

At least 66 children dead of malnutrition in Gaza as Israel tightens genocidal siege



Gaza City, June 29 (RHC)-- At least 66 children have died of malnutrition in Gaza over the course of Israel's war, authorities in the Palestinian enclave said, condemning a tightened Israeli siege that has prevented the entry of milk, nutritional supplements and other food aid.

The statement from Gaza's Government Media Office over the weekend comes as Israeli forces intensified their attacks on the territory, killing at least 60 Palestinians, including 20 people in the Tuffah neighbourhood of Gaza City. The media office said Israel's deadly blockade constitutes a "war crime" and reveals its "deliberate use of starvation as a weapon to exterminate civilians."

The office denounced what it called "this ongoing crime against childhood in the Gaza Strip" as well as "the shameful international silence regarding the suffering of children who are left to fall prey to hunger, disease, and slow death".

It also said it holds Israel, as well as its allies, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany, responsible for "this catastrophe", and urged the United Nations to intervene and open the crossings into Gaza immediately.

The statement came days after the UN agency for children (UNICEF) warned that the number of malnourished children in the Gaza Strip was rising at an "alarming rate". It said that at least 5,119 children, between 6 months and 5 years of age, had been admitted for treatment for acute malnutrition in May alone.

UNICEF said the figure represents a nearly 50 percent increase from the 3,444 children admitted in April, and a 150 percent increase from February when a ceasefire was in effect and aid was entering Gaza in significant quantities.

"In just 150 days, from the start of the year until the end of May, 16,736 children – an average of 112 children a day – have been admitted for treatment for malnutrition in the Gaza Strip," said the agency's regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, Edouard Beigbeder.

"Every one of these cases is preventable. The food, water, and nutrition treatments they desperately need are being blocked from reaching them," he added. "Man-made decisions that are costing lives. Israel must urgently allow the large-scale delivery of life-saving aid through all border crossings."

Israel intensifies attacks on north Gaza

The warnings came as Palestinians mourned the 60 people killed in Israeli attacks on Saturday. In Gaza City's Tuffah neighbourhood, rescuers continued the search for survivors after two consecutive Israeli strikes flattened several residential buildings, killing at least 20 people. Some nine children were among the victims.

"We were sitting peacefully when we received a call from a private number telling us to evacuate the entire block immediately – a residential area belonging to the al-Nakhlah family. As you can see, the whole block is nearly wiped out," one resident, Mahmoud al-Nakhala, told Al Jazeera.

"We still don't know why two three-storey homes were targeted... It's heartbreaking that people watch what's happening in Gaza – the suffering, the massacres – and stay silent. At this point, we can't even comprehend what's happening here any more," he said.

The bombings in Tuffah followed another air raid on tents sheltering displaced people in Gaza City. At least 13 people were killed, including several children. Other victims included a person who was shot and killed near an aid distribution point run by the US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) in southern Rafah.

According to officials in Gaza, Israeli forces have killed more than 550 people at and near the GHF sites, since the controversial group began operations on May 19.

Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Gaza City, said that the GHF remains the only source of food in the Strip as Israel continues to place severe restrictions on the entry of supplies by other groups.

"A lot of people here are trying to stay away from the GHF's centres because of the danger involved in going to them, because of the ongoing and deliberate shootings of aid seekers there," Mahmoud said. "But again, staying away is not an answer, because if there are no food parcels, it means that children are going to go to bed hungry."

Aid groups have condemned the GHF's "militarised" operations, with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres saying on Friday that the US-backed operation in Gaza was "inherently unsafe" and "killing people".

Israel's Haaretz newspaper has, meanwhile, reported that Israeli troops in Gaza were ordered to shoot at unarmed Palestinians at the GHF sites, with one soldier describing the scenes as a "killing field." The Israeli military denied the claim, of course.

Chris Doyle, the director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding, said the GHF's aid distribution system in Gaza is an "abomination and utter disgrace." "It is an inversion of all the global humanitarian principles about independence, impartiality and neutrality," he told Al Jazeera.

"As we've seen, around about 550 Palestinians have been killed in trying to get food there, to travel by foot, long journeys, and then the families worry whether they'll ever come back again," Doyle said.

He went on to describe the situation as another example of how "Israel enjoys complete and utter impunity from any of the norms of war, of international law." "This has to be dismantled now, and the proper systems of delivery and distribution of aid set back up," he added.

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