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زبانهای اروپایی

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13.02.2024

***Let them eat dirt!***

## ***The Final Phase of Israel's Genocide in Gaza***

In this article, Chris Hedges describes the final phase of Israel's genocide in Gaza. An orchestrated mass famine has begun. The international community has no intention of stopping it.



There was never any chance that the Israeli government would accept a pause in fighting proposed by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, let alone a ceasefire. Israel is about to deliver the coup de grâce in its war against the Palestinians in Gaza: mass starvation. When Israeli leaders use the term "absolute victory," they mean total decimation, total elimination. In 1942, the Nazis systematically starved the 500,000 men, women, and children of the Warsaw ghetto. This is a figure that Israel aims to exceed.



Israel and its main backer, the United States, by attempting to shut down the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides food and aid to Gaza, are not only committing a war crime, they are flagrantly defying the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The tribunal found plausible the allegations of genocide brought by South Africa, which included statements and facts collected by UNRWA. It ordered Israel to abide by six interim measures to prevent genocide and alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe. The fourth interim measure calls on Israel to ensure immediate and effective measures to provide humanitarian aid and essential services in Gaza.

UNRWA's reports on conditions in Gaza, which I covered as a reporter for seven years, and its documentation of indiscriminate Israeli attacks illustrate that, as UNRWA put it, "unilaterally declared 'safe zones' are not safe at all. [No place in Gaza is safe.](#)"

UNRWA's role in documenting the genocide, as well as providing food and aid to Palestinians, infuriates the Israeli government. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused UNRWA after the ruling of providing false information to the ICJ. Israel, which had targeted UNRWA for decades, decided that the agency, which helps 5.9 million Palestinian refugees across the Middle East with clinics, schools and food, had to be eliminated.



[Israel vs. UNRWA: Is Humanitarian Aid to Palestine in Danger?](#) Residents of the Gaza Strip gather to receive food supplies at an UNRWA school on January 24, 2024. [Anas-Mohammed / Shutterstock](#)

Unsubstantiated Israeli accusations against UNRWA that a dozen of the 13,000 employees had links to those who carried out the attacks in Israel on October 7, in which some 1,200 Israelis were killed, achieved their goal. It prompted 16 major donors, including the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Estonia and Japan, to suspend financial aid to the aid agency on which nearly all Palestinians in Gaza rely for food. Israel has killed 152 UNRWA workers and damaged 147 UNRWA facilities since 7 October. Israel has also bombed UNRWA aid trucks.

More than 27,708 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, some 67,000 have been injured and at least 7,000 are missing, probably dead and buried under the rubble.



A girl cries out for food in an open-field canteen in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip.

Image: Hatem Ali/AP Photo/picture alliance

More than half a million Palestinians – one in four – die of starvation in Gaza, according to the UN. Palestinians in Gaza, at least 1.9 million of whom have been internally displaced, lack not only sufficient food, but also clean water, shelter and medicine. There are few fruits and vegetables. There is little flour to make bread. Pasta, along with meat, cheese, and eggs, have disappeared. Black market prices for dry goods such as lentils and beans have increased 25-fold from pre-war prices. A sack of flour on the black market has risen from \$8 to \$200. Gaza's health system, of which only three of the 36 partially functioning hospitals remain, has largely collapsed. About 1.3 million displaced Palestinians live on the streets of the southern city of Rafah, which Israel designated a "safe zone" but has begun bombing. Families shiver in the winter rains under flimsy tarps

amid puddles of untreated sewage. An estimated 90 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes.

"There has been no case since World War II when an entire population has been reduced to extreme hunger and destitution so quickly," writes Alex de Waal, executive director of the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University and author of "Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine." in The Guardian. "And there is no case where the international obligation to stop it has been so clear."



Gaza is on the brink of famine. If the United States and the United Kingdom do not use all the means at their disposal to stop the catastrophe, they will be complicit in it. Photo:

Ashraf Amra/Anadolu via Getty Images.

The United States, previously UNRWA's largest contributor, provided \$422 million to the agency in 2023. The disruption of funding ensures that UNRWA's food deliveries, already very scarce due to Israel's blockades, will largely stop in late February or early March. Israel has given the Palestinians in Gaza two options. Leave or die.

I covered the famine in Sudan in 1988, which claimed 250,000 lives. I have marks on my lungs, scars from being among hundreds of Sudanese who were dying of tuberculosis. I was strong and healthy and I fought the contagion. They were weak and emaciated and they didn't. The international community, as in Gaza, did little to intervene.

The harbinger of starvation - malnutrition - already affects the majority of Palestinians in Gaza. Those who starve lack enough calories to sustain themselves. Desperate, they start eating fodder, grass, leaves, insects, rodents, and even dirt. They suffer from diarrhea and respiratory infections. They tear off small pieces of food, often spoiled, and ration it.

Soon, lacking enough iron to produce hemoglobin, a protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen from the lungs to the body, and myoglobin, a protein that provides oxygen to the

muscles, coupled with a lack of vitamin B1, they become anemic. The body feeds on itself. Tissues and muscles wear out. It is impossible to regulate body temperature. The kidneys become blocked. The immune system collapses. Vital organs (brain, heart, lungs, ovaries, and testicles) atrophy. Blood circulation slows down. Blood volume decreases. Infectious diseases such as typhoid, tuberculosis and cholera become an epidemic that kills thousands of people.

It's impossible to concentrate. Emaciated victims succumb to mental and emotional withdrawal and apathy. They don't want to be touched or moved. The heart muscle weakens. The victims, even at rest, are practically in a state of heart failure. Wounds don't heal. Vision deteriorates with cataracts, even among young people. Finally, ravaged by convulsions and hallucinations, the heart stops. This process can take up to 40 days for an adult. Children, the elderly, and the sick die more quickly.

I saw hundreds of skeletal figures, specters of human beings, moving desolate at an icy pace across the arid Sudanese landscape. Hyenas, accustomed to eating human flesh, would take small children away. I stopped in front of clusters of bleached human bones on the outskirts of villages where dozens of people, too weak to walk, had lain down in groups and never gotten up. Many were the remains of entire families.

The dirt airstrip was flanked by hundreds of human bones, skulls, and remains of iron bracelets, colored beads, baskets, and shreds of clothing. The palm trees had been cut in half. People had eaten the leaves and pulp inside. Rumor had it that the food would arrive by plane. People had walked for days to the airstrip. They waited and waited. No plane arrived. No one buried the dead.

Now, from a distance, I observe what is happening in another land, in another time. I know the indifference that condemned the Sudanese, mostly Dinka, and that today condemns the Palestinians. The poor, especially when they are of color, don't count. They can be killed like flies. The famine in Gaza is not a natural disaster. It is Israel's master plan.

There will be academics and historians who will write about this genocide, falsely believing that we can learn from the past, that we are different, that history can prevent us from being, once again, barbarians. They will hold academic conferences. They will say, "Never again!" They will praise themselves for being more humane and civilized. But when the time comes to speak out with each new genocide, fearful of losing their status or their academic positions, they will scurry like rats down their rabbit holes. Human history is one long atrocity for the world's poor and vulnerable. Gaza is just another chapter.

*Chris Hedges*

*Original: [Let Them Eat Dirt](#)*

*Source: [The Chris Hedges Report](#), February 8, 2024*

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La Pluma. net 11.02.2024