

Position Paper (4)

A War without Human Rights

Ethnic Cleansing by Weaponizing Food, Water, and Medicine

Dec, 2023

A War without Human Rights

Ethnic Cleansing by Weaponizing Food, Water, and Medicine

Enough Calories to Survive!

Since the early nineties of the last decade, the Israeli Occupation has been imposing restrictions on the Gaza Strip, and the restrictions were intensified after Hamas movement came to power in the Gaza Strip in June of 2007. Under the pretext of “security reasons,” the signs of the siege of the Gaza Strip began to appear in 2006 when the Israeli occupation decided to close the “Erez” crossing and prevent movement through it except for holders of special permits. Egypt also closed the Rafah crossing in 2007 and this closure continued for 3 years while allowing the passage of some special cases such as students or patients.

The closure and restriction of movement to and from the Gaza Strip was not the only dilemma facing the residents of the Gaza Strip; The closure of the crossings was accompanied by the Israeli occupation’s control over the quantities and types of commercial goods and food entering the Strip. The number of trucks that entered Gaza loaded with goods during the first five months of 2022, about 8,000 trucks per month, is 30% less than the monthly average of trucks that entered the Strip during the first half of 2007 before imposing the siege. Since then, the population has increased by more than 50%.¹

The Israeli occupation reduced gas and electricity supplies, and in 2006, it bombed the only power plant in the Strip². The imposed restrictions also included controlling residents’ access to agricultural lands and fishing areas in Gaza itself, bulldozing agricultural lands, sabotaging crops, destroying fishermen’s boats, and preventing them from reaching the rich fishing areas, it also imposed restrictions on the health sector, which had a profound impact on living and health conditions. Together, these restrictions undermined the Strip’s economy in general, leading to high unemployment and poverty rates and heavy reliance on humanitarian aid.

Reports issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the UNRWA regarding the periods between 2015 and 2016 indicate that around 35% of agricultural lands in the Strip and 85% of fishing waters have

¹ Zaid Taleb, “UNRWA Continues Its Efforts to Rebuild Refugee Homes in the Gaza Strip”, UNRWA (30 June 2022). Website: <https://cutt.us/bYQPm>.

² “The Siege on Gaza: How it Started and How It Continues (A Chronological Sequence),” *The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor* (23 July 2023). Website: <https://2u.pw/G0nl7lL>.

been damaged as a result of the Occupation's restrictions imposed at different stages, while 30% of wages declined during the period between 2005 until 2015³. A report issued by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor pointed out that the siege on the Gaza Strip resulted in the unemployment of around 47% of male and female participants in the workforce, in addition to a significant deterioration in the health sector, where the percentage of shortage in basic medicines reached about 40%, the percentage of shortage in consumable medical supplies reached 32%, and the shortage of laboratory and blood bank supplies reached 60%, and the occupation banned the import of many important medical devices, as well as maintenance equipment for broken medical devices.⁴

Great damage was inflicted on the economic and production sectors in the Gaza Strip, which created a complex crisis. As a result of the restrictions imposed on import and export, hundreds of factories closed their doors, and thousands of workers were laid off due to the shortage of raw materials and the ongoing fuel and electricity crisis due to the siege. The fishing sector also suffered great damage. Whether through direct attacks on fishing boats, which amounted to an average of 30 attacks per month during the year 2022, or through banning the export of fish from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, and preventing access to fishing areas.⁵

The value of losses in the agricultural sector as a result of the siege and multiple Occupation attacks from 2006 to 2022 amounted to about 1.3 billion US Dollars, and farmers received compensation for these losses at a rate equivalent to 30% only, and during the year 2022, the electricity crisis continued, so the residents of the Strip received electricity for 12 hours at most out of the 24 hours of a day. The population's access to electricity depends on the rate of fuel that the Occupation allows to enter the Gaza Strip through the Karm Abu Salem crossing borders, which is subject to closure by the Occupation at any time, in addition to the continued provision of fuel supply to the only operating gas station in the Gaza Strip⁶.

The concept of starvation is not related to the direct deprivation of food commodities only. Starvation is a systematic colonial policy used by colonial governments throughout history, with the aim of subjugating the colonized and depriving them of all the necessities of life, and all their basic rights that guarantee their living

³ "Realistic Stories, A Realistic Life – What the Gaza Siege Means" *UNRWA* (2016). Website: <https://n9.cl/mve0qm>.

⁴ "A Generation Under Siege. A Report by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor Documenting Life in Gaza after 17 Years of Siege" (25 January 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/cglmj>.

⁵ Previous Resource.

⁶ Previous Resource.

in dignity. The Israeli occupation's policies aim to disrupt all economic structures in the Gaza Strip to undermine livelihoods there, as the siege on the Gaza Strip represents a comprehensive and systematic policy of starvation and collective punishment aimed at ethnic cleansing, as it deprives the population of all forms of life, and works to destroy all social, economic and political structures.

