



Access to Food in Gaza

The Bleak Intersection of Genocide and Food Inaccessibility

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The Situation: A Landscape of Prolonged Desolation

The Gaza Strip, a narrow coastal enclave that serves as home to approximately 2.1 million souls—including a significant 1.7 million Palestine Refugees—has weathered a consistent trajectory of socioeconomic decay for more than a decade. This decline isn't merely a statistic; it's a living reality for most of its inhabitants.

The origins of this deterioration can be traced to various structural and external impositions, with the Israeli-imposed blockade in 2007 standing out as a particularly debilitating measure. The blockade, a comprehensive land, air, and sea encirclement, has not just limited the movement of people, but critically, also the flow of goods, essential supplies, and opportunities into and out of the whole Gaza Strip. This has had cascading effects on Gaza's economy, healthcare, infrastructure, and crucially, its food security.

Even before the horrifying developments of October 2023, the signs were evident. A staggering 63% of Gaza's residents grappled with food insecurity, rendering them heavily dependent on the inconsistent inflow of international assistance. It paints a bleak picture: families uncertain about their next meal, children experiencing stunted growth, and communities teetering on the brink of malnutrition.

Moreover, the socioeconomic fabric of Gaza was already threadbare. A daunting 81.5% of its population struggled beneath the poverty line, with limited access to basic needs, healthcare, and education. The unemployment rate, at an exorbitant 46.6%, meant that nearly half of the employable population found themselves without stable incomes, exacerbating the dependency on aid and relief. The collective weight of these factors painted a grim tableau, underscoring the monumental challenges faced by the people of Gaza even before the recent crises.

Gaza October 2023: From Siege to Strangulation

The relentless assault that Israel launched on October 7th marked the beginning of a harrowing chapter for the Gaza Strip. With the use of intensive aerial bombardments targeting civilian homes, the devastation was swift and profound. In just a few days, thousands fell victim, with the death toll soaring to approximately 4,137 and over 13,162 wounded — shockingly, more than 60% of them were children and women. The impact of such aggression was not merely physical but also psychological, leaving a lasting scar on an already traumatized population.



Amid this backdrop of carnage and despair, October 10th emerged as a defining juncture. The Israeli occupation, not content with the aerial onslaught, decided to tighten its grip on the beleaguered Strip even further. On that fateful day, all essential deliveries to Gaza — including food and fuel — were abruptly halted. For residents, who had been enduring prolonged periods of socioeconomic hardships, this blockade was the metaphorical noose tightening around their collective neck.

The situation took a further grim turn when Israel, citing an impending ground invasion, mandated the evacuation of over one million Palestinians from their homes, predominantly in Gaza City and its nearby regions. This displacement, conducted in an atmosphere thick with fear and urgency, sparked chaos. Families were abruptly uprooted from their local food supplies, communal support structures, and often, lands they had cultivated for generations. The absence of essential utilities, such as water and electricity, across the Gaza Strip further deepened the human tragedy, pushing an already suffering population to the brink of an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe.

The Fragility of Gaza's Agricultural Backbone

The Gaza Strip, while modest in size, has historically stood as a beacon of food production for its people. Encompassing 75.2 km² of cultivable land, it has been home to a wealth of fruits, with an annual yield of 70,000 tons, spanning citrus to date. Furthermore, the land consistently produces over 300,000 tons of various vegetables. Notably, the border areas contribute substantially to this bounty, being the source of a significant portion of the region's produce.

Agriculture isn't merely a profession in Gaza; it's a legacy passed through generations. It employs around 44,000 individuals, making up 11% of Gaza's total labor force. For many, farming is more than a livelihood—it's an inheritance and a way of life.

However, the recent wave of devastation brought on by the Israeli war of extermination has drastically altered this agricultural landscape. The persistent offensives have made it perilously challenging for Palestinians in Gaza to access their ancestral farmlands, especially in the vital eastern and northern zones, traditionally revered as Gaza's primary food hubs. As a result, fields that once brimmed with life now lay forsaken, their crops withering away.



The aftershocks of this disruption ripple throughout the Strip. Numerous bakeries, pivotal for daily sustenance, have faced destruction, causing severe food shortages. Residents, in their quest for basic nourishment, are met with daunting queues.

