comply with its obligation to cooperate with the [United Nations](#) by ensuring the unhindered provision of essential aid to Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in an October 22, 2025 [advisory opinion](#), Human Rights Watch said today.

The court concluded that Israel's allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) lacks impartiality is unfounded and that Israel's obstruction of the agency's critical work is at odds with international law.

"The International Court of Justice made clear that Israel should end its campaign to dismantle UNRWA and stop using starvation of civilians as a weapon of war," said [Balkees Jarrah](#), acting Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Palestinians will continue to suffer and die unless Israel lifts its unlawful blockade and restores electricity, water, and health care. It's critical for Israel's allies to press the government to immediately permit unhindered UNRWA aid."

The ICJ advisory opinion stems from an urgent [request](#) by the UN General Assembly in December 2024 asking the court to clarify Israel's obligations in relation to the activities of the UN, third states, and other international organizations in the occupied territory. The request was submitted amid Israel's campaign to dismantle UNRWA, and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza resulting from Israel's use of [starvation](#) as a weapon of war, a war crime, and [intentional deprivation of aid and basic services](#).

Human Rights Watch [concluded](#) that these Israeli policies amount to the crime against humanity of extermination and acts of genocide.

On January 30, [two bills](#) approved in the Israeli Knesset [went into effect](#), shutting down UNRWA operations in the occupied territory. Israeli authorities have blocked UNRWA's aid distribution in Gaza, [prevented](#) its international staff from entering Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and issued [closure orders](#) for UNRWA operated schools in East Jerusalem.

The ICJ, in its opinion, asserts Israel's "unconditional" obligation as an occupying power under international humanitarian law to ensure the unhindered provision of humanitarian relief, such as food, medical supplies and clothing, to the civilian population of Gaza. The court said this obligation applies to "relief schemes provided by the United Nations and its entities, including UNRWA." The court said that the US-backed aid distribution system operated by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) "has not significantly alleviated the situation." Israeli authorities have not only repeatedly [violated](#) their obligations relating to providing aid to Palestinian civilians, but also [gunned down](#) hundreds of Palestinians seeking food aid at or near GHF sites, in acts that amount to war crimes, Human Rights Watch said.

The ICJ, in its opinion, underscored that Israel "may not obstruct the functions of the United Nations and must provide every assistance in any action taken by the Organization," in particular through UNRWA. The court concluded that the Knesset's two laws "have directly resulted in obstructions to the operations of UNRWA in and in relation to the [OPT]." The court also found Israel's allegations that UNRWA lacks impartiality and has ties to Hamas to be unfounded.

The court also outlined Israel's obligations toward impartial humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Despite mounting [reports](#), including by Human Rights Watch, of abuses of Palestinians in detention, Israeli authorities have [denied](#) the ICRC access to detention facilities since October 2023.

By restricting or blocking aid from reaching Palestinians in Gaza, Israel continues to [flout](#) the ICJ's [binding orders](#) in a separate case brought by South Africa under the UN Genocide Convention, Human Rights Watch said.

In July 2024, the ICJ issued a separate advisory opinion concluding that Israel's decades-long occupation is unlawful and contravenes Palestinians' right to self-determination. In that opinion, the court also found that Israel was [responsible for apartheid](#) and other serious abuses against Palestinians.

Governments should publicly support the ICJ findings and ensure that obligations laid out in its advisory opinion are fulfilled, Human Rights Watch said. The [UN secretary-general](#) and [UNRWA's commissioner general](#) have welcomed the opinion.

"The suffering of millions of Palestinians won't be alleviated if the ceasefire is not followed by Israel's ending its obstruction of UNRWA's operations," Jarrah said. "Governments should strongly and publicly push back against the Israeli government's efforts to restrict UNRWA and they should fund its irreplaceable work."

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