Some of the consequences of these colonial policies are represented in the high levels of unemployment and poverty rates as a result of the ongoing siege. The poverty rate in Gaza according to the national poverty line reached 61% in 2020. This also led to food insecurity and greater reliance on aid, and the percentage of families who received humanitarian aid in the six months before the current war reached 73% of all families in the Gaza Strip while 50.5% of families in the Gaza Strip depend mainly on non-governmental and charitable aid.⁷

The consequences of the siege and starvation imposed by the Occupation of the Gaza Strip have doubled on marginalized groups. For example, the unemployment rate among women in the Gaza Strip, according to the Labor Force Survey for the year 2022 issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, reached 67.4%⁸. Women head 11% of families in the Gaza Strip⁹, and the percentage of poverty among these families is 54%¹⁰. Furthermore, the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip among persons with disabilities reached 53.7% in 2017¹¹, meaning that more than half of persons with disabilities and women in the Gaza Strip are unemployed, and therefore they are the most affected by poverty and starvation policies, and most dependent on humanitarian aid.

Starvation is a War Crime:

Contemporary International Criminal Law prohibits starvation of civilians - that is, intentionally depriving them of food - as a method of warfare. This rule, derived from the principle of distinction stipulated in International Humanitarian Law, appears for the first time in the Additional Protocols of 1977 (Article 54

⁷ "Gaza War: The Expected Social and Economic Repercussions on The State of Palestine", *ESCWA* (5 November 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/ktioo>.

⁸ "Unemployment in Palestine" *Wafa*. Website: <https://n9.cl/kn0y8>.

⁹ "Ola Awad Presents the Conditions of Palestinian Women on the Eve of International Women's Day" *The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (8 March 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/k6fdw>.

¹⁰ *Men and Women in Palestine, Issues and Statistics* (Ramallah: The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Website: <https://n9.cl/p2m4x>.

¹¹ "The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics Issues a Press Release on the International Day for Persons with Disability" *The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (3 December 2019). Website: <https://n9.cl/k6fdw>.

paragraph (1) of Additional Protocol I, Article 14 of Additional Protocol II), and today it is considered customary law in international and non-international armed conflicts. The Rome Statute stipulates that “the deliberate use of starvation of civilians as a method of war” constitutes a war crime in international armed conflicts¹².

The Israeli occupation has starved Palestinian civilians and deliberately deprived them of food since the beginning of the siege in 2007. This constitutes a flagrant and blatant violation of international humanitarian law and international norms and is also considered a war crime according to the Statute of the International Criminal Court.¹³

Former ICC Prosecutor Luis Ocampo stated that Article 2 (c) of the Genocide Convention stipulates that there is no need to kill people directly to commit genocide, but rather creating the conditions for the destruction of the group constitutes genocide in itself, and this is what Israel is doing in the Gaza Strip.¹⁴

In the same context, Francesca Albanese, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, stated on her X account that depriving citizens of things that are vital for their existence is considered a war crime, this also applies to the use of starvation as a means of war, which is also a crime against humanity when it is used as part of a wide scope / systematic attack against civilians)¹⁵.

In 2018, UN Security Council Resolution No. (2417) was issued, which affirmed that: “The use of starvation of civilians as a method of combat may constitute a war crime.” It also affirmed that: “The use of starvation of civilians as a method of combat in several conflict situations is prohibited under international humanitarian law.”¹⁶

The Israeli Supreme Court forced the Israeli occupation government to reveal a study it conducted regarding the number of calories Palestinians need to avoid malnutrition in light of its siege of the Gaza Strip. Reuters presented in a press report published in 2012, quoting an official in the Occupation Ministry of “Defense”, “Jay Inbar,” that it was part of a research paper that was developed during two rounds of discussions, his

¹² Gloria Gagioli, “Does the Contemporary Humanitarian International Law Prohibit the Use of Military Siege Methods?” *Regional Media Centre at the International Committee of the Red Cross* (19 February 2019). Website: <https://cutt.us/JQf2q>.

¹³ See the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court Article 8, Paragraph (b), Clause 25. Website: <https://cutt.us/SKYyZ>.

¹⁴ “Israel's siege of Gaza is a Genocide interview with Luis Moreno Ocampo” *Al-Jazeera* (3December 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/pxajt>.

¹⁵ Francesca Albanese, Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, a Tweet on her Personal Account on “X” Platform. Website: <https://cutt.us/kBYOr>.

