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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Andre Damon

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Israeli finance minister pledges Gaza will be “entirely destroyed” and Palestinians sent to “third countries”



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, right, speaks with Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich during the weekly cabinet meeting at the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv, Israel, January 7, 2024. [AP Photo/Ronen Zvulun]

One day after Israel’s cabinet voted to approve a plan for the full military occupation of Gaza, the internal displacement of its people and the takeover of food supplies by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich made clear this marked the next step in the total ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

Smotrich pledged:

Within a year, ... Gaza will be entirely destroyed, civilians will be sent to ... the south to a humanitarian zone ... and from there they will start to leave in great numbers to third countries.

This proposal for the destruction of Gaza, its military occupation and the ethnic cleansing of its population has, in fact, been the operative plan of Israel's "war" in Gaza, which was launched using the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack and hostage taking as a pretext.

In order to provide political cover for the planned genocide, US President Joe Biden, the Democratic Party and the media claimed that Israel was waging a war against Hamas, aimed at returning the hostages, even while providing Israel with thousands of 2,000-pound bombs whose only use was to destroy entire city blocks.

In February, US President Donald Trump publicly announced the actual policy, which is the total demolition of the Gaza Strip. Israel and the US would "level the site," displace its people and annex the territory.

The plan announced by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Monday, as Smotrich made clear, marks the full-scale implementation of this vision. The Palestinians in Gaza are to be rounded up, displaced into concentration camps in the south of the territory, then either forced to march across the desert into Egypt or put on ships.

This plan will be presented as a "voluntary" relocation, in the context of a total blockade of all food, water and electricity in the Gaza Strip. But it will be "voluntary" only because remaining in a place without food will be a death sentence.

Of course, this will be a death sentence for the hostages who remain in Gaza, who will die of starvation along with the remaining Palestinian population. But Israeli ministers are stating increasingly openly that the pretext of waging a war to "return the hostages" is being discarded.

As Smotrich told Agence France-Presse (AFP):

Israel does not intend to withdraw from territories the IDF captures, not even as part of a deal to release hostages.

In response to the plan to fully occupy the Gaza Strip, Hamas stated that it would no longer engage in negotiations with Israel.

Basem Naim, Hamas's senior official, told AFP:

There is no sense in engaging in talks or considering new ceasefire proposals as long as the hunger war and extermination war continue in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's plan to occupy and ethnically cleanse Gaza has been met with silence by the Democratic Party, with House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, former President Joe Biden, former President Barack Obama, and former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi all remaining mute.

Israel has completely blockaded all food, water and electricity from entering Gaza since March 2, leading to a surge in malnutrition. A sack of flour, previously sold for \$5, now costs as much as \$500.

Israel is deliberately using starvation as a weapon of war. Last month, Israel's Minister of Defense Israel Katz declared:

Israel's policy is clear: No humanitarian aid will enter Gaza, and blocking this aid is one of the main pressure levers preventing Hamas from using it as a tool with the population. ... No one is currently planning to allow any humanitarian aid into Gaza, and there are no preparations to enable such aid.

Approximately 69 percent of Gaza has now either been incorporated into an Israeli buffer zone or is subject to evacuation orders, leaving the remaining population of Gaza, which has been displaced multiple times, trapped in ever smaller enclaves.

In a statement this week, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said that food had "completely run out" both in marketplaces and in distribution centers.

In its latest humanitarian update, the PRCS said, "The population is once again at extreme risk of famine," and "There is an inability to meet even the minimum daily needs of over a million displaced people."

In a statement, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported, "The level of need among civilians in Gaza right now is overwhelming," and "Under international humanitarian law, Israel has an obligation to use all means available to ensure that the basic needs of the civilian population under its control are met."

In a statement Tuesday, UNICEF noted:

In the past month, over 75 percent of households have reported deteriorating access to water—they don't have enough water to drink, are unable to wash their hands when needed, and are often forced to choose between showering, cleaning, and cooking.

It added:

Malnutrition is also on the rise. More than 9,000 children have been admitted for treatment of acute malnutrition since the beginning of the year. Hundreds more children in desperate need of treatment are not able to access it due to the insecurity and displacement. Since March 18, hostilities have intensified, resulting in 390,000 people being newly displaced with nowhere safe to go.

Aya al-Skafy, a Gaza City resident, told Al Jazeera her baby died last week of malnutrition:

She was four months old and weighed 2.8kg [6.2lb]. Because of severe malnutrition, she suffered from blood acidity, liver and kidney failure, and many other complications. Her hair and nails also fell out due to malnutrition.

Mohammed al-Seikaly, another Gaza City resident, told Reuters:

There is nothing left in the Gaza Strip that has not been struck by missiles and explosive barrels. ... I'm asking in front of the whole world: "What's left to bomb?"

Andre Damon@Andre__Damon