

Warning “famine is setting in,” International Court of Justice orders “unhindered provision” of humanitarian aid to Gaza

Jordan Shilton
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The International Court of Justice issued a ruling Thursday ordering Israel to provide urgently needed humanitarian aid to Gaza’s desperate 2.3 million inhabitants. The ruling, which starkly declares that “famine is setting in” for the Palestinians, amounts to a damning indictment of Israel’s far-right Netanyahu government and its imperialist backers in Washington and Europe.

The ICJ first ordered Israel to adopt interim measures in January after South Africa brought a complaint alleging the commission of genocide in Gaza. South Africa’s presentation to the court was a devastating exposure of the genocide, demonstrating with reference to statements by senior Israeli government officials, and the brutality of military operations in Gaza, the Zionist regime’s intent to eliminate the Palestinians. Israel was ordered, among other things, to increase aid deliveries and do more to reduce civilian casualties within a month.

Thursday’s ruling declared, “The catastrophic living conditions of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have deteriorated further, in particular in view of the prolonged and widespread deprivation of food and other basic necessities to which the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been subjected. Palestinians in Gaza are no longer facing only a risk of famine, as noted in the order of 26 January 2024, but that famine is setting in.”

The ICJ also warned Israel to ensure that the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) “does not commit acts” in violation of the Genocide Convention, “including by preventing, through any action, the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance.”

Given the undeniable fact that Israel has systematically blocked aid deliveries into Gaza, and massacred Palestinians trying to access food from the few shipments that have made it through, the Court’s statement implicitly accuses Israel of committing genocidal actions. Earlier Thursday, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) noted that “the clock is ticking fast towards

famine” and complained about the inability of its aid shipments to reach northern Gaza.

Responding to the court ruling, South Africa’s Presidency issued a statement declaring, “The fact that Palestinian deaths are not solely caused by bombardment and ground attacks, but also by disease and starvation, indicates a need to protect the group’s right to exist.

“The most effective way to uphold this right is through prevention. The court’s actions include specific responsibilities to prevent genocide.”

At least 27 children have died due to malnutrition, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. A five-year-old boy became the latest reported victim Thursday at Kamal Adwan hospital in northern Gaza, where medical staff report a steady stream of malnourished patients. Describing a malnourished infant in his care, a nurse at the facility told Al Jazeera, “You can tell that her age doesn’t match her weight. She’s two months old and yet she’s only two kilos [about 4.5 pounds] and a bit. We got used to receiving such cases in large numbers every day. They often result in death.”

Israel is not only denying food, water, electricity and medical supplies to the Palestinians, but also continuing to deliberately target hospitals across the enclave. The World Health Organisation reported Thursday that just 10 out of 36 hospitals are partially functioning. The latest hospital to cease operating was the al-Amal hospital in Khan Younis, which IDF soldiers surrounded on Tuesday before ordering everyone to leave. The al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, the largest in Gaza, has been under a 10-day siege by the IDF, which has killed at least 200 people during the bloody operation. Among the latest casualties was the journalist Muhammad Abu Sakhil, who was targeted by the IDF.

Conditions at those hospitals still functioning are miserable. According to Al Jazeera, al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital in Deir el-Ballah has 800 patients but only 160 beds.

The hellish nightmare facing Gaza’s population is the

result of the unreserved support given by US imperialism and its European allies to Israel's genocide. The US, Germany, Britain and France have supplied the bombs and military equipment with which the IDF has transformed Gaza into a killing zone. Amid an eruption of global outrage over the genocide, these same governments have viciously cracked down on all opposition to Israel's war crimes, smearing protesters as "antisemites" and criminalising demonstrations outright.

The imperialist powers' complicity in the genocide has been underscored once again by Monday's adoption of a "non-binding" resolution by the UN Security Council calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, and the events that followed. Bluntly admitting that Washington's decision to abstain in the vote so that the resolution could pass was nothing more than a public relations stunt to assuage popular anger, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby stated that the resolution would have "no impact at all" on Israel's military operations.

This fact has even been acknowledged by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who initially showed his displeasure at Washington's abstention by canceling a meeting of Israeli officials with the Biden administration to plot the invasion of Rafah. On Thursday, Netanyahu's office confirmed it had reversed course and that the meeting was now being rescheduled.

Israel has continued to bombard Rafah following the UN resolution without interruption. Citing a local resident, Reuters reported that four houses were struck during the night from Tuesday to Wednesday. On Thursday, at least 12 Palestinians were killed when another house was hit.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) international president Christos Christou told AFP, "We haven't seen any change after this resolution on the ground. We haven't seen any impact in...people's lives there every day."

Meanwhile, Israel's channel 12 reported late Wednesday that preparations for assaulting Rafah continue unabated. The army is planning to "deal with tunnels, attack command rooms, and houses where Hamas leaders are hiding." Taking note of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant's visit to Washington, where he engaged in two days of talks with Biden administration officials, Channel 12 continued, "Defense Minister Galant is coordinating the military operation in Rafah with his counterparts in Washington."

The report noted that Netanyahu has ordered the purchase of 40,000 tents from China ostensibly as part of "dealing with the civilian population residing in Rafah." To describe this as a drop in the bucket under conditions in which over 1.5 million people are crammed into the enclave's southernmost city would be generous.

During a visit of US congresspeople to Israel Thursday,

President Isaac Herzog praised the "unbreakable bond" between the US and Israel. "We share the same objective of eliminating terror," he asserted.

The impending assault on Rafah, backed to the hilt by the imperialist powers, threatens to take Israel's genocide against the Palestinians to a new and even bloodier level. Washington supports intensifying the mass slaughter because it views Israel's "final solution" of the Palestinian question as a key part of its preparations for a region-wide war targeting Iran. Washington hopes through such a conflict to consolidate its dominance over the energy-rich and strategically important Middle East. The immediate danger of an expansion of the conflict was underlined Thursday when the IDF announced a "surprise" exercise including all of its units in the north to prepare for a potential war in Lebanon.

A further deepening of the calamity facing Gaza's population can be prevented only by the independent political mobilisation of the international working class. The mass protests against the genocide involving millions of people that swept the globe over recent months demonstrates the widespread hostility to genocide and imperialist war. But these events have also demonstrated the bankruptcy of the protests' self-declared leaderships. The claim that a ceasefire and an end to the onslaught could be accomplished by applying pressure to the imperialist powers and appealing to the United Nations has been thoroughly exposed. The urgent task for workers and young people outraged by the Gaza genocide is to unify their struggle with the powerful eruption of workers' struggles in every major country over deteriorating working and living conditions in order to build an international anti-war movement led by the working class. This movement must base itself on a socialist and internationalist programme to put an end to capitalism, the source of imperialist war and genocide.



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