

Gaza on the Brink

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Gaza on the Brink: Humanitarian Law, Famine, and International Inaction

Context:

The **Gaza Strip** is currently facing one of the **worst humanitarian crises in recent history**, marked by extreme food shortages, repeated displacement, and collapsing infrastructure. This situation has been exacerbated by a prolonged blockade, disrupted aid deliveries, and violations of international humanitarian law. The crisis is not only a human tragedy but also a test of international legal frameworks and multilateral cooperation.

Aid Distribution Chaos in Rafah

- **Around 50 people were shot and injured** recently in **Rafah**, southern Gaza, during a chaotic aid distribution event.
 - The incident occurred at a site run by the **Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF)**, where thousands gathered in desperation for food.
 - The **United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)** has **distanced itself from GHF**, citing violations of **core humanitarian principles**.
 - **Jake Wood**, the head of GHF, **resigned on May 25**, denouncing the group's operational model as **non-compliant with humanitarian norms**.
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Gaza Under Siege: Blockade and Famine Threat

- Gaza has faced a **total blockade for nearly 3 months**, cutting off food, medicine, and fuel.
- According to the **Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)** report released on **May 12**, **acute food insecurity** in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels.

- The **IPC** is a global initiative that classifies the **severity of food insecurity**, involving **UN agencies, governments, NGOs, and civil society**.
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Effect of the Ceasefire and Resumption of Blockade

- During the **January 19-March 18 ceasefire**, aid temporarily reached **minimum acceptable levels**, slightly alleviating hunger.
 - After the ceasefire collapsed, **aid deliveries halted for nearly 11 weeks**, pushing **over 1.1 million Gazans** into **crisis or worse** food insecurity phases (IPC Phases 4 & 5).
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Violation of International Humanitarian Law

- The **denial of food** to civilians violates **Article 54 of Additional Protocol I** to the **Geneva Conventions**.
 - The article explicitly **prohibits starvation as a method of warfare**.
 - Using food as a **political or military tool** is classified as a **war crime** under international humanitarian law.
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Aid Deliveries: Nowhere Near Sufficient

- Israel reported that **665 aid trucks** had entered Gaza recently.
 - The **UN World Food Programme (WFP)** termed this figure a **"drop in the bucket"**.
 - Gaza requires a **minimum of 500-600 aid trucks per day** to meet basic human survival needs.
 - Confusion continues over how much aid reaches civilians, as **inspection rules** often force trucks to carry **half-empty loads**.
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Why UN and NGOs Rejected GHF's Aid Model

- UN agencies and humanitarian actors refused to cooperate with GHF due to its **collection-point distribution model**, which:
 - Excludes **immobile, elderly, or disabled populations**.
 - Encourages **crowding** and **chaos** at central distribution hubs.
 - Violates humanitarian principles of **humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence**.
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Forced Displacement and Unsafe "Safe Zones"

- GHF's model indirectly **encourages forced displacement** by restricting aid to select locations.
 - On average, **Gazans have been displaced once a month** since the conflict began.
 - Civilians are repeatedly moved to **"safe zones"** that are often **neither safe nor well-equipped**, undermining **human dignity and access to aid**.
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UNRWA Operations Undermined by New Israeli Laws

- Two Israeli laws passed in **October 2024** (enforced from **January 2025**) have **crippled UNRWA's functioning**, especially in **East Jerusalem** and **the West Bank**.

Impact in East Jerusalem

- UNRWA was banned from operating in areas considered **Israeli sovereign territory**.
- Consequences:
 - **Visas of international staff** were revoked.

- **UNRWA offices vacated.**
- **Around 800 students** were affected by **school closures.**
- **Clinics facing shutdown**, affecting **over 70,000 Palestinians.**

Operational Breakdown in West Bank

- A second law **banned all direct contact** between **UNRWA and Israeli officials**, dismantling vital coordination systems necessary for **relief delivery and logistics.**

UNRWA's Continued Role in Gaza

- Despite legal restrictions elsewhere, UNRWA remains **fully operational in Gaza**, where it is the **largest humanitarian agency**:
 - **12,000 staff** operate in Gaza (compared to just **300** across other UN bodies).

Key Services Provided

- **Logistics**: Manages major **aid warehouses and distribution networks.**
- **Healthcare**: Runs **mobile clinics**, offering **tent-to-tent services** for displaced populations.
- **Education**: The "**Back to Learning**" initiative serves over **20,000 children** with basic education and psychosocial support.
- **Sanitation**: Staff manage **waste removal** in refugee camps (though not camp management itself).

Accountability and Neutrality Measures

- UNRWA adheres to strict **neutrality protocols**:
 - In 2023, **19 staff members** were accused by Israel of misconduct.

- **All were suspended immediately**, and investigations were led by **UN oversight bodies**.
 - Although **evidence was limited**, **9 terminations** were upheld based on **balance of probabilities**, though no explicit violations were substantiated.
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India's Role in Supporting Multilateral Action in Gaza

- India, as a committed supporter of **multilateralism**, can:
 - Advocate for enforcement of **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** orders.
 - Uphold the **UN General Assembly's resolutions**.
 - Reinforce the importance of **international law** in conflict zones.
- While **multilateralism is imperfect**, it remains the **best mechanism** for **maintaining global peace, justice, and accountability**. Weakening it risks promoting **disorder and lawlessness** in global affairs.

