

Israel accused of wielding starvation as a weapon of war against Gaza

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'For over two months, Israel has been depriving Gaza's population of food and water, a policy spurred on or endorsed by high-ranking Israeli officials and reflecting an intent to starve civilians as a method of warfare,' said Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch [Saleh Salem/Reuters]

New York, December 18 (RHC)-- An international NGO has accused Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza. New York City-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a statement issued on Monday that Israel is deliberately depriving Palestinians of access to food, water and other basic necessities. The use of hunger against the civilian population is a war crime, the NGO stated, calling for world leaders to act.

The press release cites statements from Israeli officials, interviews with survivors, reports from aid organisations, and evidence from satellite imagery to establish that Israel is engaged in the “deliberate use of policies to deprive Palestinians of the resources necessary for daily existence”.

“For over two months, Israel has been depriving Gaza’s population of food and water, a policy spurred on or endorsed by high-ranking Israeli officials and reflecting an intent to starve civilians as a method of warfare,” said Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch. “World leaders should be speaking out against this abhorrent war crime, which has devastating effects on Gaza’s population,” he added.

The statement comes as Israel faces increasing internal and external pressure regarding mounting civilian casualties resulting from its “indiscriminate” bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

Speeches and statements from Israeli officials promoting a campaign to deliberately block access to necessary resources for the Gaza population as a strategy indicate that Israel has not made these intentions secret, HRW said.

Even from the beginning of the Israeli offensive, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant infamously stated that Israel was “putting a complete siege on Gaza. ... No electricity, no food, no water, no gas – it’s all closed,” justifying the move by describing Palestinians as “beastly people”.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provides that intentionally starving civilians by “depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies”, is a war crime, HRW said in the statement.

The plight of Gaza’s 2.3 million people has become desperate amid the war, which has now persisted for over two months. Around 80 percent of Palestinians living in the enclave have been displaced by the violence, while efforts to get aid into the enclave have struggled.

Images showing the massive devastation of the Gaza Strip, of desperate Palestinians raiding food banks, humanitarian aid delivery trucks and reports of deliberate destruction of agricultural land bolster the allegations.

Alarmed humanitarian organisations have been fruitlessly calling for a ceasefire and denouncing the shocking cost of the catastrophic war which amounts to a collective punishment of the civilian population of Gaza.

The Israeli government hit back at HRW, accusing it of being an “anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli” organisation.

“Human Rights Watch ... did not condemn the attack on Israeli citizens and the massacre of October 7 and has no moral basis to talk about what’s going on in Gaza if they turn a blind eye to the suffering and the human rights of Israelis,” foreign ministry spokesman Lior Haiat told AFP.



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