

Gaza becomes “death zone” as UN suspends humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands in north

Jordan Shilton
21 February 2024

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced Tuesday the suspension of all humanitarian aid to the northern parts of the Gaza Strip. The estimated 400,000 people still languishing in Gaza City and the surrounding areas have barely received any aid for months due to Israel’s blockade. Reports have surfaced of families surviving on animal feed.

Deliveries only resumed Sunday after a three-week pause prompted by the bombing of an UNRWA truck by Israel. The WFP statement announcing the latest suspension observed, “The plan was to send 10 trucks of food for seven straight days, to help stem the tide of hunger and desperation and to begin building trust in communities that there would be enough food for all.

“On Sunday, as WFP started the route towards Gaza City, the convoy was surrounded by crowds of hungry people close to the Wadi Gaza checkpoint. First fending off multiple attempts by people trying to climb aboard our trucks, then facing gunfire once we entered Gaza City, our team was able to distribute a small quantity of the food along the way. On Monday, the second convoy’s journey north faced complete chaos and violence due to the collapse of civil order. Several trucks were looted between Khan Younes and Deir al Balah, and a truck driver was beaten. The remaining flour was spontaneously distributed off the trucks in Gaza City, amidst high tension and explosive anger.”

After predicting in December that inhabitants would face a famine by May if the situation did not radically improve, the agency reported “unprecedented levels of desperation” for residents in the north this week. A report released by the WFP and UNICEF Monday revealed that one in six children in the northern Gaza Strip under the age of two are acutely malnourished.

This horrendous situation is the deliberate outcome of Israel’s genocidal onslaught on Gaza, which has already claimed the lives of well over 30,000 people. The official death toll rose above 29,300 Wednesday, with another 7,000 people declared missing and presumed dead. Since the beginning of the bombardment last October, Israel has intentionally prevented aid from reaching Gaza, using food as a weapon of war.

In November, Giora Eiland, the former head of Israel’s National Security Council, published an article in which he advocated the use of starvation and disease to decimate the population. He wrote, “The international community warns us of a humanitarian disaster in Gaza and of severe epidemics. We must not shy away from this, as difficult as that may be. After all, severe epidemics in the south of the Gaza Strip will bring victory closer and reduce casualties among IDF soldiers.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted at the time, this policy is akin to the strategy of the Nazis during World War II towards the Jews, who were left to rot in the ghettos, where many died of starvation and disease before the survivors were shipped to concentration camps.

While the levels of hunger and disease in the north are especially extreme, the situation facing Gaza’s entire population is horrific. World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described Gaza Wednesday as a “death zone.” He added, “The health and humanitarian situation in Gaza is inhumane and continues to deteriorate.”

UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese referred

to a “total collapse of civil order” across the enclave. Noting the WFP’s decision to suspend aid to the north, she added, “Imagine as a parent having to fight to get food for your child who is dying of hunger. ... Shame on all of us for allowing this betrayal of humanity.”

Al-Jazeera spoke to a mother living in the playground of an UNRWA school in the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza who is being forced to feed her eight-person family on fried pancakes made from ground animal feed. She said, “This food is insatiable. My little one wakes up at night screaming from hunger because only bread fills the children’s stomachs.

“Today I found this corn flour, and maybe I won’t find it tomorrow ... the situation is getting worse day by day, our situation is very miserable.”

At the al-Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, a joint mission by the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), WHO and Palestinian Red Crescent uncovered “appalling conditions” while evacuating the most seriously injured patients after a weeks-long siege by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). OCHA official Jonathan Whittall remarked, “There are 150 patients in one of these buildings. They have no food and water, no electricity. There’s very few doctors and nurses that are remaining inside this hospital...

“There are dead bodies in the corridors. Patients are in a desperate situation. This has become a place of death, not a place of healing.”

Amid this misery, Israel’s daily bombardments continue. A strike on a family home in Rafah Tuesday night killed a human rights lawyer with the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Nour Naser abu al-Nour, and seven members of her family. The organisation said she played a role in documenting human rights abuses and fighting injustice. Strikes on the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City and Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip killed at least 12 people Wednesday, including a journalist and his wife.

The catastrophe confronting the Palestinians in Gaza continues to worsen due to the unrestrained support extended to Israel by US imperialism and its European allies. On Tuesday, as the reports of mass starvation were pouring out of Gaza, Washington used its veto in the UN Security Council to block a resolution calling for a ceasefire. The vaguely worded text proposed by the US instead of the original text submitted by Algeria called for a ceasefire “as soon as is practicable,” i.e., at

the discretion of Israel’s far-right government that has repeatedly declared its intent to conduct a genocide against the Palestinians.

War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz reiterated Wednesday Israel’s readiness to launch an all-out offensive on Rafah during Ramadan. At least 1.4 million people are crammed into the city, which was home to just 280,000 prior to Israel’s bombardment. A ground offensive would force the Palestinians from their last refuge in Gaza, realising Israel’s plan to ethnically cleanse the enclave in order to establish Jewish settlements and direct security control.

The imperialist powers’ endorsement of this savagery is linked to their pursuit of a region-wide war targeting Iran and its allies. The Middle East is rapidly emerging as one front in the imperialist powers’ redivision of the world, which is being driven by the intractable contradictions of the capitalist profit system. Further US air strikes against the Houthis in Yemen were reported Wednesday, while Israel carried out a strike on Damascus that was allegedly aimed at a senior Hezbollah official. Washington is determined at all costs to consolidate its dominance over the energy-rich Middle East against its rivals, above all, China and Russia even at the cost of a regional bloodbath.

The only social force capable of bringing an end to the misery of Gaza’s population and stopping the descent of the Middle East into war is the international working class. Mobilising the mass opposition to Israel’s genocide that has been expressed by millions of people in demonstrations around the world over recent months, workers must fight to halt all military supplies and production destined for Israel. The urgent task is the building of an international anti-war movement to stop the genocide and the imperialists’ escalation of a third world war by advancing a socialist programme to put an end to crisis-ridden capitalism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact