

# *Report says children in Gaza dying of malnutrition amid Israel's chokehold on aid*

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By Maryam Qarehgozlou

The lifeless body of an infant lies on the ground, her small frame wrapped in a white shroud. Her delicate features, once a source of joy and hope for her parents, are frozen.

The scarcity of food, primarily due to the Israeli regime's chokehold on aid in line with its policy of deliberate starvation, led to her tragic, untimely and cruel death.

Heba Ziyada, a Palestinian infant, breathed her last a few days ago at the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza due to dehydration and malnutrition. Her parents ran helter-skelter in search of food, and when they finally found some milk, it was too late.

Her tragic end - due to hunger - came days after Anhar Saqr Al-Shanbari, a little girl from Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza, also starved to death due to malnutrition.

Her photos, widely shared on social media, showed her before and after the latest Israeli genocidal war that started on October 7 and has so far claimed the lives of more than 30,800 Palestinians, including 14,000 children.

In the first photo, the little girl beamed with exuberance, evident from her chubby cheeks radiating with the glow of good health. Her eyes sparkled with curiosity, reflecting a world brimming with hope and possibilities.

In stark contrast, the second photo showed a worrying transformation in her. Her cheeks appeared sunken and hollow. Her eyes conveyed a profound sadness and pain. The toll of starvation was clearly evident in her frail, decaying frame.

Palestinian infants Nesma Khalef and Abdul Aziz also tragically succumbed to malnutrition and lack of available treatment at the Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza.

The health condition of Yazan Al-Kafarna, a 9-year-old boy who suffered from cerebral palsy, also deteriorated due to a lack of food and oxygen amid the war. He was recently displaced from Beit Hanoun to the south.

Yazan also died of malnutrition and a lack of proper healthcare at the Abu Youssef Al-Najjar Hospital in Gaza on Monday.

The 9-year-old boy's face, bearing the marks of malnutrition and dehydration, was a stark testament to the crushing grip of hunger.

These children bear witness to the unfathomable suffering endured by Gazans in a five-month-old war that has been marked by death, despair and destruction.

According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, which completed 150 days earlier this week, has so far killed more than 30,800 Palestinians. More than two million people have been rendered homeless and displaced. Most of them have been struggling for a loaf of bread amid a complete blockade of the strip.

Israel has been blocking aid trucks from entering Gaza by land, using starvation as a weapon of war. It has even bombed gatherings of Palestinians waiting for aid. Human rights groups fear that deaths from starvation could overtake deaths from bombings in the besieged territory.

According to Palestinian reports, the number of children who have died of dehydration and malnutrition in northern Gaza is now 20. The number could be much higher as most of such deaths are unaccounted for, according to activists.

Dr. Ashraf Al-Qudra, the ministry spokesman in Gaza, said in a statement last week that doctors at the Kamal Adwan Hospital fear for the lives of many children.

They are "suffering from malnutrition and diarrhea in intensive care as a result of the cessation of the electric generator and oxygen and the weakness of medical capabilities," Al-Qudra was quoted as saying.

World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN World Food Programme (WFP) malnutrition screenings in northern Gaza in January found that nearly 16 percent – or 1 in 6 children under 2 years of age – are acutely malnourished.

Similar screenings conducted in the south in Rafah, where some amount of aid was available until recently, found 5 percent of children under 2 years acutely malnourished.

The report, warning of a “steep rise in malnutrition” in Gaza, said 90 percent of children under the age of 2 face severe food poverty – meaning they have consumed two or fewer food groups in the previous day – and the food they have access to is of the lowest nutritional value.

It also found that at least 90 percent of children under 5 are affected by one or more infectious diseases. Seventy percent had diarrhea in the past two weeks, a 23-fold increase compared with the 2022 baseline.

According to Dr Mike Ryan, Executive Director of WHO's Health Emergencies Programme, hunger and disease constitute “a deadly combination.”

“Hungry, weakened and deeply traumatized children are more likely to get sick, and children who are sick, especially with diarrhea, cannot absorb nutrients well. It's dangerous and tragic, and happening before our eyes,” he was quoted as saying.

During a UN Security Council meeting last week, the representative of Algeria said that parents are “using animal fodder to satisfy their children's hunger.”

“People in Gaza face the harrowing dilemma of perishing immediately in bombings or enduring an agonizing starvation-induced death,” the Algerian representative said.

Israel deliberately blocking entry of food

Euro-Med Monitor, a Switzerland-headquartered, youth-led human rights watchdog, said in a report on Friday that Israel is “deliberately” depriving Palestinians in Gaza of food, especially in Gaza City and the northern part, to forcibly displace people still staying in those areas.

“Despite the enormous, growing needs of the over 2.3 million people living in appalling conditions, humanitarian supplies that entered the Gaza Strip in February fell by 50 percent compared to January,” the report stated.

Project HOPE, a humanitarian group operating a clinic in the Gaza Strip, warned last week that hunger rates will “only increase” in the coming weeks if violence continues, aid shipments remain both delayed and inadequate, and critical services run by WFP and UNRWA are paused or disrupted due to insecurity or lack of funding.

In response, Jordan, France, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and the United States carried out airdrop of humanitarian aid along the Gaza coastline on Saturday, what critics slammed as “theatrical” and “performative.”

“Airdrops are the worst or close to the worst possible way to deliver aid,” Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International, was quoted as saying.

“Airdrops are a last resort for dispersing aid. They are ineffective, uncoordinated, and ultimately unable to predict exactly where the aid will land,” US-based writer and commentator Shabbir Rizvi wrote in an article for the Press TV website ([read here](#)).

“Consider this with the fact that if Zionist troops are willing to open fire on designated aid trucks, traveling to a parachuted pellet is even more dangerous.”

Wesam Bahrani, an Iraqi journalist and analyst, in an article for the Press TV website (read here), also slammed the theatrical move on the part of the Biden administration while aiding the genocide in Gaza.

"The Biden administration tried to get a message across that the US military is helping to ease the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza while being the mastermind and architect of their colossal tragedy," Bahrani wrote.

"It is another dark stain in the history books for the US, which has allowed the Israeli regime to kill and starve families instead of applying pressure on Tel Aviv to at least turn the water taps back on."

On Sunday, Michael Fakhri, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, in a post on X called for sanctions against Israel for its use of starvation as a weapon of war.

"Israel has been intentionally starving the Palestinian people in Gaza since October 8," Fakhri wrote.

"Now famine may very well be already occurring. The only way to end/prevent this famine is an immediate ceasefire. And the only way to get a ceasefire is to sanction Israel."

'Mass killing of children in slow motion'

According to Save the Children, a child rights advocacy organization, with the collapse in communication and aid, particularly in northern Gaza where civilians are at the highest risk of starvation, the stories reported are likely "the tip of the iceberg."

"What we are witnessing in Gaza is a mass killing of children in slow motion because there is no food left and nothing getting to them. They are dying because the world has failed to protect them," said Jason Lee, Save the Children's Country Director for the occupied Palestinian territory.

UNICEF warned last week that an "explosion" in child deaths was imminent if the alarming nutrition crisis wasn't resolved.

"The child deaths we feared are here, as malnutrition ravages the Gaza Strip," said Adele Khodr, UNICEF Regional Director for the West Asia and North Africa, in a statement on Sunday.

"The sense of helplessness and despair among parents and doctors in realizing that lifesaving aid, just a few kilometers away, is being kept out of reach, must be as unbearable, but worse still are the anguished cries of those babies slowly perishing under the world's gaze," he said.

"The lives of thousands more babies and children depend on urgent action being taken now."

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