¹⁶ Ibrisam Azem, “Starvation as a Weapon During War: A crime, How Can the United Nations Stop It?” (29 January2020). Website: <https://n9.cl/2c01q>.

statements came after the Israeli human rights group "Gisha"¹⁷ published the document after filing a lawsuit to obtain it. The study estimated the number of calories needed daily for an individual in the Gaza Strip to be 2,279 calories, and the document stated that this is the needed amount "to preserve the basic fabric of life" in the region, that is, "the Gaza Strip."¹⁸

The Double Impact of the Siege During the Current War: Difficulty in Obtaining Food and Medicine:

The Israeli Occupation has been imposing a stifling siege on the Gaza Strip since the 7th of October 2023, represented in the cutting of electricity and water from the Strip, and denying the entry of food, medicine, and fuel, while continuing its heavy bombing and the field invasion¹⁹. In the current war, the Israeli occupation has greatly escalated the war of starvation in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli escalation was not limited to preventing humanitarian aid from entering but also included the bombing of bakeries, factories, shops, warehouses, water tanks, and the destruction of some supply centers belonging to relief organizations, hospitals, centers, and health care facilities, and the electricity crisis aggravated the problems of crops in Gaza, as 15,000 farmers lost their crops due to lack of refrigeration and irrigation of crops. All of this exacerbated the difficult conditions of civilians in the Strip, especially in refugee centers.

There is a severe shortage of medicines and medical supplies, and all residents in the Gaza Strip face difficulty in obtaining them. There is very limited or almost no treatment for 14% of the Gaza Strip's population who have chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Ibrahim Matar, a doctor at Al-Aqsa Hospital says that diabetic patients do not have enough insulin, and stopping taking blood pressure medications increases the risk of seizures that may lead to death. The United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs also confirmed the outbreak of scabies, lice and diarrhea due to the lack of water, hygiene, and sanitation supplies, which raises concerns about the outbreak and spread of more diseases.²⁰

Civilians, especially those who have been displaced in shelters, face extreme difficulties in obtaining food and water, and the Occupation also threatens their lives during their attempts to access such supplies. Umm Muhammad, who gave birth to her child in one of the shelters, says that she cannot obtain food so that she can breastfeed her child, and she cannot provide infant formula either. *"They want to kill us through murder*

¹⁷ Maslak, Center for Defending Freedom of Movement. An officially registered Israeli organization, concerned with human rights, established in 2005.

¹⁸ "A Study on the Israeli Siege on Gaza that Calculated Calories for Palestinian", *Reuters* (17 October 2012). <https://cutt.us/gnP3Y>.

¹⁹ "World Food Programme: Gazans are at Risk of Starvation" *Aljazeera* (17 November 2023). Website: <https://cutt.us/TT4fz>.

²⁰ Isabel Debre, Samy Magdy and Najib Jobain, "Bloodshed, Fear, Hunger, Desperation: Palestinians Try to Survive War's New Chapter in Southern Gaza," Associated Press (8 December 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/dbx48d>.

*and starvation. They drop missiles on us without warning and kill entire families*²¹. Furthermore, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor documented many cases of people who were bombed by the Israeli Occupation during their food search. The most notable case is the case of Yahya Kahil and his children, who were bombed as they were returning from their journey to bring food from their home, which they had left due to the occupation's bombing in Gaza²². Khaled Abu Shaaban, a relief worker, says: "The suffering is horrific. The heavy bombing forces us to make painful choices. Should I risk my life and go out to search for water wells and food and get killed by bombing? Or should I leave my daughters to sleep in a state of hunger and thirst?"²³

Most displaced citizens depend on food aid and canned goods that are distributed inside the refugee centers, knowing that these canned foods are not enough to meet the minimum needs of the displaced people. The Government Information Office in Gaza announced on Tuesday, November 28, that the Gaza Strip needs 1,000 aid trucks daily to recover from the effects of the Occupation's bombing.

The total number of trucks that enter the Gaza Strip daily does not exceed a hundred and fifty trucks per day since the start of the truce that ended on the 30th of November, compared to five hundred trucks that used to enter the Gaza Strip each day before the 7th of October²⁴. According to the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs, on December 4, 100 aid trucks loaded with humanitarian supplies and 69,000 liters of fuel entered Gaza from Egypt, almost as happened the day before that as well. This is much lower than the daily average of 170 trucks and 110,000 liters of fuel that were entered during the humanitarian truce period that was implemented between November 24th and 30th²⁵. On November 29th, the total amount of humanitarian aid that entered the Gaza Strip was 1,200 trucks since the start of the truce, at a rate of 200 trucks per day, seven of which were loaded with cooking gas and fuel, in addition to trucks delivering water, food, and medical supplies.²⁶

²¹ Raed Mousa, "They were killed while searching for food - Israel uses starvation as a weapon to subjugate the Gaza Strip" *Aljazeera* (7 November). Website: <https://2u.pw/bYQ0GIZ>

