

Number of bodies found in Palestinian hospital mass graves rises to 310 as Israel prepares assault on Rafah

Jordan Shilton
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The number of bodies discovered in four mass graves at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza rose to at least 310 Tuesday. The horrific discovery over the past 72 hours provides further evidence of Israel's imperialist-backed genocide against the Palestinians, which is set to escalate imminently due to the looming assault on the more than 1.5 million men, women and children struggling to survive in Rafah.

Palestinian Civil Defence personnel continued Tuesday to discover bodies, including women and elderly people, buried under piles of waste. Zaina Haroun, a representative of the West Bank-based al-Haq Palestinian rights group, told *Al Jazeera* that the grisly discovery was “stark evidence of war crimes and of course the genocide which is being perpetrated against the Palestinian people in Gaza by Israel.”

Referring to the uncovering of similar mass graves several weeks ago at Shifa hospital in Gaza City, she continued, “One family member was desperate to find just a trace of his uncle; he said that he found his sandals but even if he could find a body part, an arm or a leg, that they could at least take that and bury him so they're able to sleep at night.”

The inhuman scenes from Khan Younis and Gaza City, reminiscent of the genocides of the 20th century, underscore the barbarism of the imperialist-backed Israeli regime.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fascistic government has openly declared its intention to ethnically cleanse the Gaza Strip, denounced Palestinians as “human animals,” systematically denied aid to hundreds of thousands stranded in the north of the enclave, and killed over 34,000 people during 200 days of non-stop bombardments.

With the fulsome support of US imperialism and its European allies, the Israeli regime has brushed aside the charge of genocide brought against it by South Africa at the International Court of Justice and continued its onslaught as famine takes hold in Gaza.

On Tuesday, US special envoy for humanitarian issues

David Satterfield described the threat of famine in Gaza as “very high.” Gaza's Government Media Office reported that 30 children have died so far as “a result of famine.”

In its latest situation report on Gaza, the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) noted that there has been “very little significant change” in the amount of aid entering Gaza or the approval by Israel of aid convoys to the north of Gaza over recent weeks.

Three weeks ago, after Israel's targeted killing of seven aid workers from the World Central Kitchen organisation, the Netanyahu government claimed it was prepared to open a land border crossing into northern Gaza and increase the flow of trucks into the enclave to over 300 per day. UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini reported that 310 trucks crossed into Gaza Tuesday, well short of the 500 to 600 trucks most aid organisations agree are necessary to supply adequate food and other basic necessities to Gaza's population.

The UNRWA report also noted that at least 435 attacks have been conducted by Israel on health workers or institutions since the onset of the genocide, a monthly rate that is higher than any other recent conflict. Since October 7, 180 UNRWA employees have been killed by Israel.

Israel's destruction of Gaza has displaced over 75 percent of Gaza's inhabitants, with 1.7 million people forced to flee “multiple times.” The repeated displacements have fueled the spread of infectious diseases, which have infected some 1.09 million people, or close to 50 percent of the population. According to UN human rights chief Volker Turk, a child is being killed or wounded in Gaza “every 10 minutes.”

The systematic dismantling of all civilian infrastructure by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) has created a situation in which disease and famine will soon claim more lives than the daily air strikes. Only 10 of the 36 hospitals in the enclave prior to the war are still functioning to any degree as health care facilities. Hospitals have either been turned into killing fields, as at al-Shifa or Nasser hospitals, or taken over

by the IDF. The Turkish-Palestinian Friends hospital south of Gaza City, formerly home to the only specialist cancer unit in Gaza, has been transformed by the IDF into a military base.

In a report released this week entitled “Manufacturing Famine: Israel is committing the war crime of starvation in the Gaza Strip,” B’Tselem—the Israeli Centre for Human rights in the Occupied Territories documents Israel’s culpability in the hunger crisis in the enclave, and its short- and long-term implications. Basing itself on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, the report noted that Gaza was in phase 4 during February and March, immediately below phase 5, which is famine.

During these months, 55 percent of households in the north, and 25 percent of households in the central and southern areas were already at phase 5. These figures are expected to rise to 70 percent for the north, 50 percent for central Gaza, and 45 percent for the south, which would put Gaza as a whole in a famine. The report noted that Samantha Power, head of USAID, became the first US official to publicly admit that famine has already taken hold in northern Gaza at a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in early April.

Khamis al-A’araj, a 52-year-old resident of the Falujah neighbourhood of the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza, described the horrendous living conditions in the report:

There is no food or water here. In fact, there’s nothing here. You can’t get food in the market, either—no canned food, flour or rice. There isn’t even barley left. Sometimes we manage to find khubeiza [a flowering, edible plant] growing by the roadside or in the fields and we pick it. If we manage to find some cardboard or wood to make a fire, we cook it in water and eat it for a day or two and at least manage to sleep better at night. We used to eat khubeiza maybe once a year, and now it’s almost our only source of food. In the last four days, we didn’t sleep at all because we’re so hungry. We didn’t eat a single thing. We couldn’t get any food. All I do is look for food, all the time, and I can’t stop thinking about it at night, either. Everyone here in the camp is pale with hunger and can barely stand on their feet.

Strengthened by the bipartisan vote in the US House on Saturday and Senate on Tuesday to provide \$26 billion in additional aid for its genocidal onslaught, Israel’s far-right government is preparing to turn Rafah, like the north and

Khan Younis before it, into rubble.

The Associated Press published Tuesday satellite images showing the construction of a tent city to the west of Khan Younis, a sign of preparations to displace Rafah’s population. The IDF told AP that it was not involved in establishing the tent compound. Israeli daily *Haaretz* reported that the Egyptian government was constructing the site in order to prevent Palestinians from crossing the border into the Sinai.

Whatever the case may be, a tent compound for over 1.5 million people would in effect be a massive concentration camp for more than half of Gaza’s population and create the conditions for the further spread of disease.

As Fabrizio Carboni, Middle East regional director for the International Committee of the Red Cross, told AFP, humanitarian workers have no knowledge of a plan to evacuate Rafah’s population, and such a plan would be impossible to implement. “When we see the level of destruction in the middle area [of Gaza] and in the north, it’s not clear to us where people will be moved to ... where they can have decent shelter and essential services,” he said. “So today, with the information we have and from where we stand, we don’t see this [massive evacuation] as possible.”

The normalisation of the IDF’s barbarism in Gaza has been fully endorsed by Washington, which sees the genocide as a key component of its escalation of a region-wide war aimed at Iran. This conflict, through which American imperialism aims to consolidate its hegemony over the energy-rich Middle East, is one front in a rapidly developing third world war between the major powers for a redivision of the world.

Putting a stop to the Gaza genocide and imperialist war demands the building of an international anti-war movement led by the working class. Under conditions in which the imperialist powers are cracking down on all forms of opposition to war and genocide with extreme ruthlessness, workers must respond in every country by mobilizing politically on the basis of a socialist and internationalist programme to put an end to the capitalist profit system, which is reviving all the horrors of the 20th century.



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