

Aid groups report children in Gaza survive on less than one meal a day



Palestinian children wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, in Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip [Mahmoud Issa/Reuters]

Gaza City, April 21 (RHC)-- Israel's total siege and bombardment of the Gaza Strip have left Palestinian children surviving on less than one meal a day, according to an urgent warning by the leaders of 12 major aid groups in the enclave.

The humanitarian aid system in Gaza "is facing total collapse" due to 18 months of Israel's military operation and the recent imposition of a full blockade last month, the joint statement said.

An estimated 95 percent of the 43 international and Palestinian aid groups have already suspended or cut their services in Gaza, amid "widespread and indiscriminate bombing making it extremely dangerous to move around", it added.

"Kids are eating less than a meal a day and struggling to find their next meal," said Bushra Khalil, policy head of the aid group Oxfam. "Everyone is purely eating canned food ... Malnutrition and pockets of famine are definitely occurring in Gaza."

Amande Bazerolle, emergency coordinator in Gaza for Doctors Without Borders, added that aid workers have been forced to watch people, many of them women and children, suffer and die while carrying "the impossible burden of providing relief with depleted supplies".

"This is not a humanitarian failure – it is a political choice, and a deliberate assault on a people's ability to survive, carried out with impunity," she said.

In Gaza City, Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud reported over the weekend that the enclave was running out of baby formula, leaving children and infants malnourished.

"We have seen many severe malnutrition cases. Families are not able to provide for their most basic needs, even for the most vulnerable – children and newborn babies. Baby formula is largely missing from the markets and pharmacies," Mahmoud said. "Gaza is quickly running out of all necessities."

Outside Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir el-Balah, Palestinians told Al Jazeera they are losing their children to malnutrition. Fadi Ahmed, who lost his son, said hospital staff discovered "massive infections in the boy's lungs, which led to a severe lack of oxygen in his blood." "The boy's weakness and severe malnutrition led to his inability to resist and then to his death ... after spending one week at the hospital."

Intisar Hamdan, a grandmother, said she lost her grandson because his parents could not find any milk for three days. "Children are suffering from not just malnutrition, but also serious medical complications and diseases that cannot be easily treated and require medical supplies that are scarce," Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum reported.

According to Gaza's Health Ministry, at least 60,000 children are considered malnourished in the Palestinian territory. The aid groups said Gaza holds the record of being "the deadliest place on earth for humanitarian workers", making it even more difficult to deliver services to children.

Since October 2023, more than 400 aid workers and 1,300 health workers have been killed in Gaza, despite the requirement under international humanitarian law for humanitarian and health workers to be protected.

"The recent killing of 15 Palestinian paramedics and rescue workers, whose bodies were found buried in a mass grave, triggered global outrage, but many violations and attacks go unreported," it added.

The aid groups are calling on Israel and the Palestinian armed group to guarantee the safety of their staff and to allow the safe, "unfettered access of aid into and across Gaza", and for world leaders to oppose further aid restrictions.

[SOURCE: REUTERS]

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