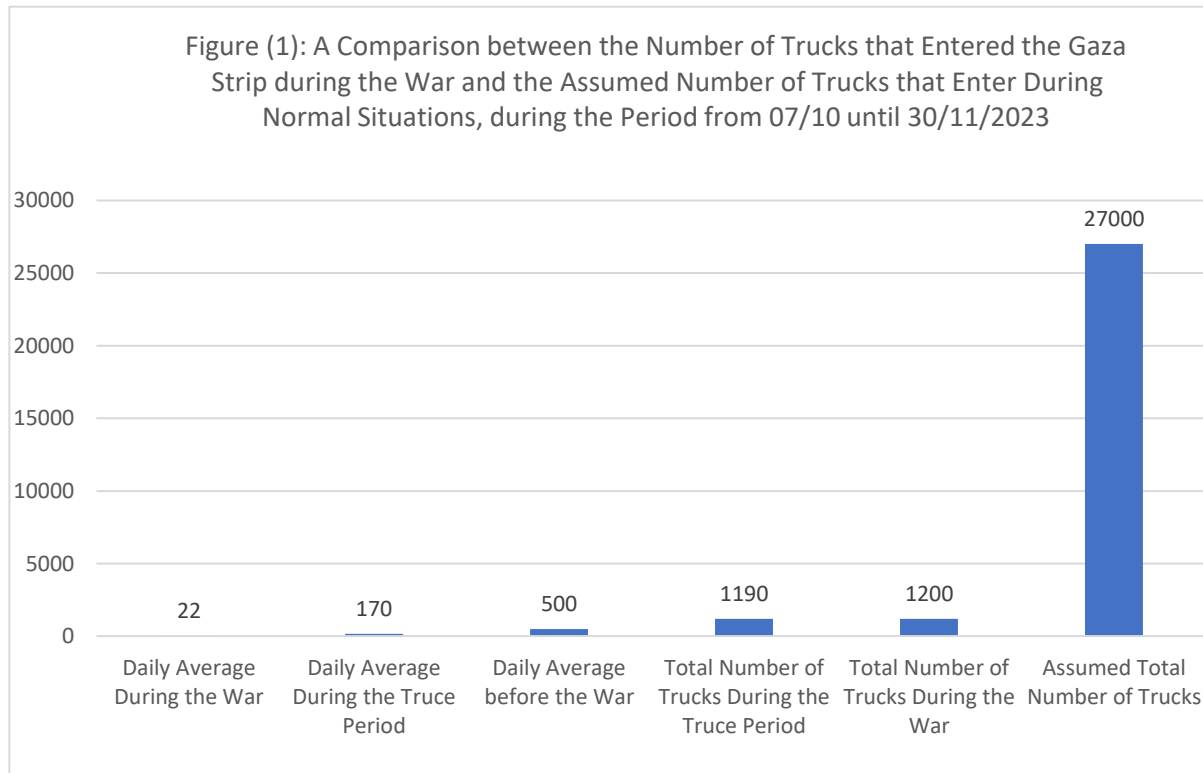
²² The previous resource.

²³ Debre, Bloodshed.

²⁴ "The Gaza War: Did the Humanitarian Situation in the Strip Improve after the Entry of Aid during the Truce", *BBC* (29 November 2023). Website: <https://2u.pw/v5IEJz6>.

²⁵ "Warfare in the Gaza Strip and Israel" *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (4 November 2023): 59. Website: <https://2u.pw/C0issyb>.

²⁶ Mohamed Majdi, "200 Aid Trucks Enter the Gaza Strip through Rafah Crossing Border", *Anatolia Agency* (29 November 2023). Website: <https://2u.pw/KEQ2SKL>.



The figure was developed by the Research Team based on multiple sources.

The above figure shows a comparison in the number of trucks that entered the Gaza Strip during the period from 7/10/2023 until 30/11/2023, which is around 54 days from the start of the war against the Gaza Strip, including the 7-day truce for the exchange of prisoners during November of 2023. From this data, we note several important observations, which are:

If we assume that the conditions in the Gaza Strip are normal without this aggression, and according to official resources, about 500 trucks were entering the Gaza Strip from the various crossings daily, and therefore it was assumed that within 54 days, about 27 thousand trucks of various materials would enter the Gaza Strip. If we assume the presence of eight weekend vacation days during that period (two days a week), the number will be about 23 thousand trucks at the minimum.

However, in reality, only around 1200 trucks entered the Gaza Strip during that period, with an average of 22 trucks per day supposing that they were distributed over the days, taking into consideration that the number of trucks during the aggression was not regular, as on some days, no trucks entered the Strip. Thus, the total number of trucks during the truce was 170 trucks per day, with a total of 1,190 trucks during the seven days.

Furthermore, the total number of trucks that entered Gaza over 47 days of the aggression (after the outage of basic materials) is less than the number of trucks that entered in three days in a normal situation before the war. The distribution process of the materials and medical supplies among displaced people and hospitals during the days of the truce was hindered, for several reasons, including that the scarcity of fuel did not help facilitate the process of distributing this aid, due to the inability to operate transport equipment, and the inability to access some geographical locations in the Gaza Strip, in which there were hospitals and citizens, especially in the north of the Gaza Strip due to the siege and denial of access imposed by the Occupation army.

