

World Health Organization warns of “looming famine” in Gaza

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Amid a systematic US-Israeli campaign to deliberately starve the 2.2 million residents of Gaza, the entire population is on the brink of famine.

“Famine is ever closer to becoming a reality in northern Gaza,” warned the World Health Organization on Wednesday. “People are starving and getting sick. The limited food available is insufficient to keep adults and children healthy,” the organization said in a social media post on Tuesday.

To date, 27 Palestinians have died of acute malnutrition in Gaza, 23 of them children. On Monday, 12 Palestinians drowned while desperately trying to reach food that had been airdropped into the sea, according to Gaza’s government media office.

Last week, the official UN-backed global body designating starvation found that “famine is imminent” in Gaza, leading to “major acceleration of deaths and malnutrition.”

The report found that 1.1 million people in Gaza are expected to face catastrophic levels of hunger and risk famine, 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,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a news briefing.

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

Last week, Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, the UN Agency for Palestine

Refugees, said, “Siege, hunger and diseases will soon become the main killers in Gaza.”

Israel has deliberately restricted food, fuel and electricity going into Gaza in a deliberate effort to starve the population, as part of its genocidal onslaught against the besieged enclave.

The United States is serving as the key enabler of the starvation of the population of Gaza. Over the weekend, US President Joe Biden signed a spending package that cuts off funding for UNRWA, the main provider of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians which serves as “the backbone of all humanitarian responses in Gaza,” according to UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

Despite recent public criticism of the Netanyahu government by the Biden administration, behind the scenes the US is doubling down on its support for the genocide.

Over the weekend, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, notorious for describing Palestinians as “human animals,” visited Washington D.C. to meet with leading US officials, including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, to plan Israel’s assault on Rafah.

Austin began the meeting by declaring, “President Biden has been clear: Israel has a right to defend itself like any other state. So, we’re working with Israel to ensure that an outrage like October 7 can never happen again.”

In the official readout of the meeting between Gallant and Austin, a Defense Department official was quoted as saying, “We believe that the concepts that we are sharing and the additional ideas we’re developing based on those concepts have the potential to achieve the dual objectives of protecting the civilians who are currently in Rafah and defeating the Hamas battalions that are in Rafah.”

By declaring that “defeating the Hamas battalions

that are in Rafah" is an objective of the US government, the Biden administration is all but signing off on the planned assault.

On Wednesday, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article headlined, "Behind closed doors, the US pushes to shape, not stop, the Rafah operation." It explained that the purpose of the weekend talks between Gallant and US officials was to sort out a means by which the US could give its stamp of approval to the planned onslaught on Rafah.

The *Journal* wrote, "In two days of meetings between the Israeli defense chief and senior officials in the White House and Pentagon, discussions on Israel's planned military operation in southern Gaza focused not on how to stop it, but on how to protect civilians during its rollout."

It reported that Israel was planning to launch its assault on Rafah within the next two weeks.

On Wednesday, the White House confirmed that the Netanyahu government had asked to hold further talks on the planned assault on Rafah with the US. "The Prime Minister's Office has agreed to reschedule the meeting dedicated to Rafah so we're now working with them to set a convenient date," White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said.

In anticipation of its planned assault on Rafah, Israel is carrying out daily and nightly bombardments of the city where over a million displaced people are sheltering. On Tuesday, the United Nations reported that "18 Palestinians, including at least nine children and five women, were reportedly killed, and tens of others were injured when a house sheltering IDPs in Musabeh area, in northern Rafah, was hit."

On Wednesday, the Euro-Med Monitor reported that Israeli forces have been targeting and shooting children during its weeklong siege of Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza. "In a week, Israeli army executes 13 children in and near Al-Shifa Hospital," the human rights monitor titled its report.

The report included testimony by Palestinian Islam Ali Salouha, who reported that Israeli troops forced her family to flee from the house where they were sheltering, killing two of her sons, Ali, nine years old, and Saeed Muhammad Sheikha, six years old, by targeting them with gunfire.

The Euro-Med Monitor reported, "Salouha emphasized that his son Ali was killed in a field

execution crime after he had been deprived of food for days because of the Israeli siege. He also pointed out that the area around Al-Shifa Medical Complex had become a hotspot for field executions and murders, with the bodies of the victims discovered in the streets serving as evidence."

These reports only underscore the findings of Francesca Albanese, the United Nations Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Palestine, who earlier this week issued a report saying there is evidence to support the claim that Israel's actions in Gaza fit the criteria for genocide.

Albanese's report concludes that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating Israel's commission of genocide is met."



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