June 10, 2024

Dear Mr. Michael Fakhri,

In December 2023, humanitarian experts began raising the alarm for the probability of famine in the Gaza Strip as Israeli officials deliberately blocked and severely restricted the flow of aid and Israeli forces repeatedly attacked aid workers. Aid trucks were lined up outside the Rafah crossing, but Israeli officials restricted their entrance to a trickle, and forbade many basic essentials such as fuel that keeps hospitals running.

After Israeli ground forces and evacuation orders pushed many Palestinians into south Gaza, those who remained in north Gaza were increasingly isolated. Early this year, the Ministry of Health reported the first confirmed deaths from malnutrition and dehydration in Kamal Adwan Hospital in north Gaza. Nearly all of them were children.

Young children and children with disabilities are uniquely vulnerable to malnutrition and dehydration, and this manifested when the first deaths were announced. Of the approximately two dozen deaths attributed to malnutrition and dehydration by mid-March, the majority of deaths were either newborn babies—indicating that their pregnant mothers were malnourished for months before giving birth—or children with disabilities, who required special diets.

[Yazan Kafarneh](https://mondoweiss.net/2024/03/the-story-of-yazan-kafarneh-the-boy-who-starved-to-death-in-gaza/) was a nine-year-old Palestinian boy in Gaza with a congenital illness and his doctors prescribed a diet of milk, bananas, and eggs in addition to medication. His family was able to meet his needs prior to October, but his food and medication were impossible to find once Israeli officials cut off Palestinians in Gaza from the flow of aid and other goods. The lack of food and medicine killed Yazan, and his mother said, “We weren’t able to save him. And he didn’t need a miracle to save him either. All he needed was the food that we’ve always been able to provide for him.”

The latest data from medical staff and news reports in Gaza indicate that the death toll from starvation and dehydration has risen to at least 37, though we should understand this number to be a significant underestimate. Doctors and the Ministry of Health can only account for deaths that occur while the patient is hospitalized, or if a family reports the death. Given Israel’s campaign to decimate Gaza’s health care system, many families cannot reach hospitals.

In addition to being a hallmark of genocide, Israel’s policy of starvation is a direct attack on Palestinian children who are entitled to special rights under the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child), ratified by Israel in 1991, specifically:

* Article 6: (1) State Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life, and (2) State Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.
* Article 23: (1) States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.
* Article 24: (1) States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services, and (2) States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures: (a) To diminish infant and child mortality; (b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care; and (c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution.

To increase the food security of Palestinians in Gaza, Defense for Children International - Palestine calls for:

* An international arms embargo to stop the flow of weapons to the Israeli military;
* The international community to end all financial and diplomatic support to the Israeli government, push for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, fund and support a massive increase in humanitarian aid;
* Self-determination for the Palestinian people; and
* Urgent action to ensure accountability for violations by supporting efforts by the International Criminal Court to hold perpetrators accountable and by carrying out obligations under the Geneva Conventions or Rome Statute to exercise criminal jurisdiction and arrest persons alleged to have committed, or who ordered to have committed, international crimes.