

WHO expresses alarm over acute hunger at Gaza hospitals

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Palestinian children wait to collect food at a donation point in a refugee camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on December 23, 2023. (AFP)

Geneva, December 27 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of severe shortage of food and the resulting “desperation” in the Palestinian hospitals almost twelve weeks into Israel’s constant siege and bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described “unbearable” scenes of largely abandoned patients begging for food and water after a team of the UN agency and its partners visited two badly damaged hospitals in northern Gaza over the weekend. He wrote in a message on X that what they witnessed in the hospitals was “rising desperation due to acute hunger.”

“Amid dire food shortages, the search for food is forcing people into horrible states of hunger and leading some — out of desperation — to take supplies from delivery trucks.” “I can only imagine the torment that would drive people to such lengths,” the WHO chief said.

He said the weekend’s joint mission delivered aid, including fuel, to the devastated Shifa Hospital — a medical facility that has been brought to its knees by Israel’s “relentless hostilities and massive numbers of wounded people.”

Tedros warned the dire situation at Shifa was “a microcosm of the nightmare playing out across Gaza, where drastic shortages of medicines, food, power, water and - above all - safety imperil the population.”

Hospital authorities say the facility, which has suffered significant damage and seen its oxygen plant destroyed, is also providing refuge to around 50,000 displaced people. Sean Casey, a WHO Emergency Medical Teams coordinator who was on the mission, said, “everyone we speak to is hungry.”

The WHO team also visited two maternity hospitals, which jointly assist with up to 35 deliveries a day, while facing shortages of fuel, food, water, oxygen, antibiotics and anesthesia.

The United Nations has estimated that some 50,000 pregnant women are currently living in Gaza, with more than 180 births taking place every day amid the “decimation” of the healthcare system. The WHO said earlier only 38 percent of hospital beds remained available in Gaza and only 30 percent of original health staff were still working.

At the same time, hospitals, protected under international humanitarian law, have repeatedly been hit by Israeli strikes since the regime started its brutality on October 7th.

As of December 20, the WHO registered 246 Israeli attacks on healthcare infrastructure in Gaza, including hospitals and ambulances.

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