

Gaza has been failed by silence and impunity

Gaza is on the brink of famine. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a multistakeholder global initiative aimed at enhancing food security and nutrition analysis, reports that the entire population of Gaza is facing high levels of acute food insecurity. Nearly half a million people are at risk of starvation, a predicament precipitated by the Israeli Government's refusal to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip for over 11 weeks, despite destruction of most agricultural, fishery, and food systems. At the time of going to press, Israeli authorities have announced that minimal aid will now be allowed into Gaza, but the quantities released thus far are considered wholly inadequate by humanitarians. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that, since the blockade of humanitarian aid, the average caloric intake per person per day in Gaza has plummeted to 67% of the minimum required for survival, a figure expected to decline further by July 5. Yet the Israeli Government continues to escalate its military operations in Gaza.

Starvation is only one aspect of this grim reality. The attacks on health-care facilities and workers have been relentless, with Gaza having by far the most attacks on health care of any country experiencing conflict in 2024. Many hospitals have either been bombed or destroyed, particularly in the northern parts of Gaza. Specialised care is almost non-existent. The European Gaza Hospital, the only facility able to conduct cancer-related surgery, is no longer functioning. The already moribund health system has been further weakened by aid blockade and the unacceptable killing of more than 1400 health-care workers. Medical Aid for Palestinians, a UK-based charity, has stated that "Gaza's health system is being systematically dismantled, making it impossible to sustain Palestinian life in Gaza."

The Israeli Government has also targeted civilian infrastructure required for the survival of Palestinians, with 89% of the water and sanitation systems and 92% of housing destroyed or damaged. With no-go military zones now covering 70% of Gaza and the displacement of around 90% of the population to overcrowded living spaces with little access to clean water and sanitation, infectious diseases are rife. The bleak health situation on the ground after 19 months of protracted conflict in Gaza is now laid bare in a letter by

the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. Comparing annual data from 2023 and 2024, cases of acute watery diarrhoea increased 36-fold, while acute jaundice syndrome (indicative of hepatitis A) increased 384-fold. Palestinians are being forced to live in inhumane conditions where disease proliferates.

A recent webinar on the situation in Gaza reported that every day, on average, 35 children are killed in Gaza, amounting to a total of at least 18 000 children killed in this conflict. Pre-teen children are being admitted with gunshot wounds. Children are dying of chronic malnutrition and those who survive might never fully recover. Gaza is also home to the largest cohort of child amputees in modern history. Beyond physical injuries, the psychological trauma of seeing their houses being destroyed and families being killed will leave permanent scars. The legacy of such destruction will be felt for generations to come.

For too long, the Israeli Government has acted with impunity. Speaking on the same webinar about the current humanitarian crisis, Nick Maynard, a UK surgeon who has completed several tours in Gaza, said he had witnessed "many examples of clear war crimes". But despite often-repeated statements from doctors and public health experts about the atrocities committed against the civilian population in Gaza, many medical academics and health professional organisations that claim a commitment to social justice have failed to speak out. Their silence is morally unacceptable.

Indifference has also reigned at the UN Security Council, even after repeated information being presented on the "death, injury, destruction, hunger, disease, torture, other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, repeated displacement, on a large scale" in Gaza. "Will you act—decisively—to prevent genocide and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law?", Tom Fletcher, UN Relief Chief, asked the UN Security Council. A joint statement from the UK, France, and Canada, warns of concrete action if Israel does not cease its renewed military offensive and lift its restrictions on humanitarian aid. The history of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the surrounding geopolitical context are complex, but the international community must act on the indisputable evidence to protect the health of Palestinian people. ■ *The Lancet*



Omar Al-Qatari/AFP via Getty Images

For more on **food insecurity in Gaza** see <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159596/>

For the **UN Food and Agriculture Organization briefing note on the occupied Palestinian territories** see <https://openknowledge.fao.org/bitstreams/ecc2f085-c738-416e-b4e8-e82fdd9aaca/download>

For the **more on attacks on health care during conflict** see <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/epidemic-violence-violence-against-health-care-conflict-2024>

For more on the **killing of health-care workers in Gaza** see <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/1400-healthcare-workers-killed-israels-systematic-attacks-gazas-health-system>

For more on **targeting of civilian infrastructure in Gaza** see <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-14-may-2025>

For more on **child health in Gaza** see [World Report Lancet 2024; 404: 1630-31](https://www.thelancet.com/journal/S0140-6736(25)00812-8)

For the **webinar on the situation in Gaza** see <https://www.nenjp.org/calendar/2025/5/19/519-zoom-11am-gaza-what-to-do-when-your-organisation-turns-a-blind-eye-to-injustice-jvp-health>

For the **UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees letter** see [Correspondence Lancet 2025; published online May 23. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)00812-8](https://www.unrwa.org/press-releases/2024/05/23/letter-to-the-un-security-council)