

Chilling tragedy: Israel weaponizes cold as more children in Gaza freeze to death

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By Humaira Ahad / PRESS TV

Yahya Muhammed al-Batran awoke to the cold touch of a raindrop seeping through the roof of his makeshift tent. As his eyes fluttered open, he found himself staring into an abyss.

His wife, who had given birth to twins just a month earlier, sat frozen in a state of horror. Her gaze was locked on one of the twins, little Jumaa.

“My wife was awake. I asked her what was wrong, and she pointed to Jumaa and shook her head. She said: ‘Ali seems half alive. But Jumaa, I’ve been trying to wake him for a while, and he won’t wake up.’”

The memory of that moment was seared into Batran’s mind. Jumaa’s small head felt icy under his touch, his skin pale as a winter sky, and his tiny body utterly lifeless.

The grieving father wrapped his son in a thin blanket and rushed to al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, deep within the northern expanse of the besieged Gaza Strip. “When I got there, the doctor said: ‘May God grant you patience; he’s dead,’” the devastated father recalled with heavy heart and enormous grief.

But fate’s cruelty did not end there. Just one day later, Jumaa’s twin, Ali, also succumbed at the same hospital. Medical sources attributed their tragic deaths to hypothermia—a silent killer that strikes when the body’s core temperature plummets below 35°C.

In the freezing grip of Gaza’s relentless winter, survival has become an unforgiving battle. In just one week, eight children in the beleaguered territory have lost their lives to the biting cold.

The names of these tiny victims echo like a dirge: Ali Youssef Ahmed Kloub, 35 days old; Aisha al-Qassas, 21 days old; Ali Essam Saqr, 23 days old; Ali Hussam Azzam, only four days old; Sila Mahmoud al-Fassih, 14 days old; and the twins, Jumaa and Ali al-Batran, both one month old.

The most recent to die was little Kloub. His family had sought refuge in a fragile tent on the windswept beach, where survival was a daily struggle. On Saturday, the freezing cold claimed his life, making him yet another cold statistic in Gaza’s humanitarian crisis.

The boy’s devastated mother lamented that they lacked even the most basic necessities. “We had to borrow bedding and covers from other displaced families,” she was quoted as saying. “But they, too, are desperately trying to shield their children from this bitter cold.”

Press TV reporter in northern Gaza Abubaker Abed said parents of most of these children particularly infants “cannot provide their babies with clothes” amid the humanitarian crisis.

“What I saw is horrific, most children don’t have clothes, sandals, boots, or anything at all. They live in flimsy, damp, frigid tents with no means of living. They don’t even have food, no water, medicines,” Abed told the Press TV about the distressing condition of Gaza’s children.

“They spend most of their nights or days outside because the shelters are inhabitable so their life is miserable. I have seen children with only one piece of clothing, and children with bare feet most of the time. It was heartbreaking,” he hastened to add.

Drop in mercury, rise in problems

According to the Press TV reporter, the temperature is significantly dropping in Gaza and it is “on the cusp of facing another low-pressure front.”

“I was in the surgery room today at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, and a man was searching for his blood-soaked blanket. The cleaners seem to have thrown it away. His eyes were teary because he had no other blankets and didn’t know how to sleep the night. He kept saying he would clean it and pleaded with the

workers to find it for him,” Abed wrote on his X handle on Friday.

This winter, people in the blockaded territory are finding it particularly difficult after being displaced by the ongoing genocidal war, health officials in Gaza were quoted as saying.

“Sila died from the cold, I was warming her and holding her. But we didn’t have extra clothes to warm the girl,” Sila’s mother, Nariman Al-Fasih, was reported as saying by various media outlets.

“It was very cold overnight and we couldn’t even take it as adults. We couldn’t stay warm,” Sila’s father Mahmoud Al-Fasih said. “Sila woke up crying three times overnight and in the morning they found her unresponsive, her body stiff.”

“She was like wood,” the grief-stricken father added. Sila was rushed to a field hospital where doctors tried to revive her, but her heart had already stopped beating.

Still in shock,” Sila’s mother said she “can’t bear the memory of her child frozen from the cold.”

Three of the eight babies who died over the past week lived in al-Mawasi, near the southern town of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. Al-Mawasi has been repeatedly attacked by the Israeli regime despite being designated as a ‘humanitarian zone.’

The seventh adult victim, a physician named Dr. Ahmed al-Zaharna, was also found dead in his tent in Mawasi, Khan Younis, due to hypothermia.

“After investigations, the forensic medicine team said that he died from the cold. This bitter cold and life in tents is difficult, and no one can bear it,” said Dr. Alaa Al-Zaharna, Ahmad’s brother. “The cold is severe and harsh, and can lead to cardiac arrest,” Al-Zaharna added.

The Ministry of Health in a statement said Dr. Ahmed Al-Zaharna, who worked with their teams at the European Hospital in Gaza, “died as a result of the bitter cold.”

Al-Zaharna had been living in a tent in the Mawasi area for over a year after being displaced from Gaza City. “We have been displaced for more than a year. In the summer, we cannot bear the intense heat, and in the winter, we die from the cold,” Al-Zaharna said.

Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF’s regional director for West Asia, said cold injuries pose a serious threat to Palestinians, especially children, who are currently putting up in tents.

“Cold injuries, such as frostbite and hypothermia, pose grave risks to young children in tents and other makeshift shelters that are ill-equipped for freezing weather,” he stated.

“With temperatures expected to drop further in the coming days, it is tragically foreseeable that more children’s lives will be lost to the inhumane conditions they are enduring, which offer no protection from the cold.”

Starving and dying of cold

Dr. Ahmed Al-Farra, the head of pediatrics and obstetrics at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis city, said the staff in the hospital’s neonatal ICU witness at least five cases of hypothermia every day. The Palestinian pediatrician blamed the lack of breastfeeding and limited availability of infant formula for raising the risk of hypothermia for babies.

Reporting from northern Gaza, Abed said the mothers in Gaza are unable to breastfeed their children.

“There is no food, no water, no hygienic care. It is almost impossible to afford all these basic needs at the moment because of the skyrocketing prices, so most families are living without primary amenities which is

completely harrowing,” the Press TV reporter said as he visited the makeshift tents of the displaced Palestinians.

As per experts, malnutrition makes people, especially children and babies, more susceptible to conditions like hypothermia.

Babies are dying every day from “severe cold and the lack of necessities of life such as food, drink and baby milk,” Muhammad Abu Afash, director for medical relief in Gaza said.

A late December report by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), which provides information about global food insecurity, had warned that a “famine scenario” was unfolding in northern Gaza amid Israel’s genocidal war on the territory, which has so far claimed nearly 45,000 lives.

The FEWS NET report dated December 23 noted that Israel has maintained a “near-total blockade of humanitarian and commercial food supplies to besieged areas” of northern Gaza for nearly 80 days.

“Based on the collapse of the food system and worsening access to water, sanitation, and health services in these areas ... it is highly likely that the food consumption and acute malnutrition thresholds for Famine (IPC Phase 5) have now been surpassed in North Gaza Governorate,” the report noted.

The network added that without a change to Israeli policy on food supplies entering the area, it expected that 2 to 15 people would die per day from January to March at least, which would surpass the “famine threshold”.

The United States, which has been providing substantial military and diplomatic support to the Israeli regime in its genocidal war on Gaza, has asked FEWS NET to retract the report. The organization is funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

As per official reports, there is very little information about recent malnutrition cases and deaths in northern Gaza, where hunger levels are the highest.

“Starvation, malnutrition, and excess mortality due to malnutrition and disease, are rapidly increasing” in northern Gaza, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification said in an alert on November 8.

Lack of basic necessities

For months, Israeli forces have been blocking humanitarian groups from bringing basic necessities like clothes, tents, and winterization supplies into Gaza. The UN recently said that nearly 1 million Palestinians in Gaza, about half the population, lack proper winter supplies.

The head of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini, has said that winter supplies remain in aid trucks lined up outside of the border for months, waiting for approval from Israel that often never comes.

In July last year UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri declared that famine had spread throughout Gaza.

“Parents and communities feed their children before they feed themselves, so when a child dies it tells us that social structures are collapsing and an entire people is under attack,” Fakhri said.

Little is known about how many people in Gaza have died of causes unrelated to violence since the war began.

According to officials in the besieged strip, many families bury their dead without reporting the death because of the cost, dangers, and difficulties of moving around in Gaza.

In late October 2024, a Gaza health ministry official presented a list of 38 people whose deaths were attributed to malnutrition or dehydration. A majority were children, including infants under the age of 1. The officials believe that the tally substantially undercounts actual deaths.

Destruction of the infrastructure causes Palestinians to die of cold. The current winter in Gaza is especially harsh as the besieged strip grapples with a 14-month-long genocidal war.

Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza has driven more than 90 percent of its 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes, most of them living in squalid camps of tents.

As temperatures in Gaza dropped below 8 degrees Celsius last week, Palestinians were left in a desperate state to deal with the winter chill. Rains also flooded more than 1,500 tents sheltering displaced Palestinian families across the enclave, according to Gaza's Civil Defense agency.

Strong winds and heavy rains have destroyed the temporary coverings of these tents, soaking inhabitants and their belongings.

Last year's satellite imagery provided by the United Nations (U.N.) showcased the extent of destruction of vital civilian infrastructure in Gaza throughout the regime's genocidal war on Palestinians.

The imagery from the U.N. Satellite Center (UNOSAT) in June showed that the attacks by the apartheid regime have affected more than half of Gaza's infrastructure.

By now, the total number of destroyed buildings is likely higher.

In the absence of necessary infrastructure, experts say that the likelihood of deaths from hypothermia is far more than recorded by Gaza's health officials. Such deaths are not counted in the official death tally of the genocide reported by the besieged strip's health officials.

They get counted as "indirect" deaths not caused by something like a bomb or gunfire by Israeli forces.

As Gaza grapples with a lack of basic amenities, cases of hypothermia may increase when temperatures continue to drop across the besieged strip.

The current winter chill has increased the stressful conditions for Palestinian parents who worry about the risk of their children becoming the next victims of the biting cold.

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