



ISRAELI-ENGINEERED FAMINE IN GAZA



“Day 1, no food. Day 2, half a cup of fava beans with some bread. Day 3, mallow plant and half an onion with some bread.”

This is the consumption per person of a family in the Gaza Strip, over a few days of Israel’s 6-month-long genocide in Gaza. As the assault rages on, Israel continues to engineer a famine in Gaza at full speed.

STARVATION : A WEAPON OF WAR

Among numerous other forms of killing, the famine being engineered by Israel in Gaza is a major part of the Israeli settler colonial state’s genocidal campaign against the Palestinian population.

Israel’s use of starvation as a weapon of war has been detailed in [South Africa’s submissions before the International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#), cautioned by numerous civil society organisations, and revealed by a growing cascade of news reports from the ground.

- Israeli airstrikes have destroyed critical food infrastructure in Gaza, including countless bakeries, flour mills, agricultural farmland, animal stock, and more.
- Israel has forced shut desalination plants and water supply, on top of rendering 90% of Gaza’s water unsafe for consumption well before October 7.
- In March, Israel’s blockade of humanitarian aid into Gaza created a line of aid trucks waiting to enter Gaza from Israel stretching 3 kilometres long.
- Aid ships carrying 240 tonnes of undelivered food were sent back to Cyprus after Israel killed 7 World Central Kitchen aid workers in an airstrike.

- Israel has deliberately and routinely killed aid workers, attacked aid convoys, and shelled aid distribution centres in Gaza through targeted air strikes.
- In the Flour Massacre on 29 February, Israeli forces fired on thousands of Palestinians seeking food from aid trucks on Al-Rashid Street in Southern Gaza City, killing at least 118 Palestinians and injuring 760 others.
- Israel targeted and killed Palestinians gathering to receive aid at the two entrances to Gaza City - the Al-Kuwait Roundabout and Al-Nabulsi Roundabout - in at least 14 incidents in February and March.

These acts by Israel - from the direct destruction of food stocks and blockade of aid, to the targeting of aid givers as well as aid receivers - demonstrate an intent to make the Gaza Strip uninhabitable. As such, Israel's manipulation and control of aid, together with its starvation policy, can be seen as counterparts to its military strategy.

The use of starvation as a weapon of war and the intentional deprivation of conditions of life (such as food and water) are war crimes and crimes against humanity respectively under the [Rome Statute](#). The famine engineered by Israel, amongst its other atrocities, paints a clear picture of its absolute disregard for international law.

- On [26 January](#), the ICJ issued an order requiring Israel to ensure that aid and services reach Palestinians, and to prevent the commission of genocidal acts. Since then, the amount of [aid reaching Gaza has declined 50%](#), as Israel continues to blatantly violate the ICJ order with glaring impunity.
- On [28 March](#), the ICJ expressly ordered Israel to ensure that basic food supplies arrive without delay, observing that Palestinians in Gaza are no longer facing a mere risk of famine, but one that is already setting in.

The man-made famine in Gaza engineered by Israel is painfully clear:

- The price of items such as flour and sugar has skyrocketed 10-20 times since October 7.
- Palestinians in Gaza have fed on animal fodder and rainwater amidst extreme food shortage.
- One third of children under 2 years old are acutely malnourished.
- Increasingly, children and adults are dying of malnutrition and dehydration.
- Doctors are reporting that they no longer see normal-sized babies being born.
- Neonatal deaths or complications have at least doubled since October 7.

STARVATION AND COLONIALISM

Historically, wilful starvation has been considered one of the gravest forms of mass killing, and has also been tied to colonialism. As prominent economist [Amartya Sen](#) has noted, starvation is often underlined by social politics and a belief that Indigenous populations are inferior to the coloniser.

In Canada, the government led by Sir John A. Macdonald in the late 1800s pursued a deliberate policy of starvation, starving thousands of Indigenous people and later generations to clear the way for railroad construction and open the prairies to settlement by white European settlers.

In Ireland, a country marked by its struggle against centuries of British occupation and a strong sense of solidarity with Palestine today, the British government's colonial policies led to the 1845 Potato Famine, killing one million people and displacing two million.

In India, two centuries of British colonial rule left behind a long list of famines, each killing millions of people. For instance, the 1943 Bengal Famine was caused by the British authorities' deliberate attempt to shift resources away from India to support its war efforts during WWII.



GAZA'S FOOD EMERGENCY

The Famine Review Committee has classified half of Gaza's population as experiencing "catastrophic" conditions and the entire population under "acute" food insecurity. Gaza today has the highest share of people the IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) has ever classified for any given area or country.

The rate at which the famine in Gaza is being created is unprecedented. Without an immediate end to Israel's acts, the death toll from hunger and social trauma in the event of survival would be colossal. This is a product of Israel's genocidal intention and brutal assault on a people that has endured a 17-year-long stifling blockade with multiple destructive wars throughout.

Like other cases of wartime famine such as in Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia, Gaza's famine is also the result of deliberate and man-made conditions, oftentimes involving deep Western complicity . Reports of Palestinians being killed by airdropped US aid packages - of such scarce amounts that it cannot be meaningful - have sparked widespread outrage. Likewise, Egypt's reported practice of charging entry fees of \$5,000 for aid trucks has been denounced.

Unless there is an immediate end to Israel's assault, famine conditions in Gaza are bound to worsen. Rather than furthering impunity for Israel and allowing performative trickles of aid into the territory, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip need an immediate end to Israel's starvation campaign, including a lifting of the blockade. Only then will Palestinians be freed from engineered hunger as a genocidal tactic.