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US House Votes to Suppress Gaza Death Toll

Dissenting lawmakers decried the “genocide denial” of a bipartisan measure banning State Department officials from using agency funds to cite statistics from the Gaza Health Ministry.



Palestinians and corpses of people killed by Israeli airstrikes outside the Indonesian Hospital in Jabalia, north of the Gaza Strip, on Oct. 9, 2023. (Bashar Taleb, Palestinian News & Information Agency for APaimages, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Barbara Lee took to the House floor to denounce an amendment to next year’s State Department spending bill that would ban U.S. officials from using agency funding to cite casualty figures provided by the Gaza Ministry of Health.

Rep. Jared Moskowitz's (D-FL) amendment to H.R. 8771, the State Department Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 2025, passed by a vote of 269-144 on Thursday with broad bipartisan support.

The bipartisan measure — co-sponsored by Reps. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ), Mike Lawler (R-NY), Joe Wilson (R-SC), and Carol Miller (R-WV) — bans State Department officials from using agency funds to cite any statistics from the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry. [For enactment, the bill still faces a vote in the Senate.]

“How absolutely unconscionable that my colleagues are offering an amendment to prevent our U.S. government from even citing the Palestinian death toll,” said Tlaib (D-MI). “Since 1948... there has been a coordinated effort, especially in this chamber, to dehumanize Palestinians and erase Palestinians from existence.”

“The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians did not end in 1948,” Tlaib continued. “Today... we are witnessing the Israeli apartheid government carry out a genocide in Gaza, and in real time, and this amendment is an attempt to hide it.”

Noting the “more than 15,000 Palestinian children” killed by Israel’s bombs, bullets, and starvation-inducing siege, Tlaib said that “six children... are killed in Gaza every single hour.”

“But Palestinians are not just numbers,” she said. “Behind these numbers are real people—mothers, fathers, sons, daughters who have their lives stolen from them and their families torn apart, and we should not be trying to hide it.”

“These are innocent children and babies who have been bombed in their tents, burned alive, dismembered, and deliberately starved to death. Where is our shared humanity in this chamber?” Tlaib asked. “There is so much anti-Palestinian racism in this chamber that my colleagues don’t even want to acknowledge that Palestinians exist at all—not when they’re alive, and now, not even when they’re dead.”

“It’s absolutely disgusting,” she said. “This is genocide denial.”

“I won’t remain silent as the only Palestinian-American serving in Congress, while folks attempt to erase those who were killed with our own weapons,” the congresswoman vowed, holding up a thick ream of paper that she said was a list of Palestinians killed during the war, to be entered into the Congressional Record.

“The list is too long that I can’t even submit it because of the text limit,” she added.

Lee (D-CA) said that the Gaza Health Ministry’s data is “often the only information available about what is happening on the ground in Gaza.”

“This amendment would severely inhibit the United States government’s ability to assess the situation,” she warned.

“Israel has sealed Gaza’s borders barring foreign journalists and others who can offer this reporting,” Lee added. “The journalists and medical professionals who are there are unable to account for all of the bodies trapped under rubble and discovered in mass graves.”

Lee noted that the Gaza Health Ministry’s figures “have been found to be credible in the past, holding up to United Nations scrutiny, independent investigations, and even Israel’s tallies.”

Israel Defense Forces officials have also concurred with the roughly 2:1 civilian-to-militant fatality figure claimed by the Gaza Health Ministry.

In February, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin acknowledged that “over 25,000” Palestinian women and children had been killed in Gaza up to that date, although the Pentagon subsequently attempted to walk back his admission.

[Related: *The Real Gaza Death Toll*]

President Joe Biden has been accused of genocide denial for casting aspersions on Gaza Health Ministry casualty reports.

“The president paved the way for horrific amendments like these when he questioned Palestinian death counts that were deemed credible by independent human rights organizations and our own State Department,” said Tariq Habash, a former U.S. Education Department official who resigned earlier this year over the Biden administration’s support for Israel’s war on Gaza.

Moskowitz — whose all-time top campaign contributor is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) — contended Wednesday that “at the end of the day, the Gaza Ministry of Health is the Hamas Ministry of Health” while disdaining “the idea that the United States government would rely on a terrorist organization for statistics.”



Moskowitz, right, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, center, and others in Israel, Nov. 12, 2023. (U.S. Embassy Jerusalem, Flickr, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0)

However, the State Department has repeatedly — and uncritically — cited the ministry’s figures in past reports on previous Israeli attacks on Gaza.

In November, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf testified before Congress that the true death toll from the current Israeli war on Gaza is likely “even higher” than reported, as thousands of Palestinians are missing and presumed dead and buried beneath the rubble of hundreds of thousands of bombed-out buildings.

According to the Gaza Health Ministry, at least 37,765 Palestinians — mostly women and children — have been killed during Israel’s 265-day assault on the embattled strip. More than 86,400 Gazans have been wounded, and over 11,000 others are missing.

Israel’s conduct in the war is the subject of an ongoing genocide trial at the International Court of Justice. The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is also seeking to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity including extermination and forced starvation, as well as three Hamas leaders for alleged extermination and other crimes.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres also recently added Israel and Hamas — whose political wing has governed Gaza for a generation— to its “List of Shame” of countries and governments that kill and harm children.

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