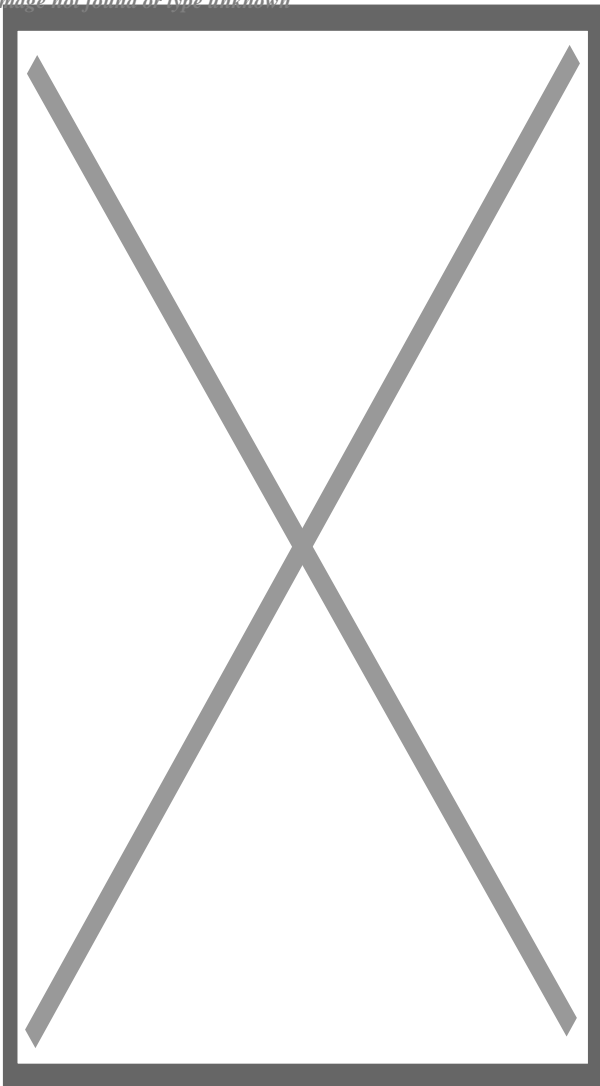


World Health Organization warns that Gazans are starving to death

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Geneva, February 1 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that the people in the Gaza Strip are starving to death due to the constraints imposed by Israel on the delivery of humanitarian

aid into the besieged Palestinian territory.

The WHO's emergencies director Michael Ryan said on Wednesday that the risk of famine was already high and on the rise. "This is a population that is starving to death. This is a population that is being pushed to the brink," Ryan said.

The WHO official said efforts to bring aid into Gaza are constantly disrupted and that the space for humanitarian intervention was being constrained in "every aspect."

Major donor Western countries have announced the suspension of their aid to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). The UN says cutting the "lifeline" 2 million people in Gaza depend on is a "collective punishment."

"The civilians of Gaza are not parties to this conflict and they should be protected, as should be their health facilities."

Ryan said the people in Gaza "are right in the middle of a massive catastrophe." The WHO official further said access to proper nutrition has become a major issue in the Gaza Strip, with the calorie count and the quality of nutrition consumed by the people having dropped sharply. Populations are not supposed to survive indefinitely on food aid, he said. "It's supposed to be emergency food aid to tide people over."

"And if you mix a lack of nutrition with overcrowding and exposure to cold through lack of shelter... you can create conditions for massive epidemics." "And we're seeing them," Ryan said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ryan pointed to the dramatic reduction in the number of operational health facilities in Gaza.

On Wednesday, the head of the WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that cutting funds to the UN Palestinian refugee agency would entail "catastrophic consequences" for people in Gaza. "No other entity has the capacity to deliver the scale and breadth of assistance that 2.2 million people in Gaza urgently need."

"We appeal for these announcements to be reconsidered," Ghebreyesus said. Ghebreyesus also said the WHO was facing continued "extreme challenges" in propping up Gaza's health system. "Over 100,000 Gazans are either dead, injured, or missing and presumed dead."

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