

Statement by International Economists on Israel's Weaponization of Aid and Starvation

We take note of the letter from 23 eminent economist colleagues to the Prime Minister and Knesset of the State of Israel, which acknowledges Israel's perpetuation of famine and displacement, notes "the spreading starvation in Gaza" and calls "for an immediate halt to any policy that intensifies widespread starvation". This recognition of the horror that has unfolded in the Gaza Strip comes at a time when the Israeli war machine has killed at least 62 thousand Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, wounded, maimed and orphaned over 166,000 others, and destroyed health, education, and all livable infrastructures. In the past weeks over 270 Palestinians have died of starvation, including almost a hundred children. More than 7,000 children under the age of five were put on recovery programs for acute malnutrition at clinics run by Unicef in Gaza in just two weeks last month. Over a thousand have been shot dead in US-Israeli so-called humanitarian zones trying to access meagre food being allowed into Gaza Strip. The past 22 months have been an historical juncture in which previous notions of international law, human rights, and international security have lost meaning, resonance and effect.

In this broader context, we feel that a letter addressed to the Israeli Prime Minister in good faith, hoping it will sway him away from the warpath, is akin to asking the arsonist to help put out the fire. It is now urgent and essential to call on the international community and the US Government to hold the Israeli government accountable for these two years of unimaginable destruction of human life, communities and futures. We cannot ignore the Israeli government's direct responsibility for the near-total devastation of living conditions in the Gaza Strip and its threats to complete the ethnic cleansing already underway in Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Without this recognition, a call to end starvation in Gaza risks shielding Israel from accountability and entrenching impunity for war crimes that will leave comprehensive devastation for decades to come.

Weaponizing Starvation and Aid is Only Part of the Picture

The current conditions of starvation in Gaza Strip are not a passing, unintended outcome, but rather the result of clear Israeli policy planning, which have been openly communicated to any who cared to listen. Palestinian, Israeli and international scholars increasingly agree that Israel's defiance of international law, including the 4th Geneva Convention, and the Hague Convention (1907), and its actions over the past two years, amount to genocide (even if yet to be judged at the ICJ). Calling out the Israeli government is therefore a moral and professional responsibility. As economists from across the world, we address ourselves to colleagues everywhere and to international public opinion, rather than to the Israeli State, which has openly claimed its intent to conduct mass erasure and destruction and acts it out livestreamed on global television.

The Facade of a "Democracy" that Plans Ethnic Cleansing and Annihilation

We note that Israel is a democratic state only for its 7 million Jewish citizens, while some 2 million Palestinian Israeli citizens live in segregated, underprivileged ghettos. This is a State that was built

on expulsion, segregation, expropriation and favoring one national identity over another, as practiced in minor and major policies in the different regions of Palestine. There is clear evidence of discrimination against Palestinians living in Israel, as well as apartheid-style policies in the West Bank and a 17-year-long siege of the Gaza Strip, which have been called out by international human rights organizations well before 2023. The 2024 ICJ advisory opinion concluded that Israel's policies in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute systemic discrimination and segregation—breaching Article 3 of International Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (which condemns both segregation and apartheid). Therefore, calls to preserve Israel's "democratic character" (defined in terms of the current or recent pre-war status quo) are misguided and misleading, especially in the context of recent plans to segregate the West Bank even further with illegal settlement expansion.

Official statements from as early as the first weeks of October 2023 clearly point to Israel's designs: plans to annihilate the population, flatten Gaza and cut off all food water, and fuel, effectively turning Gaza into a place where no human being can live. Israeli intelligence reports suggest that 83% of the casualties are civilians, suggesting aims beyond military ones. The current mechanism for food provision, the so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), has been strongly criticized by international aid agencies for inducing displacement and creating 'killing zones.' Israeli and US powers together openly defy international laws and agreements to maintain human dignity and not weaponize aid.

An End to the War is Only the Beginning of What is Needed

The demand for restoration of food entry is therefore only a small part of the essential measures required immediately. It is crucial to recall that ruthless siege and severe restrictions on provisions have been in place in Gaza well before 2023. As early as 2006, Israeli policy aimed to "put Gaza on a diet". Food provision was monitored using a cynical calculation of calories that would reduce living standards in Gaza without causing starvation or death by hunger, by only providing the necessary 'minimum' nutrition (also known as the Red Lines of food consumption). The current GHF mechanism allots daily rations of 1,750 calories, well below the international standard of 2,100 calories per day in contexts of emergency, and in any case it does not reach those most in need. Additionally, Palestinians' right to health has been jeopardized by severe obstacles to their movement to seek aid outside the Gaza Strip because of Israel's siege policies, while the healthcare sector has been all but destroyed.

We know that appeals without action cannot avert the famine or end the suffering, but some demands must be made loud and clear. The ongoing erosion of socioeconomic conditions will not cease once a ceasefire is enacted. Experiences of food insecurity and malnutrition are expected to cause long-term decline in cognitive development for children, and various health impacts for women in reproductive ages.

An end to this war, in good faith by both sides, is urgently needed, yet it is only a first step to addressing the broader need to hold Israel accountable for policies that violate humanitarian and

international law. This is why stronger calls to action are needed that befit the context of prolonged siege, aggression, genocide, and ethnic cleansing.

Time to Act

Economists, scholars and public intellectuals around the world have a duty to acknowledge the realities of life and death in Gaza and Palestine, and the dangerous intentions of the Israeli Government, as silence is complicity. We therefore urge the international community, economic institutions, and our colleagues worldwide to:

- Demand that their Governments support an urgent end to the war that includes iron-clad commitments to end Israeli attacks and fully withdraw Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip;
- Call upon Israel and neighboring States to ensure massive and unimpeded entry to the Gaza Strip of relief supplies, decent transitional shelter and building materials;
- Denounce ethnic cleansing and colonial expansion plans in the Strip, as well as in the occupied West Bank, and call on international legal institutions to uphold their responsibilities and hold Israel accountable;
- Encourage boycotts of economic, cultural and sporting relations with Israel and divestment from an economy that funds occupation and genocide, as legal and moral actions that we can all undertake; and,
- Demand that their Governments apply the necessary sanctions, including bans on arms trade with Israel, to oblige it to cease and desist.

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