And to further exacerbate the hardship, safe

Bombing of Al-Nusrat Bakery -Gaza- 17/10/2023



drinking water has become a rarity. With much of the infrastructure decimated and available water sources contaminated, Palestinians in Gaza face the grim reality of an escalating humanitarian crisis.

Testimonials from the Ground

Riyad Al-Nasr, a 62-year-old farmer, underscores the gravity of the situation. He and his family cultivated 70 dunums of vegetables. However, since the Israeli operations commenced, they've lost access to their land. Thousands of dunums that served as a primary food source for Gaza's residents have suffered similarly. Poultry farms have been severely affected, with thousands of birds perishing due to direct bombings or lack of care. The fishing sector, on which many depend, has also been paralyzed, with fishermen forbidden from entering the sea.

Saad Ziada, an Agricultural Engineer, and Development Specialist attests to the dire circumstances his family and he is currently enduring. Forced to evacuate from Gaza to Rafah due to the ongoing Israeli aggression, the necessities of life have become a luxury.

For over two days, Saad and his family have not had access to potable water. The limited water that is available is extremely scarce, prompting them to limit activities like going to the restroom to conserve what little they have. Their diet has been restricted to old, canned food that barely suffices to meet their nutritional needs.

Saad emphasizes, "If the situation persists in this manner, we are on the brink of a genuine catastrophe."

Demands and Claims

Considering the above situation, Palestinians and international social movements and organizations put forward the following key demands:

- Engagement of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food:** A direct appeal to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to intervene and assess the grave situation in Gaza. This includes releasing a comprehensive report detailing the violations of the right to food and recommending immediate measures to address these breaches, in coordination with international stakeholders.
- Immediate End to Blockades and Attacks:** An immediate cessation of all military operations and the lifting of blockades to allow the free movement of goods and people.
- Humanitarian Aid:** Expedited delivery of international aid to cater to the food needs of Gaza's population, including emergency food supplies, clean water, and medical assistance.



4. **Protection of Civil Infrastructure:** Assurances that essential civilian infrastructures like farms, bakeries, and water sources won't be targeted in any military action.
5. **Empowerment and Sovereignty Over Resources:** Initiatives to rebuild and bolster Gaza's agricultural and fishing sectors, ensuring not only long-term food security but also allowing Palestinians full sovereignty over their natural resources and means of production.
6. **Accountability and Pursuit of Justice:** Demanding that the Israeli occupation be held accountable for its crimes and ensuring that those responsible for acts of extermination and the destruction of life's essentials in Gaza face justice.

In summary: The ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip has reached alarming proportions, with its impact echoing far beyond its immediate geographic confines. At the core of this escalating disaster is the fundamental human right to food—a right that is now perilously under threat for the Palestinian residents of Gaza.

Historically, Gaza has been an epicenter of rich agricultural production, feeding not only its own residents but also serving as a vital food resource in the region. But the recent waves of Israeli aggression and sustained blockades have crippled this once-thriving sector. The disruption of essential imports, coupled with the inaccessibility to local farmlands due to conflict, has left the people of Gaza with dwindling food resources.

The severity of this situation cannot be understated. Without adequate food, residents face malnutrition, increased vulnerability to diseases, and a heightened mortality rate, especially among children and the elderly. The daily struggles of families trying to secure a single meal, with parents facing the heart-wrenching ordeal of seeing their children go hungry, are becoming the distressing norm.

Beyond the immediate physiological effects of food scarcity, there are profound psychological and societal implications. Chronic hunger breeds despair, intensifies trauma, and deepens socio-economic inequalities. In the broader spectrum, this crisis threatens to destabilize an already fragile region, with potential repercussions on a global scale.

Given the magnitude of this emergency, it is incumbent upon the international community to intervene promptly and robustly. A multifaceted approach is crucial—encompassing immediate relief efforts, sustained diplomatic interventions to restore peace, and long-term strategies to rejuvenate Gaza's agricultural sector.

Inaction or delayed action will only serve to exacerbate an already grave situation. With each passing day, the humanitarian catastrophe inches closer to an irreversible tipping point. Hence, it is imperative that global powers, humanitarian organizations, and the broader international community rally together to prevent further degradation of life in Gaza and uphold the sacrosanct right to food for its people.

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