United Nations says Israel using “starvation as a method of war”

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Israel’s withholding of food from the population of Gaza may be a deliberate effort to starve the population, the United Nations’ highest human rights official said Tuesday.

In a statement, Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that “The extent of Israel’s continued restrictions on the entry of aid into Gaza, together with the manner in which it continues to conduct hostilities, may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which is a war crime.”

Türk’s comments come as the rate of starvation and malnutrition surges throughout Gaza’s imprisoned population of over 2 million.

According to Türk, “The situation of hunger, starvation and famine is a result of Israel’s extensive restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid and commercial goods, displacement of most of the population, as well as the destruction of crucial civilian infrastructure.”

Asked to reply Tuesday to Türk’s statements that Israel may be using starvation as a “weapon of war,” US Department of State spokesman Vedant Patel replied, “That is not something that we have observed or witnessed.”

This absurd denial is contradicted by the reality of mass starvation imposed on the population of Gaza.

A separate report published Tuesday by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) partnership, the official global body designating starvation, found that “famine is imminent,” with a “major acceleration of deaths and malnutrition.”

The IPC assessment notes that 1.1 million people are expected to face catastrophic levels of hunger and risk famine in Gaza, the highest number of people in that category ever recorded since the beginning of the current classification system.

“This is the highest number of people facing catastrophic hunger ever recorded by the Integrated Food Security Classification system—anywhere, anytime,” U.N. Secretary General António Guterres said in a news briefing Monday.

Before Israel’s assault on Gaza, less than 1 percent of children in Gaza under five were acutely malnourished. But that figure has surged to between 12.4 and 16.5 percent.

The report concluded,“Famine is imminent in the northern governorates and projected to occur anytime between mid-March and May 2024.”

The report found that every single person in the Gaza Strip lives with some level of food insecurity. The report projected that while the entirety of the Gaza Strip is currently in the “emergency” phase of food insecurity, the entirety of Northern Gaza will be in famine within a matter of months.

Israel is imposing famine on the population of Gaza in a multitude of ways. The most visible is through the imposition of a blockade that denies humanitarian organizations the ability to provide food to starving people.

In a statement Tuesday, the office of the United Nations Secretary-General said that Israel had let in less than half of the humanitarian missions that the UN had planned to send to Gaza.

“During the first two weeks of March, less than half of planned humanitarian aid missions to northern Gaza were facilitated by the Israeli authorities—that’s 11 out of 24 missions,” the statement said. “The rest were either denied or postponed. Dispatching aid to the north of Gaza requires day-to-day approvals from Israeli authorities.”

The ongoing blockade is accompanied by the

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systematic and deliberate killing of aid workers. On Thursday, the Israeli military carried out the latest in its repeated attacks on the Kuwait Roundabout, where the remaining population of Gaza City goes to receive food aid.

Al Jazeera reported that 23 aid workers were killed in the latest strike, which local officials said was a targeted attack on food distribution workers.

This attack on food distribution workers was accompanied by a full-scale assault on Gaza's al-Shifa Hospital, which the Israeli military said left dozens of people killed.

But even this bloodbath is just a downpayment on what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has in store with the planned invasion of Rafah.

On Tuesday, Netanyahu said he made it "supremely clear" to US President Joe Biden in a telephone conversation that "we are determined to complete the elimination of these battalions in Rafah, and there's no way to do that except by going in on the ground."

Despite its rhetorical criticisms of Netanyahu's plans to invade Rafah, where over one million people are sheltering, the Biden administration has made clear that it will continue to supply weapons and funding to Israel no matter what it does.

In a press briefing Monday, White House national security advisor Jake Sullivan said that "The president emphasized his bone-deep commitment to ensuring the long-term security of Israel." Sullivan added, "Israel has a right to go after Hamas, the perpetrators of the worst massacre of the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Israel has made significant progress against Hamas."

Earlier this month, Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of former President Donald Trump and one of his key advisors on Middle East issues, endorsed the prospect of expelling the population of Gaza from Palestine.

In an appearance at Harvard University, Kushner said it would be "possible" to get the population of Gaza "into Egypt…with the right diplomacy." He also raised the prospect of displacing the population of Gaza into the Negev Desert in Israel, saying "the thing that I would try to do if I was Israel right now is I would just bulldoze something in the Negev. I would try to move people in there. I know that won't be the popular thing to do, but I think that's a better option to do so you can go in and finish the job."

"Gaza's waterfront property could be very valuable," Kushner said.

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