

Expert Declaration: Urgent Action on Gaza's Famine

In the month since the formal declaration of famine in Gaza, humanitarian conditions have continued to collapse. As experts and practitioners with extensive experience combating past famines and hunger crises, we write today to say with utmost urgency that:

Gaza's famine is real; Gaza's famine is man-made; and Gaza's famine can be stopped – if the international community requires Israel to abide by international humanitarian law.

Gaza's Famine is Real

Both the [IPC](#) analysis and [independent](#) data confirm that famine is both real and deepening. Millions are facing acute hunger, and tens of thousands are already severely malnourished. Classic famine patterns are evident in Gaza today, and no sufficient response is possible under current constraints:

- **Food:** [WFP](#) estimates at least 15,500 metric tons of food per week is needed to meet life-saving needs. Between 1-15 September, Israel allowed the UN-led aid system to bring only 40% of that volume into Gaza (an average of 6,250MT per week). Much of that was subsequently lost as the IDF routinely directs UN convoys to travel along routes known for violent looting – a result of both criminality and the population's level of desperation. This leaves only around 10% of total food needs reaching UN and NGO warehouses for distribution. Aid groups used this to supply 500,000 hot meals a day, but this is a fraction of what is needed for a population of 2 million people with few other food sources. Roughly half the community kitchens and malnutrition treatment centers in Gaza are in Gaza City, and are being forced to [close](#) by Israeli forced evacuation orders.
- **Health:** In a famine, prolonged malnutrition turns survivable diseases or injuries fatal, making medical care essential to saving lives. But Gaza's health system has [collapsed](#), with 94% of hospitals damaged or destroyed by Israeli attacks. The few remaining run at triple capacity with almost no supplies, and more than half of those still operating are in Gaza City and thus face threats to continued operation from the Israeli ground offensive. During Israel's aid blockade this spring, [WHO](#) reported "stock zero" for key items as nearly half of essential medicines ran out. The [agency](#) reports that only 44 trucks of health supplies have entered in September – shockingly far below need. And given the conditions on the ground and the warnings issued to the humanitarian community by [COGAT](#), there is a serious risk that more than 15,600 patients requiring emergency medical evacuation will be denied, with no capacity in Gaza to treat them.
- **Malnutrition:** Malnutrition rates in Gaza City passed the famine threshold in July and continue to rise. In [August](#), one-fifth of children there were acutely malnourished, needing lifesaving malnutrition treatment, and nearly half of pregnant and breastfeeding women in Gaza City are malnourished. This calls for an urgent scale-up of nutrition interventions. Instead, 21 of 50 malnutrition treatment centers in northern Gaza -

including 10 in Gaza City – have closed in recent weeks due to Israel’s military offensive and evacuation orders. Nutritional supplies within Gaza are also dwindling and resupply remains impeded, dramatically increasing the likelihood of preventable child deaths. In [mid-September](#), only 2,400 children are receiving specialized therapeutic foods despite 10,000 requiring such immediate treatment.

- **Water and sanitation:** Clean water and effective sanitation are critical famine interventions, preventing malnutrition, enabling safe food preparation, and stemming the spread of dangerous waterborne diseases. However, Gaza’s water and sanitation infrastructure has been [decimated](#); Israel has destroyed over 85% of clean water facilities, households survive on only 3–5 liters/person/day, well below survival thresholds. Preventable diseases have [spiked](#) sharply, including a 150–300% increase in diarrhea cases and a more than doubling of jaundice. The Israeli ground offensive into Gaza City and the displacement it causes there may collapse already strained water and sanitation services in southern Gaza, raising the spectre of wider disease outbreaks among huge numbers of displaced people and leaving people without safe water for consumption and food preparation.
- **Fuel:** The linchpin for any viable aid operation, an estimated 70,000 liters per day of fuel are needed to keep hospitals, water systems, bakeries, and cold chains functioning. Since the famine declaration, Israel has permitted only [41 percent](#) of that requirement to enter Gaza, forcing constant triage by humanitarians and repeated shutdowns of lifesaving services. For each of the other humanitarian challenges listed above, persistent fuel shortages will worsen the impact and speed the decline.

Gaza’s Famine is Man-made

The actions of the Israeli government are the primary drivers of famine in Gaza: across the core dimensions of famine response, Israeli political and security barriers are blocking relief operations. Despite expert [warnings](#) early on of starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza, this obstruction has continued. Over the course of the war, Israel has also destroyed essential civilian infrastructure like hospitals, housing, and utilities; forcibly displaced almost the entire population of Gaza to areas without sufficient services; and constantly restricted or even completely blocked humanitarian aid necessary to keep displaced civilians alive.

Rather than pivot to support a robust famine response, Israel has spent the month since the famine declaration [denying](#) existence of famine, [impeding](#) humanitarian action, and widening its military [offensive](#) in the famine zone:

- **Impeding humanitarian action:** Israeli bureaucratic requirements and security restrictions block or severely restrict UN, NGO, and commercial convoys. Its ban on [UNRWA](#) relief operations created vast aid gaps, and it is weaponizing arbitrary new [NGO registration](#) laws to deny NGO convoys and to threaten aid groups with suspension or expulsion for any Gaza-related advocacy. Aid that Israel does allow to pass inspection is

nonetheless routinely [delayed](#) through exhaustive and costly checks, dysfunctional coordination with COGAT, and hours-long waits at IDF checkpoints. Critical humanitarian supplies like syringes and emergency shelter materials are regularly rejected by IDF inspections on baseless “dual-use” grounds, and mission-critical fuel and spare parts are limited far below adequate levels.

