

UN agency sounds alarm as one in 10 children in Gaza now malnourished



A Palestinian boy diagnosed with malnutrition, according to doctors, lies in a bed receiving treatment at the ICU of Nasser Hospital, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on December 7, 2024 [Mohammed Salem/Reuters]

U.S. nurse tells of Israeli authorities confiscating supplies of baby formula being brought into Gaza by medical workers.

Geneva, July 17 (RHC)-- One in every 10 children screened in clinics in Gaza run by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, is malnourished, as child hunger surges across the territory amid the continuing Israeli blockade on humanitarian aid.

Israel's punishing prevention of aid entering Gaza has led to "severe shortages of nutrition supplies", UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said on Tuesday, describing the situation for starving children as "engineered and man-made."

Lazzarini said the UN must be allowed to do its work in Gaza, particularly bringing in "humanitarian assistance at scale, including for children."

"Any additional delay to a ceasefire will cause more deaths," he said, noting that more than 870 starving Palestinians had been killed so far while trying to access food from the highly criticised distribution system run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), which is backed by Israel and the United States.

UNRWA's communications director, Juliette Touma, told reporters in Geneva via a videolink from Amman, Jordan, that "medicine, nutrition supplies, hygiene material, fuel are all rapidly running out."

"Our health teams are confirming that malnutrition rates are increasing in Gaza, especially since the siege was tightened more than four months ago on the second of March," Touma said. "One nurse that we spoke to told us that in the past, he only saw these cases of malnutrition in textbooks and documentaries," she said.

"As malnutrition among children spreads across the war-torn enclave, UNRWA has over 6,000 trucks of food, hygiene supplies, medicine, medical supplies outside of Gaza. They are all waiting to go in," Touma added. "The world cannot continue to look away."

Since January 2024, UNRWA said it had screened more than 240,000 boys and girls under the age of five in its clinics, adding that before the war, acute malnutrition was rare in Gaza.

Andee Clark Vaughan, an emergency nurse with the Palestinian Australian New Zealand Medical Association (PANZMA) based in Gaza, told Al Jazeera on Wednesday how Israeli authorities had confiscated baby formula from medical workers entering the territory.

"Immune systems are so compromised here because of the malnutrition," Vaughan said, describing how Palestinian mothers are so malnourished that they are unable to produce breast milk to feed their infants and forced to make difficult decisions to keep their children alive.

"What we've been seeing here is moms trying to do their utmost best, mixing water – which is often contaminated – with beans or lentils just to make something of sustenance to get these kids fed and get them nutrients," Vaughan added.

On Monday, UNICEF said that last month, more than 5,800 children were diagnosed with malnutrition in Gaza, including more than 1,000 children with severe, acute malnutrition. It said it was an increase for the fourth month in a row.

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and NEWS AGENCIES]

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