High numbers of cases of patients have been recorded as a result of consuming unsafe food and contaminated water due to the extreme shortage in food supplies. Yousef Hamoudeh, a displaced person, says: *“These diseases are primarily caused by contaminated food and water, as those affected suffer from fever and diarrhea.”* He added: *“From the beginning of the war, we used to stand in queues to get bread from the beginning of the day until the end, and sometimes we would leave without getting any.”*²⁷

World Food Program Executive Director Cindy McCain states that: “The food and water supplies are practically non-existent in Gaza, and only a small portion of what is needed reaches across the border. With winter approaching, unsafe and overcrowded shelters and a shortage of clean water, civilians face the immediate possibility of starvation. There is no way to meet current hunger needs with a single border crossing in operation, and the only hope is to open another safe corridor for humanitarian access to bring life-essential food to Gaza”²⁸.

UNRWA report No. 49 on the conditions in the Gaza Strip indicated that flour is distributed continuously, and 74,922 families in the southern governorates of Gaza were accessed²⁹, this shift in the method of distribution came after bakeries ran out of fuel and many of them were bombed by the Occupation. Citizens of the Gaza Strip report that UNRWA supplies are scarce in the northern governorates of the Gaza Strip. “Unfortunately, all international organizations have left, at least the area where I am located, Gaza City and northern Gaza,

²⁷ Noor Abu Aishah, “Displaced People in Gaza Suffer from Diseases Due to Water and Food Contamination,” *Anatolia Agency* (4 December 2023). Website: <https://2u.pw/wale34d>.

²⁸ “The World Food Programme Warns: Gaza Faces Widespread Hunger as Food Systems Collapse”, World Food Programme (16 November 2023). Website: <https://cutt.us/MmcfS>.

²⁹ “UNRWA Report No. 49 on the Conditions in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Monday 11 December 2023. Website: <https://cutt.us/jh28j>.

and since their departure, they have not provided any kind of assistance in these areas. That is, there is an absence of the UNRWA and the Red Cross, and there are no international organizations"³⁰.

This indicates that the war waged by the Occupation includes the use of starvation, thirst, and lack of medicine and treatment as weapons to kill Palestinian civilians, in addition to bombing their homes, public streets, and shelters. These constitute serious violations of International Humanitarian Law and are considered war crimes and acts of ethnic cleansing.

Aid Held in the Warehouses of Relief Organizations:

In light of the starvation war waged by the Israeli Occupation against the Gaza Strip, UNRWA warehouses in the southern and middle areas of the Strip witnessed storming by thousands of hungry civilians, who seized flour and food supplies. UNRWA considered what happened to be a dangerous indicator, and Thomas White, Director of UNRWA Affairs, described the storming of the UNRWA's distribution centers as a worrying indicator of the civil system that started to collapse after 3 weeks of war and tight siege on Gaza.³¹ In Dair AlBalah, another attack on the warehouses of the UNRWA containing food supplies was reported, a resident of the neighborhood reported *"A group of people stormed the warehouses and did not harm anyone. There were about ten of them, and they took their personal needs of these materials from the warehouses and left"*³².

Some media reports indicate that many residents pounce on aid the moment it arrives. One displaced person in one of the shelters says: "There are 8,000 people in this shelter. Any vegetables disappear before I see them because people seize everything very quickly." Some residents also mentioned that the prices of basic food supplies have greatly inflated. Currently, the price of a bag of flour is about 450 Shekels. Sugar is being emptied from shops and its price reaches 40 Shekels on the black market.³³

³⁰ An interview with Thareef ALGhurra, Head of the Disabilities Representative Persons Network in Gaza, conducted on 7 December 2023.

³¹ "The UNRWA Warns from chaos spreading in Gaza after aid warehouses were looted" *Asharq Al-Awsa Newspaper* (29 October 2023). Website: <https://2u.pw/0PrVfW3>.

³² An interview with a resident from Dair AlBalah, conducted on 5 December 2023.

³³ Debre, Bloodshed.

The work method of all relief organizations must be appropriate to the size and scope of the crisis in the Gaza Strip, based on the principles of humanitarian aid, so that they all build a clear and declared work mechanism that responds to the conditions of citizens with speed and efficiency that is proportionate to the urgent needs of the population. This requires changing the usual work mechanism that these organizations adhere to, so that they adopt an approach that is appropriate to the state of emergency with the population reaching the lowest levels of food security so that there is no need for individuals to storm the warehouses of these organizations to obtain their food needs.

