

WHO warns of permanent impact of hunger on entire generation of Gaza



Geneva, May 14 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization's representative for the occupied Palestinian territories says malnutrition rates are rising in Gaza and hunger could have lasting impacts on "an entire generation."

Rik Peeperkorn, in remarks on Tuesday, stressed that people in Gaza are trapped in a "dangerous cycle" where malnutrition weakens immune systems, diseases spread rapidly due to lack of clean water and sanitation, and access to health care is virtually nonexistent. The official said he had seen children in clinics who looked years younger than their age.

"Without enough nutritious food, clean water, and access to health care, an entire generation will be permanently affected," Peeperkorn said. The WHO official also warned of poor health, stunting, and impaired cognitive development among children across the blockaded region.

He further described the situation as "one of the world's worst hunger crises," driven by the "deliberate obstruction" of humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies. "If the situation persists, nearly 71,000 children under the age of five are expected to be acutely malnourished over the next eleven months," Peeperkorn said. "If this situation persists, half a million people are at risk of starvation. One million people will be severely affected over the coming four or five months, and another half a million will be moderately affected."

He noted that starvation is not typically the direct cause of death in such crises. "You normally don't die from starvation. You die from the diseases associated with that," he said,

The official also described scenes of children suffering from pneumonia and gastroenteritis in overcrowded hospitals, worsened by hunger and lack of clean water. Vaccine coverage has plummeted, and child protection risks are rising, he said.

The representative said it is struggling to maintain support for 19 malnutrition treatment centers due to dwindling supplies. Current stocks inside Gaza can treat just 500 children -- "a fraction of the urgent need."

Peeperkorn further said that at least 57 children in Gaza had died from the effects of malnutrition since the start of a complete blockade on March 2nd. Regarding the medical evacuations out of Gaza, he said they remain "extremely limited and challenging."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Peeperkorn reiterated calls for an immediate end to the aid blockade, the protection of health care and a ceasefire leading to lasting peace in the besieged region.

No food has been allowed into Gaza for more than two months, as Israel presses its devastating blockade of the strip. Israel has admitted to withholding food, water, and other life-sustaining supplies from Gaza as a pressure tactic against Palestinian resistance groups.

Over 52,900 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza in a brutal Israeli onslaught since October 2023, most of them women and children.

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