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Gaza: Israel's use of starvation evidence of genocide against Palestinians

Evidence gathered by Amnesty International demonstrates how over a month since the introduction of its militarized aid distribution system, Israel has continued to use starvation of civilians as a weapon of war against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip and to deliberately impose conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction as part of its ongoing genocide.

Heartbreaking testimonies gathered from medical staff, parents of children hospitalized for malnutrition and displaced Palestinians struggling to survive paint a horrifying picture of acute levels of starvation and desperation in Gaza. Their accounts provide further evidence of the catastrophic suffering caused by Israel's ongoing restrictions on life-saving aid and its deadly militarized aid scheme coupled with mass forced displacement, relentless bombardment and destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure.

"While the eyes of the world were diverted to the recent hostilities between Israel and Iran, Israel's genocide has continued unabated in Gaza, including through the infliction of conditions of life that have created a deadly mix of hunger and disease pushing the population past breaking point," said Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

In the month following Israel's imposition of a militarized "aid" scheme run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), hundreds of Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured either near militarized distribution sites or en route to humanitarian aid convoys.

"This devastating daily loss of life as desperate Palestinians try to collect aid is the consequence of their deliberate targeting by Israeli forces and

the foreseeable consequence of irresponsible and lethal methods of distribution,” said Agnès Callamard.

By continuing to prevent UN and other key humanitarian organizations from distributing certain essential items, like food parcels, fuel and shelter, within Gaza and by maintaining a deadly, dehumanizing and ineffective militarized ‘aid’ scheme, Israeli authorities have turned aid-seeking into a booby trap for desperate starved Palestinians. They have also deliberately fueled chaos and compounded suffering instead of alleviating it. The aid delivered is also way below the humanitarian needs of a population that has been experiencing almost daily bombings for the last 20 months.

“As the occupying power, Israel has a legal obligation to ensure Palestinians in Gaza have access to food, medicine and other supplies essential for their survival. Instead, it has brazenly defied binding orders issued by the International Court of Justice in January, March and May 2024, to allow the unimpeded flow of aid to Gaza. Israel has continued to restrict the entry of aid and impose its suffocating cruel blockade and even a full siege lasting nearly eighty days,” said Agnès Callamard.

This must end now. Israel must lift all restrictions and allow unfettered, safe, and dignified access to humanitarian aid throughout Gaza immediately.”

Amnesty International interviewed 17 internally displaced people (10 women and seven men) as well as the parents of four children hospitalized for severe malnutrition, and four healthcare workers, across three hospitals in Gaza City and Khan Younis in May and June 2025.

Devastating impact on children

Even before the imposition of a total siege on 2 March 2025, slightly but insufficiently eased some 78 days later, Israel’s deliberate imposition of conditions of life calculated to destroy Palestinians had had a particularly devastating impact on young children and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Since October 2023 at least 66 children have died as a direct result of malnutrition-related conditions. This figure does not include the many more children who have died as a result of preventable diseases exacerbated by malnutrition.

The victims include four-month-old baby, Jinan Iskafi, who tragically died on 3 May 2025 due to severe malnutrition. According to her medical report, which was reviewed by Amnesty International, Jinan was admitted to the Rantissi pediatric hospital due to severe dehydration and recurrent infections. She was diagnosed with Marasmus, a severe form of protein-energy malnutrition, chronic diarrhea, and a suspected case of

immunodeficiency. The pediatrician treating her told Amnesty International that she required a specific lactose-free formula, which was not available due to the blockade.

Gaza's decimated health sector, already overwhelmed with the volume of injuries, is struggling to deal with the influx of infants and children hospitalized for malnutrition. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of 15 June 2025, a total of 18,741, children were hospitalized for acute malnutrition since the beginning of the year.

The vast majority of children suffering from malnutrition, however, cannot reach any hospital due to access challenges posed by displacement orders and heavy bombardment and ongoing military operations.

Numbers barely scratch the surface of the suffering in Gaza

Accounts from healthcare workers and displaced individuals paint an even more harrowing picture.

Susan Maarouf, a nutritional expert at the Nutrition unit in the Patient Friend Benevolent Society hospital in Gaza City, supported by the organization MedGlobal, said that in June 2024 the hospital opened a dedicated department for children aged six months to and five years to manage cases of severe malnutrition.

"Back then, Gaza City and the North Gaza governorate were hit by malnutrition [as a result of the tight blockade]. But this year for us the situation began to drastically get worse again in April. Since then, out of approximately 200-250 children we have screened daily for malnutrition. Nearly 15% showed signs associated with severe or moderate malnutrition," she said.

In the worst cases visible signs include pale skin, falling hair and nails, and alarming weight loss. She expressed the profound helplessness of offering nutritional advice amid severe shortages of food, with fruit, vegetables and eggs only available at exorbitant prices, if at all: "In an ideal world, I would recommend the parents to provide the child with nutritious food, rich with protein. I would advise that they maintain a hygienic environment for their children; I would stress the importance of clean water... In our situation... any recommendation you give ... sometimes you feel like you are rubbing salt into these parents' wounds."

