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All UN bakeries in Gaza close as Israel maintains starvation policy



Women line up in front of a bakery to get their share of bread in Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip, Thursday Nov. 21, 2024 [AP Photo/Abdel Kareem Hana]

Every bakery in Gaza operated by the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) closed Tuesday due to shortages of food and fuel caused by the ongoing Israeli blockade.

For nearly a month, Israel has prevented all food, fuel, water and electricity from entering the Gaza Strip as part of a deliberate policy of starvation and ethnic cleansing aimed at killing or displacing Palestinians in Gaza and annexing their land.

“Today, the 25 bakeries that were supported by the World Food Programme during the duration of the ceasefire are all closed due to the shortage of flour and the unavailability of cooking gas,” said Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General António Guterres, on Tuesday.

Gaza's government media office said Israel's starvation policy has caused "the complete shutdown of all bakeries and deepened the famine crisis." It added that Israel's "criminal action aims to complete the chapters of genocide and ethnic cleansing practiced by the occupation against our Palestinian people through systematic starvation policies and the deprivation of citizens of their most basic human rights."

"We have entered a new phase of famine due to the Israeli blockade," said Amjad Shawa, head of the Gaza NGO Network, adding, "We have reached an unprecedented level of humanitarian disaster."

Under conditions of a total blockade, Israeli officials have absurdly declared that there is enough food in Gaza. Dujarric, the UN spokesperson, said Israel's claim was "ridiculous," adding that the United Nations is "at the tail end of our supplies."

Mohammed al-Kurd, a father of 12, told the Associated Press his children regularly go to sleep without dinner. "We tell them to be patient and that we will bring flour in the morning," he said. "We lie to them and to ourselves."

The deliberate starvation of the Palestinian people in Gaza is accompanied by intensified ground operations amid plans for the total military occupation of the enclave. At least 140,000 people have been ordered to evacuate the southern city of Rafah in preparation for what is expected to be a ground offensive in the area.

Gaza's health ministry said Tuesday that 42 bodies had arrived at the enclave's hospitals over the past 24 hours, bringing the death toll since Israel systematically abandoned a "ceasefire" in Gaza two weeks ago to at least 1,042. According to Gaza's health ministry, the death toll of the genocide is over 50,000—a figure that likely underestimates the true death toll.

Amid the expanding military onslaught on Gaza, there is growing evidence that Israeli troops are carrying out mass summary executions.

On Tuesday, the *Guardian* reported that the bodies of 15 Palestinian paramedics and rescue workers, whose bodies were discovered in a mass grave over the weekend, showed evidence of being bound and executed by Israeli forces.

The *Guardian* reported that "The witness accounts add to an accumulating body of evidence pointing to a potentially serious war crime on 23 March, when Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance crews and civil defence rescue workers were sent to the scene of an airstrike in the early hours of the morning in the al-Hashashin district of Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city."

Dr. Ahmed al-Farra, a senior doctor at the Nasser medical complex in Khan Younis, told the *Guardian* that he personally examined bodies that showed signs of being bound and executed.

“I was able to see three bodies when they were transferred to the Nasser hospital. They had bullets in their chest and head. They were executed. They had their hands tied,” he said. “They tied them so they were unable to move and then they killed them.”

The *Guardian* reported that al-Farra provided photographs of the bodies showing signs of summary execution.

Another witness, identified by the *Guardian* as “an official from an international aid agency,” said he saw evidence of a summary execution when the bodies were exhumed from the mass grave.

“I saw the bodies with my own eyes when we found them in the mass grave,” the witness told the *Guardian*. “They had signs of multiple shots in the chest. One of them had legs tied. One was shot in the head. They were executed.”

The 15 aid workers included paramedics, employees of the Red Crescent, and at least one employee of the United Nations.

Jens Laerke, a spokesperson for the UN aid coordination office, told the *Guardian*, “This is a huge blow to us. ... These people were shot.”

In a statement over the weekend, Tom Fletcher, the head of the UN’s humanitarian operations, asserted bluntly, “They were killed by Israeli forces while trying to save lives. ... We demand answers and justice.”

“I condemn the attack by the Israeli army on a medical and emergency convoy on 23 March resulting in the killing of 15 medical personnel and humanitarian workers in Gaza,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said in a statement.

“Available information indicates that the first team was killed by Israeli forces on March 23 and that other emergency and aid crews were struck one after another over several hours as they searched for their missing colleagues,” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs told the AFP news agency.

In a statement on Monday, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said that 322 children have been killed by Israeli forces over the past two weeks. The Israeli offensive “has reportedly left at least 322 children dead and 609 injured—constituting a daily average of around 100 children killed or maimed over the past 10 days. Most of these children were displaced, sheltering in makeshift tents or damaged homes. These figures include children who were reportedly killed or injured when the surgical department of Al Nasser Hospital, in southern Gaza, was struck in an attack on 23 March.”

It added that “After nearly 18 months of war, more than 15,000 children have reportedly been killed, over 34,000 reportedly injured, and nearly one million children repeatedly displaced and deprived of their right to basic services.”

Characterizing the humanitarian situation, UNICEF wrote that “With no aid allowed into the Gaza Strip since 2 March—representing the longest period of aid blockage since the start of the war—food, safe water, shelter, and medical care have become increasingly scarce. Without these essential supplies, malnutrition, diseases, and other preventable conditions will likely surge, leading to an increase in preventable child deaths.”

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