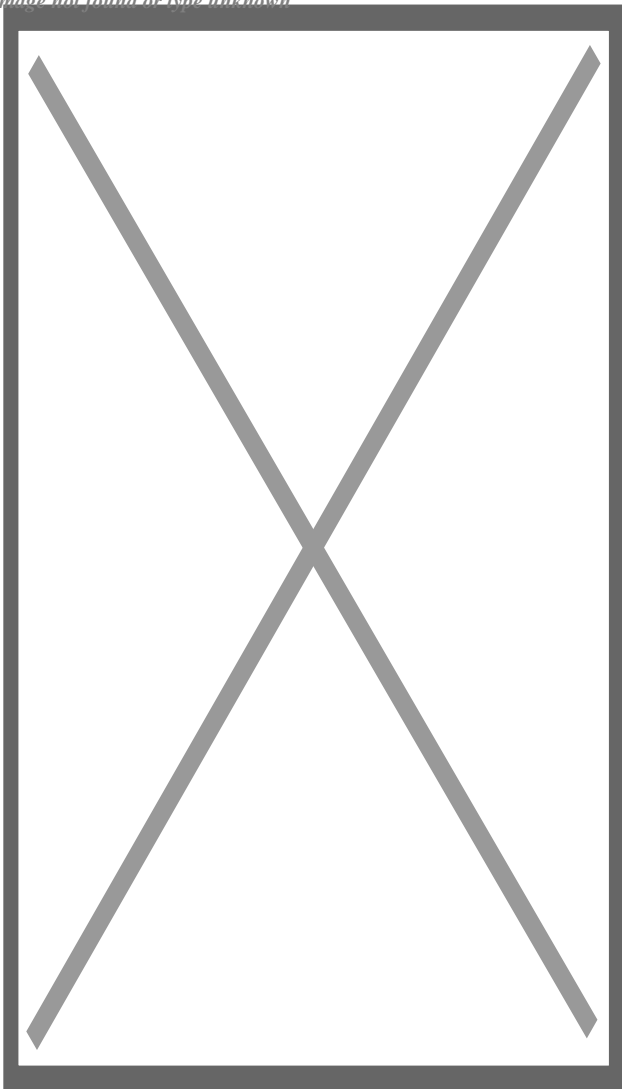


Israel blocks World Food Program convoy of 14 trucks from entering northern Gaza

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WFP truck convoy waiting to enter northern Gaza (File photo)

Gaza City, March 6 (RHC)-- Israeli forces have turned back a 14-truck food aid convoy bound for northern Gaza following a three-hour wait at a checkpoint, according to the World Food Program (WFP).

The WFP says the aid convoy was denied entry to north Gaza by Israel's military, preventing the first attempt by the UN agency to deliver aid there since last month. WFP said "to avert famine," there must be road access to Gaza's north.

The 14-truck convoy was stopped by armed troops and turned back. The convoy was then rerouted, but later stopped by a large crowd of desperate people who looted the food and took about 200 tonnes, the UN food agency said in a statement.

The prevention of food reaching the most vulnerable forced the agency to airdrop food for some 20,000 people into northern Gaza, which has almost been cut off from aid since late October. "Airdrops are a last resort and will not avert famine," said Carl Skau, the agency's deputy executive director. "We need entry points to northern Gaza that will allow us to deliver enough food for half a million people in desperate need."

The World Food Program says that hunger has reached catastrophic levels in the north of Gaza where children are dying of hunger-related diseases and suffering severe levels of malnutrition. A massive relief operation requires more entry points into Gaza, including from the north, and the use of Ashdod port.

The UN food agency emphasized that a ceasefire in Gaza is urgently needed to enable an operation of this size. "With greater safety for humanitarian staff to move food and other supplies regularly throughout the Strip and with routes in from the North, WFP and its partners can prevent famine."

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