

## **HUMANITARIAN AID AND CHILDREN IN GAZA**

### **Situation before October – UNRWA and UNICEF**

Established in 1949, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the UN agency that supports Palestinian refugees and their descendants. In June 2023, UNRWA announced that it was operating with a US \$75 million shortfall to provide food for people in Gaza. UN Secretary General António Guterres said “UNRWA is on the verge of financial collapse.”<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, prior to the latest escalation in violence, UNICEF reported that about one million children were in need of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – almost half the child population in those areas.<sup>2</sup> Both organisations were already underfunded to carry out their critical humanitarian work.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

The issues facing the whole population of Gaza have also impacted humanitarian workers, who have lost friends and family members, and have been forcibly displaced. Many have little or no access to electricity, limited access to food, and no access to running water, due to the collective punishment siege tactics implemented by Israel. Without the ability to produce or import food, the Gazan population relies on aid to survive. The UN, international aid agencies and NGOs have managed to deliver limited assistance in Gaza, but aid alone cannot meet the massive needs. Infrastructure for storing and transporting aid has also been damaged and warehouses are unusable.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision – Limited Resources**

Palestinian Red Crescent announced that an average of 94.5 trucks entered Gaza per day between 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023 and 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024 . This represents an 86% shortfall compared to the figure of 600 trucks that entered daily before October 2023.<sup>3</sup> There are an insufficient number of trucks to provide aid, which is exacerbated by the lack of fuel to operate those trucks that are available.

Trucks carrying relief are forced to undergo numerous inspections prior to entering Gaza, which is also exacerbated by the inspection process remaining slow and unpredictable. UNICEF claims that many of the essential materials needed for the humanitarian response are restricted on seemingly arbitrary grounds. These necessities include life-saving generators to power water facilities and hospitals, and plastic pipes to repair badly damaged water infrastructure. Critical medical supplies have also been restricted.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision – Distribution and Logistical Challenges**

Drivers entering Gaza face incredibly challenging conditions—destruction of infrastructure and roads; routes strewn with unexploded ordnance; and overcrowding on the streets in the south caused by mass internal displacement, which further complicates relief operations. Frequent communications blackouts as part of Israel’s siege also routinely disrupt coordination efforts to distribute aid. UNICEF has stated that it regularly loses contact with its teams on the ground, and families in Gaza often have no means of learning where and how to access aid.

---

<sup>1</sup> [UN News. \(2<sup>nd</sup> June 2023\) UN agency for Palestine refugees on verge of financial collapse. UN News.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [UNICEF. \(26<sup>th</sup> January 2024\) 3 major obstacles to delivering aid in Gaza. UNICEF.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Palestine Red Crescent Society. \(4<sup>th</sup> February 2024\) Humanitarian Aid trucks. X.](#)

## **Defunding of UNRWA**

UNRWA, which already faced chronic underfunding prior to October, was defunded by 13 countries, including major funders like Germany, USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, and Japan. This came after 12 UNRWA staff were accused by Israel of involvement in the 7<sup>th</sup> October attack.

Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, warned that the decision to pause funding to UNRWA "*overtly defies*" the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s order in the *South Africa v Israel* case, which alleges violations of the Genocide Convention. The ICJ ordered Israel to allow unhindered humanitarian assistance into Gaza. Albanese referred to the decision to defund UNRWA as 'collective punishment' and said that states that defunded UNRWA were "*most likely violating their obligations under the Genocide Convention*."<sup>4</sup> European Commission Vice President Josep Borrell also referred to the defunding as 'collective punishment' that was "*disproportionate and dangerous*".<sup>5</sup>

## **Risk of Famine**

Food insecurity in Gaza has been worsened by the destruction of bakeries and the restriction of external aid. Human Rights Watch has released a report finding that starvation is deliberately being used as a weapon of war in Gaza.<sup>6</sup> The desperate search for food has left the entire civilian population hungry, including children, babies, pregnant women and the elderly. The extreme lack of food means nursing mothers are unable to produce enough milk to feed their babies, leaving them chronically and dangerously malnourished. The whole population is facing starvation.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a tool devised by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) to analyse food insecurity. The IPC now indicates that from 8 December 2023 – February 2024, 1.75 million people in Gaza are in the two highest phases of food insecurity, Phase 4 (Humanitarian Emergency) and Phase 5 (Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe).<sup>7</sup> Three weeks ago, the IPC warned that if the situation did not change imminently, Gaza would have the highest share of people in the world facing acute food insecurity.<sup>8</sup> UNICEF said these findings suggest 335,000 children are at high risk of severe malnutrition and preventable death, and it poses concerns for 155,000 pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers.<sup>9</sup>

## **British Palestinian Families – Airlifted Aid**

British Palestinian Families in the UK wrote a letter to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024 asking for the UK to urgently and immediately intervene to avoid imminent famine in Gaza. The group called for the direct airlifting of aid including food to Gaza's starving population.<sup>10</sup> This call for airlifted aid has been echoed by experts including Nebal Farsakh, spokesperson for Palestine Red Crescent Society, who gave evidence to the International Development Committee in the House of Commons.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> [The New Arab \(28<sup>th</sup> January 2024\) States defunding UNRWA may be violating genocide convention: expert. The New Arab.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Reuters. \(5<sup>th</sup> February 2024\) EU top diplomat says defunding UNRWA 'collective punishment,' will endanger lives. Times of Israel.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Human Rights Watch. \(2023\) Israel: Starvation Used as Weapon of War. Human Rights Watch.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(2023\) Gaza Strip: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for 24 November – 7 December 2023 and Projection for 8 December 2023 – 7 February 2024.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [UNICEF. \(22 December 2023\) Statement by UNICEF on the risk of famine in the Gaza strip. UNICEF.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [ICJP \(30<sup>th</sup> January 2024\) British Palestinian families call for urgent and immediate intervention in Gaza to avoid imminent famine. ICJP.](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Nebal Farsakh. \(9<sup>th</sup> January 2024\) Oral evidence: Humanitarian situation in Gaza, HC 110. International Development Committee. Q67.](#)