- **Gaza Humanitarian Foundation:** Israel has attempted to justify its ongoing restrictions on the UN-led humanitarian system by claiming it is facilitating the work of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. The GHF has been a humanitarian failure and a [disaster](#) for Palestinians: thousands of civilians have been killed and injured from weapons fire while attempting to access GHF’s remote aid sites; credible reports indicate the GHF has recruited members from an anti-Islam motorcycle gang to provide site security. The GHF appears to be [a component of](#) the Israeli government’s larger agenda of forcing Gaza’s residents into holding camps in the far south, as several Israeli ministers have stated publicly. Even were it not so directly deadly for Palestinian civilians, the [GHF](#) is still not a remotely sufficient substitute for experienced humanitarian professionals. Its sites are inaccessible to those in the famine zone, beyond reach of most residents of Gaza. And GHF supplies dried foods that are inappropriate to the needs of starving and displaced people, due to insufficient cooking fuel and clean water, and which cannot address the need for more intensive specialized malnutrition assistance.
- **Attacks on Civilians and Civilian Infrastructure:** Israel’s bombardment of Gaza has destroyed 87% of Gaza’s buildings, and 94% of its hospitals, schools, universities, religious centers, and roads. By September 10, 2025, over 64,400 people were [confirmed](#) dead, and hundreds of thousands wounded, with civilians making up [83%](#) of those killed, half women and children. Gaza is the deadliest place in the world for aid workers: 540 have been killed, including 373 UN staff and 167 NGO workers. Israel regularly strikes humanitarian convoys, warehouses, and aid points, and WHO has [recorded](#) an unprecedented number of attacks on hospitals, clinics, and ambulances. International humanitarian law requires that militaries protect medical services and humanitarian operations, and such protection is indispensable for effective famine response.
- **Allegations of Aid Diversion:** Israel has also pointed to looting of aid convoys to claim that Hamas is systematically diverting aid. This is false. Insecurity from looting, collapsed policing, and desperate community members does remain a persistent obstacle to safe aid distribution (conditions that have worsened due to IDF targeting of civilian security actors). IDF policies exacerbate these risks by frequently directing humanitarian convoys into known [looting](#) hotspots; barring the UN and NGOs from using the secure “fence road” (which GHF is allowed to use); and prolonged stoppages of aid convoys at checkpoints, increasing their exposure to looting. Conversely there is little credible evidence to support Israeli allegations of systematic Hamas diversion. A U.S. government ([USAID](#)) review found ‘no systematic aid diversion’ by Hamas, and former U.S. Ambassador Jack Lew has stated that the Israeli government never shared such allegations with him in public or in private (despite routinely making diversion claims in

the press). Sources [within the Israeli military](#) have likewise reported no evidence of systemic diversion either. This suggests that the diversion claims are a pretext to block impartial humanitarian aid that the Israeli government does not control, rather than a good-faith attempt to prevent aid manipulation.

Gaza's Famine Can and Must be Stopped

Many will die unless this trajectory is reversed. We know from past famines that the current conditions in Gaza will produce preventable deaths on an enormous scale. But humanitarians know how to effectively respond to famine, and with safe access and unimpeded aid operations, it would be possible to begin rapidly turning this famine around. Aid agencies have decades of experience confronting hunger emergencies and have the tools to turn the tide: Gaza is small, its population concentrated, and the logistics of delivering aid would be straightforward under normal conditions.

- **Gaza's famine can still be contained.** Gaza is a small territory with a small population, and reversing famine there is an operationally straightforward task. The systems and operational capacity to deliver food, nutrition, water, health, and fuel exist and could be restored and scaled quickly.
- **The obstacles to famine response in Gaza are political.** Israel must give humanitarian actors the access, resources, and protection they need to mount a full response. Humanitarians know what needs to happen to reverse this growing cataclysm. But without political decisions to open access, protect civilians, and allow aid to flow at the level required, famine in Gaza will deepen and spread. The humanitarian toolkit for famine response can be remarkably effective when it is allowed to be – and famines have become far less common in recent decades as a result. This means that when famines do emerge, the obstacles are primarily man-made.
- **The stakes of failure are clear.** As humanitarian experts with experience in past famines, we recognize grimly familiar patterns in the data and reporting from Gaza. We know from past crises what happens when a displaced population in a war zone is denied food, water, and medicine. We know what happens when malnutrition rates for children and mothers begin spiking out of control. We know what it means when deaths from starvation become a routine daily occurrence. We know this signals that a famine is building momentum. More deaths – likely many more – will follow without definitive action. Deaths in this phase of rising famine may not be seen or recorded until later – but the window to save those lives now is closing. Without immediate action to protect civilians and scale-up a real famine response, tens of thousands more could die needlessly.

History tells us what is likely to happen next unless the world acts. The UN has already warned that 640,000 face famine conditions by late September if access is not enabled. Governments around the world must use any and all leverage and influence they have to remove obstacles to famine response in Gaza, and save the countless lives that can still be saved. Without concerted

diplomatic and political action to create space for humanitarians to do our lifesaving work, an intolerable wave of preventable death will overwhelm Gaza, to the world's enduring shame.

Signed,

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