

War on Gaza: Hunger ‘Worse Than Bombings’ for Starving Palestinians

Food is scarce, spoilt and often non-existent in besieged enclave, leaving people dizzy and weak

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Ali, in northern Gaza, goes out every day, in the midst of persistent [Israeli](#) bombs and shelling, looking for food for his family.

“My family, the kids, all of them wait for me to come and say ‘there is food’ or ‘I brought vegetables’,” the [Palestinian](#) man tells Middle East Eye.

But most days, he says, he comes back empty-handed and despondent.

“We stopped talking about ‘When will the war be over?’ and started talking about ‘When will the food come in?’” he added.

Ali and all Gaza residents MEE spoke to about the worsening starvation crisis, caused by the ongoing Israeli siege blocking the delivery of basic life-saving food and medical items, preferred not to use their real names.

Rania, in Gaza City, also goes to the market daily in search for food. What she finds is either unaffordable or extremely limited in range.

“There are no vegetables, fruits or milk in the markets. Nothing that has any nutritional value,” she tells MEE.

Rania says she received a food basket from the World Food Programme (WFP) over a month ago, containing halva, beans, hummus, peas and cold cuts. She's still holding on to those items now.

"I've been rationing them because if I run out I will have nothing to eat," she says. "I feel dizzy and weak. My face is pale and I've lost a lot of weight."

Rania's and Ali's experiences are similar to those of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, particularly in the north.

For over eight months, the Israeli military has imposed a tight siege on the Gaza Strip, severely limiting the flow of life-saving essential food and medical items.

The siege has been even tighter on northern Gaza, an area Israel attempted to empty of its more than one million residents at the start of the war in October.

Along with the relentless bombardments and deliberate targeting of hospitals, and as part of a policy that amounts to collective punishment of civilians, the Israeli military has used starvation of the population as a weapon of war, according to [independent UN investigators](#).

The hunger crisis peaked in March, with dozens of children dying of malnutrition and residents being forced to [eat grass](#) as Israeli forces repeatedly [killed aid-seeking people](#).

Under mounting international pressure, Israel "[slightly](#)" improved food access in some areas after its forces [killed several foreign aid workers](#) and a UN-backed report warned [famine was imminent](#).

However, residents say Israeli authorities are now severely restricting life-saving food deliveries again, bringing back the extreme conditions experienced in March, leading to the death of at least four children from malnutrition just last week.

Looming Famine

The UN's hunger monitoring system, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), released another report on Tuesday showing that a "high risk of [famine](#) persists across the whole Gaza Strip".

The report said more than 20 percent of the Palestinian enclave's population, over 495,000, are now facing "catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity" involving "an extreme lack of food, starvation, and exhaustion".

Almost everyone else faces "high levels of acute food insecurity" or worse.

The IPC found that while aid deliveries to northern Gaza increased in March and April, and found their way to the south too, the situation had deteriorated in recent weeks.

Israel's ground invasion on Rafah, in southern Gaza, including its seizure of the Rafah crossing, have choked off the few routes into the enclave for humanitarian aid trucks.

The report found that over half of households in Gaza reported that they often have no food to eat in the house, and over 20 percent go entire days and nights without eating.

“The humanitarian space in the Gaza Strip continues to shrink and the ability to safely deliver assistance to populations is dwindling,” the report said.

“The recent trajectory is negative and highly unstable.”

‘Hunger Is Worse Than Bombings’

For Ali, there are no words to describe the hunger that people are enduring in Gaza.

“It is worse than all of the bombing and the noise and the horror we live through, and it is even worse than the famine that we’ve lived through the first time,” he said, referring to the March starvation crises.

Ali explains that at the beginning of the war, when people in northern Gaza were forcibly ejected by Israeli authorities to the south, those who remained were left in conditions akin to famine due to a complete blockade on food and resources.

“But some people had stored some food or legumes from before. Also, then, the atmosphere and temperature would help grow some herbs or plants which we would use as alternatives to food.”

Now, he says, with soaring temperatures in Gaza, it has become increasingly difficult to store food.

Some canned foods that have made it to northern Gaza via aid trucks are inedible. Exposure to the sun during the journey has meant much of the stock is spoilt before it reaches starving Palestinians.

“We have witnessed in Gaza City more than one case of poisoning due to the spoilage of this canned food,” says Ali.

According to the Gaza-based government media office, there have been many cases of food poisoning from eating expired canned food in recent days, especially among children.

Many Palestinians in Gaza are now attempting to plant food in their homes to circumvent their hunger. They attempt to plant things that might grow quickly, such as zucchinis, cucumbers and tomatoes.

But plants require water – something that is also in immensely short supply in Gaza.

Before Israel’s war on Gaza began on 7 October, 96 per cent of the enclave’s water was already unfit for human consumption due to 17 years of Israeli blockade.

Now the situation is worse, with water, sanitation and hygiene systems [entirely defunct](#), according to a UN report last week on the environmental impact of Israel’s war.

“We don’t know how much more can we endure of this,” says Ali.

“Every day we fall apart and break down. Every day is worse than the day before it.”

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