Starvation is considered a method of ethnic cleansing followed by the Israeli Occupation against the citizens of the Gaza Strip. Accordingly, all international organizations must work to ensure that the aid received through the crossing border is distributed most equitably. The lack of aid reaching the northern governorates of the Gaza Strip constitutes a fundamental problem in light of the absence of any work by the international organizations responsible for receiving and distributing aid there. Therefore, all humanitarian organizations must be responsible for their roles, must take the necessary measures to distribute this aid fairly, and must press for sufficient and comprehensive aid for all citizens throughout the Strip, specifically for groups least able to access food, medicine, and water without assistance, such as persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Persons with Disability, A Suffering Above Their Suffering:

According to the official statistics issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, around 58,000 residents of the Gaza Strip are persons with disabilities³⁴, over one-fifth of those are children, an official in the UNICEF estimates that the actual number is much higher. According to a statement issued by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor and the Disabilities Representatives Persons Network, an estimate of 5,000 people or more suffered various disabilities due to the occupation since October 7th, 2023.³⁵

Persons with disabilities in Gaza face difficulties in obtaining assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and hearing aids. This is due to the obstacles imposed by the Occupation on imports since the beginning of the

³⁴ "A Press Release issued on the International Day for Persons with Disability" *The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (3 December 2023). Website: <https://cutt.us/MgmUB>.

³⁵ "Over 35 New: The catastrophic Plight of Persons with disabilities in Gaza Caused by Israel's Attacks", report issued by "The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor" (7 December 2023). Website: <https://cutt.us/vD8BU>.

siege on Gaza, and the lack of provision of the necessary devices by government institutions and relief teams, as well as restrictions imposed by the Occupation authorities on the entry of spare parts and batteries for assistive tools³⁶. This is in addition to the lack of accessibility of infrastructure and transportation, and the destruction of the ones that are accessible which greatly limits their ability to move.

During the current war on the Gaza Strip, initial monitoring conducted by the Social and Economic Policies Monitor (AlMarsad) and the Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities (SHS) showed a limitation in food supplies and medicine. Forty interviews were conducted with persons with disabilities, they all stressed that there is a scarcity of food, and that they have large need for food and medicine. A woman with disability says: *“Transportation and movement is very hard, there is a scarcity of gas and diesel, and carriages have become the used means of transportation. The owner of the carriage charges twice the amount that a taxi does, knowing that it is an uncomfortable ride for persons with disabilities, especially those with physical and visual disabilities, and the safe passage was very long and uneven, as we saw persons with physical disabilities using their wheelchairs to transport the family’s needs, as well as a person with an intellectual disability who was carrying blankets, pillows, and mattresses, and during the days of the war, for fear of their lives, they took sleeping pills and sedatives to control the cases of fear and panic to which persons with intellectual disabilities are exposed”*.³⁷

This war has a serious impact on persons with disabilities. Before the war, the percentage of persons with disabilities in Gaza was among the highest in the world. ESCWA warned in its report “The Gaza War: The Expected Social and Economic Repercussions on the State of Palestine” of the dangers associated with the sharp increase in the number of persons with disabilities. This is significant in light of the escalation in the number of injured people and the decrease in healthcare capabilities. We pointed out in a previous position paper that many injured people were subjected to amputation due to the Occupation’s bombing of civilian gatherings with unknown weapons, which increases the number of amputation injuries, which greatly increases the rate of disability.

In light of the decrease in health capabilities, the ability of persons with disabilities to obtain medicine, health care, and rehabilitation services is almost non-existent, given that many hospitals and health centers are out of service as a result of the scarcity of medical supplies, the direct Israeli bombing of these centers, or their

³⁶ “Israeli Restrictions Harm Persons with Disabilities”, Human Rights Watch (3 December 2020). Website: <https://cutt.us/FOT9E>.

³⁷ An interview with a woman with disability, date of interview: 29 November 2023.

deliberate removal from service, just like what happened to Al-Shifa Medical Complex. A woman with disability in Gaza said “Some persons with disabilities lost their assistive devices and medications that they use daily.³⁸” Another woman adds “*I have three children with disabilities, a girl with a hearing and speech disability, a young man with a splint from the 2021 war, he has to take a specific medicine and I looked for it everywhere in Dair AlBalah but could not find it, and I did not even have any money, and my second son has hemiplegia, and he needs people to help him to sit or get up, he cannot sleep on the floor. At home, he used to sleep in his bed, but our house was bombed, I don’t even know where I will go after this war is over*”³⁹. Initial monitoring data indicates that there is a significant scarcity of medicines in the Strip’s pharmacies and a significant increase in their prices if available. The staff of the Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities reported that they have not been contacted by any governmental or non-governmental entities to provide assistance. Thareef Al-Ghurra, Head of the Disabilities Representative Persons Network in the Gaza Strip, adds: “No one contacted me, and the size of the scene is enormous. The Red Cross is ineffective, and neither is the UNRWA.”⁴⁰