Dr. Maarouf described the relentless cycle of malnutrition stating that in some cases children were re-hospitalized after being discharged:

"We treated one little girl, aged six, for nutritional edema, she had severe protein deficiency when she came in early May; with the treatment we gave her she showed signs of improvement, including gaining weight,

becoming livelier... unfortunately she was recently admitted again because her condition relapsed. Like most families in Gaza, her family is displaced; they live in a tent; they have to rely on the lentil or rice they get from the community kitchen. It's a cycle. With no aid getting in, you feel like as a hospital you only patch up the wound but eventually it will burst again."

Doctors have also warned that the lives of newborn babies are at risk amid acute shortages of baby formula milk, especially for children with lactose-intolerance or other allergies.

One doctor said: "There is a milk crisis in Gaza overall. Also, we notice that new mothers, because they themselves are not eating properly or because of the panic, trauma and anxiety, are unable to breastfeed. So, to secure baby formula at all is a struggle. But if your child has allergies, it's almost impossible to find special formula in any of Gaza's hospitals for infants the failure to secure special baby formula can be a death sentence."

At Nasser hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, Dr. Wafaa Abu Nimer confirmed the dire situation, reporting that by 30 June 2025, 9 children were still being treated for malnutrition-related complications at her facility alone. She described the scenes they have witnessed over the past two months as "really unprecedented" with severe cases of nutritional edema or marasmus, muscle wasting. She also said that some are additionally suffering from injuries due to explosions from which they have not recovered.

Dr. Abu Nimer said that since Israel's new aid distribution scheme began there has been no signs of improvement in the situation with hundreds of children screened for malnutrition on a daily basis in their pediatric emergency room. Mass displacement orders issued to the Khan Younis governorate in May made Nasser hospital out of reach for thousands of displaced families.

Dr. Abu Nimer described to Amnesty how the impact on children extends beyond the physical. "One girl whose hair fell out almost completely as a result of nutritional edema, kept asking me 'doctor, will my hair grow again? Am I [still] beautiful?' Abu Nimer said. "Even if these children recover completely, the scars will always remain with them. Medically we know that malnutrition amongst infants and small children may have long-term cognitive and developmental effects, but I don't think enough attention is being given to the mental health and psychological impact [of starvation and war] on children and parents."

She also conveyed the exhaustion felt by medical staff: "We as doctors are also exhausted, we are malnourished ourselves, most of us are also displaced and live in tents, yet we do our best to offer medical care,

provide nutrient supplements and as much support as we can. We try to save lives, we try to alleviate the suffering, but there is very little we can do after discharge.”

Weaponized aid

While Israeli authorities continue to impose their unlawful blockade on the entry of aid and commercial supplies into the occupied Gaza Strip, hundreds of aid trucks remain stuck outside Gaza, waiting for an Israeli permit to enter.

OCHA reported that as of 16 June 2025, 852 trucks for UN and international humanitarian organizations, the majority of which carry food supplies, remain stuck in Al-Arish in Egypt, yet to receive a permit from the Israeli authorities to enter Gaza. Moreover, the partial easing of the total siege on 19 May did not include easing restrictions on certain critical supplies, such as fuel and cooking gas, which have not been allowed into Gaza since 2 March. Without fuel, electricity cannot be produced to allow, for example, life-saving medical devices to function.

Only a trickle of the extremely limited aid allowed by Israel into Gaza reaches those in need. It is either distributed through the inhumane and deadly militarized scheme run by the GHF, or is offloaded by desperate starved civilians, and in some cases, organized gangs. This grim reality is compounded by Israel’s deliberate destruction of or denial of access to life-sustaining infrastructure, including some of Gaza’s most fertile agricultural land and food production sources, like greenhouses and poultry farms.

The World Food Programme and local organizations were for the first time permitted to distribute flour in Gaza City on 26 June 2025. The relatively smooth distribution that took place with thousands waiting their turn and no reported injuries is a damning indictment of Israel’s militarized GHF scheme. All the evidence gathered, including testimonies which Amnesty International is receiving from victims and witnesses, suggest that the GHF was designed so as to placate international concerns while constituting another tool of Israel’s genocide.

“Not only has the international community failed to stop this genocide, but it has also allowed Israel to constantly reinvent new ways to destroy Palestinian lives in Gaza and trample on their human dignity,” said Agnès Callamard.

“States must cease their inertia and live up to their legal obligations. They must exercise all necessary pressure to ensure Israel lifts immediately and unconditionally its awful blockade and ends the genocide in Gaza. They must end any form of contribution to Israel’s unlawful conduct or risk complicity in atrocity crimes. This requires immediately suspending all

military support to Israel, banning trade and investment that contribute to Israel's genocide or other grave violations of international law.

"States should also adopt targeted sanctions, through international and regional mechanisms, against those Israeli officials most implicated in international crimes and cooperate with the International Criminal Court, including by implementing its arrest warrants."

Background

According to figures obtained from the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the under-five mortality rate for 2024 in Gaza was recorded at 32.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, representing a sharp increase compared to the 13.6 rate reported in 2022. Maternal mortality has also more than doubled from an estimated 19 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2022 to 43 deaths per 100,000 in 2024.

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