

Food cannot be a weapon of war

Statement on the siege of Gaza

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) unequivocally condemns the heinous and indiscriminate attacks that have terrorized civilians – both Israelis and Palestinians – in the ongoing war in Israel and Gaza. Further, we condemn the catastrophic situation now unfolding in Gaza, in which food is illegally being denied to civilian populations. **Under no circumstance can it be justified to use food as a weapon of war.**

Now entering its third week, Israel's siege of the Gaza Strip is depriving essential food, fuel, water, electricity and medicine to 2.2 million Palestinian people, nearly half of whom are children. While the recent opening of a **humanitarian corridor** in Rafah will start to bring much needed aid to the region, the initial provisions are only a fraction of what is needed. Moreover, the continued air strikes prevent safe access to even these provisions by civilians.

The denial of access to food and water is a violation of international humanitarian law relating to the protection of civilians in times of war, including the **Geneva Conventions** and their **protocols**.

In 2018, the UN Security Council adopted **Resolution 2417**, which strongly condemns the starving of civilians as a method of warfare, as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access depriving civilians of “objects indispensable to their survival”. This includes food and water. Five years on, we note that the deplorable situation in Gaza is the **latest example of food being continually weaponized in conflicts around the world**.

Gaza had already endured a devastating **16-year blockade** and long-standing occupation, where 62% of the population required food assistance. On 19 October, **UN experts** expressed serious concerns about the tightening of the siege and recalled that “the UN Security Council has repeatedly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, which is prohibited under international humanitarian and criminal law.” Withholding food and water from an entire population, as Israel is now inflicting on Gaza, amounts to **collective punishment** – also illegal under international law.

This vicious cycle of conflict and food insecurity needs to be broken. **The right to food is a fundamental and universal human right.**

To avert further catastrophic impacts, we call for safe, unimpeded and sustained access to food, water and other humanitarian assistance to be restored for civilians in Gaza. **Aid flows must urgently be sped up and scaled up, and must include fuel for running hospitals and operating water pumps.**

Further, we call for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the violence and the return of hostages, as precursors to a just political process that will restore sustainable peace and security, and build a basis for lasting food security for all parties.

Finally, we call on all parties to respect international law and for an end to the use of food as a weapon of war.