Persons with disabilities, like others, suffer from extreme difficulties in accessing food in general and within shelters in particular. However, they are exposed to double risks that threaten their lives due to their regular need for many needs, requirements, and medicines related to their disability. The collapse in the health system due to the war, the limited food supplies and their types, and the difficulty of the movement of persons with disabilities due to the lack of assistive devices and inclusion components, constitute a major threat to their lives, especially if they lose family members who can support them. A member of the family of the child Jana Hani Qadeeh, announced her death from starvation via social media last Saturday, 12/9/2023. Jana is one of the girls with a complex disability, “cerebral palsy,” and she needs special food. She has been displaced in a school in Abasan, which has been under siege since many days. Jana was martyred as a result of not receiving the necessary food and the lack of oxygen.⁴¹

According to the initial monitoring data, accessing water and food has become very difficult. Persons with disabilities in general, and those with visual disability in particular, face doubled difficulties when standing in line to get water and food in shelters. Often there is a stampede, and therefore they are unable to reach aid.

³⁸ An interview with a woman with disability displaced in a shelter home in the Gaza Strip, date of interview: 29 November 2023.

³⁹ An interview with a woman with disability, date of interview: 27 November 2023.

⁴⁰ An interview with Thareef AlGhurra, Head of the Disabilities Representative Persons Network in Gaza, conducted on 5 December 2023.

⁴¹ “Jana Qadeeh Died from Starvation and Was Buried in a School... The Children of Gaza are Starving” *Aljazeera* (9 December 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/vpls1>

The aid provided in shelter schools is a loaf of bread a day, a can of meat for each person, or a can of tuna for two people⁴². A woman with disability adds: “The humanitarian situation in which displaced people live is very bad and is even worse for persons with disabilities. As for food, in some places, it is distributed equally, regardless of the numbers and needs of breastfeeding women and diabetics. In some places, food is distributed by youth initiatives. Some families received food parcels and purchase vouchers, and others were not so lucky in getting any”.⁴³

Thareef ALGhurra, the Head of the Disabilities Representative Persons Network in Gaza, indicates that persons with disabilities can hardly access food: *“They are unable to access water and food, persons with disabilities can hardly live on what is available in the market like other residents. As for medicine, unfortunately, all clinics for persons with disabilities have been closed, and medical centers have been closed. Thus, persons with disabilities are not able to get their medical needs and rehabilitation services anymore. As for water, there isn’t any type of drinking water, and persons with disabilities use and drink salty water, if available of course, and it is rarely available. Therefore, there is virtually no access to food, water, or medicine, and in reality, we are unable to provide food, water, or medicine because the aggression is greater than all of us. The aggression cannot be described. Therefore, everyone is helpless in the face of the horror of the crime, and we cannot provide anything for persons with disabilities.”*⁴⁴

Further, Mohamed AlArabi confirmed the difficulties that persons with disabilities face in accessing food, water and medicine: *“This means that access for persons with disabilities to food and water in light of the current situation is very difficult, and the food supplies that reach the Strip are very few when compared to the needs. In addition, the shelter centers in which persons with disabilities are located are not accessible, and when recording the data of persons with disabilities, their having a disability is not recorded so that this person has priority, whether in medicine or food. Also, the medicines distributed in schools are simple medicines, that is, they are painkillers such as Acamol and others, and persons with disabilities need certain types of medicines regularly and some health supplies such as gauze and iodine, which are not available even in hospitals. Additionally, persons with disabilities cannot handle not going to the bathroom for long periods, and workers in international organizations do not take these matters into consideration.”*⁴⁵

⁴² An interview with a woman with disability who is displaced in a school, date of interview: 29 November 2023.

⁴³ An interview with a woman with disability who is displaced in a school, date of interview: 29 November 2023.

⁴⁴ An interview with Thareef ALGhurra, Head of the Disabilities Representative Persons Network in Gaza, conducted on 7 December 2023.

⁴⁵ An interview with Mohamed AlArabi, the Coordinator of the Disabilities Representative Persons Network, conducted on 7 December 2023.

Mohamed AlArabi says that currently, the most prominent needs of persons with disabilities is related to water and medicine “*We must focus on food supplies, the conditions of people are very difficult. For example, canned foods are very important. The other important thing is tents and plastic. The other thing is related to assistive devices. There is also another need for replacement clothing, gauze, urine bags, sanitary towels for persons with disabilities, medical-grade mattresses, and beds. Many young people have ulcers and sleep on the floor. There are no beds, bedding, or blankets. These are important needs to be provided during the coming period.*”⁴⁶

Concerning health supplies and services related to women and women with disabilities, women generally suffer from a lack of medicines and health services. For example, some media interviews with medical personnel in the sector indicate that there is a noticeable increase in the rate of premature birth due to the ongoing bombing, and it was also indicated that doctors were forced to conduct emergency premature birth operations on women who were dying. Nearly two-thirds of primary health clinics were closed, which negatively affects the lives of pregnant women⁴⁷. With the severe shortage of water and cleaning supplies, women are more exposed to diseases.

The shortage of sanitary and menstrual supplies has a double impact on women with disabilities, as overcrowding in shelter centers, in addition to a shortage of water and cleaning supplies, long queues for the bathroom, and the lack of inclusion and accessibility limits the access of women with disabilities to these services. One displaced woman with a disability says: “*I could not shower during or after my menstrual period due to the limited space in the school bathroom*”⁴⁸. Another noted: “*Many women take birth control pills due to the lack of sanitary supplies.*”⁴⁹ The use of these medications increases the possibility of them developing health complications, and women with disabilities may be more vulnerable to using these medications, especially with the lack of accessibility tools and lack of health supplies. The effects of the lack of health supplies on women with disabilities increase severely, especially if they lose family members. As for women’s

⁴⁶ The previous resource.

⁴⁷ “As The War on Gaza Has Been Going on for Over a Month, Pregnant Women Face a Rapidly Worsening Catastrophe,” *United Nations Population Fund* (7 November 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/hlb7p>.

⁴⁸ An interview with a woman with disability who is displaced in a school, date of interview: 29 November 2023.

⁴⁹ An interview with a woman with disability who is displaced in a school, date of interview: 10 December 2023.

follow-up on their pregnancy, one woman with disability says: *"I wasn't unable to reach the clinic, and I was not able to obtain the necessary medicine for my pregnancy, or the vitamin supplements".*⁵⁰

As for the role of international organizations in providing food and medicine for persons with disabilities, AlGhurra confirmed that there are no international organizations in the northern regions of the Gaza Strip and that local institutions and organizations working in the field of disability have been targeted and are out of service. He indicated that they tried to communicate with international organizations to secure some needs and requirements related to disability, but they did not respond: *"We, as disability organizations, tried to communicate with the Red Cross in an attempt to request their intervention, whether to rescue persons with disabilities or facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to the south of the Gaza Strip. They apologized for that and said that this was not their role and that the issue was in the hands of the Occupation and that it was out of their control and they could not offer any other solution."*

During the period preceding the war, organizations have developed an emergency plan related to persons with disabilities. AlGhurra said that this plan was prepared as a response plan, in partnership with the government and international organizations, but due to the volume of crimes committed, this plan was not implemented⁵¹. Al-Arabi also confirmed that they, as institutions working in the field of disability, tried to communicate with the Ministry of Social Development and aid organizations in the Gaza Strip, but they did not have anything related to the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities. He also pointed out that even if these requirements were available in the market, persons with disabilities would not be able to buy them, in the absence of any kind of direct cash assistance.

The daily lives of civilians in the Gaza Strip have become a struggle for life and survival, the Occupation's bombing targets everyone, while the attempts to provide food, water, and medicine seem to threaten the lives of civilians under the ongoing bombing. Therefore, persons with disabilities suffer from extremely complex and difficult conditions during their attempts to adapt to the inaccessible places they are currently in, and without the ability to access their humanitarian needs and requirements. The health conditions of persons with disabilities are becoming more dangerous as they are cut off from the necessary medications and treatments for some of them, and this becomes a direct threat to their lives as a result of the absence of proper nutrition, safe drinking water, and life-saving medications.

⁵⁰ An interview with a woman with disability who is displaced in a school, date of interview: 10 December 2023.

⁵¹ Thareef AlGhurra, dated 7 December 2023.

In light of the difficult conditions that persons with disabilities have lived in since the beginning of the latest aggression against the Gaza Strip, it is important to urgently strengthen international efforts to stop the aggression against the Gaza Strip and lift the siege in a way that ensures the continued entry of humanitarian aid, such as food, water, medicine, health supplies, and fuel, into the Gaza Strip in all its governorates, and to provide the requirements of persons with disabilities in all fields, in addition to working to mobilize efforts for urgent reconstruction as soon as the war of ethnic cleansing waged by the Occupation against the Gaza Strip stops.

All the aforementioned requires the intervention of all concerned parties to ensure the continuity of providing medical services and basic food and water supplies for all citizens in the Strip during this period, which can be done by opening the Rafah Crossing Border to expedite the process of bringing in aid without any delay, and in amounts that are enough for their humanitarian needs, in addition to providing safe passages for civilians, especially persons with disabilities , and working to provide compatible shelters and provide all the elements of inclusion, in addition to giving the authorities supervising the shelter centers, specifically the UNRWA, special attention to persons with disabilities . There is also a need for distributing food aid on a regular and sufficient basis, and in a manner that is appropriate with the needs of individuals displaced in shelter centers.