

Human Rights Watch says Israel is using starvation as a weapon in Gaza.



Palestinian children waiting in line for a food distribution in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, last week. Human Rights Watch has accused Israel of blocking deliveries of food, water and fuel and impeding humanitarian access in violation of international law. Credit...Fatima Shbair/Associated Press

Human Rights Watch accused Israel on Monday of using starvation of civilians as a weapon in its war in Gaza against Hamas by blocking deliveries of food, water and fuel, and by impeding humanitarian access. The group said Israel's actions could constitute a war crime.

It cited statements by senior Israeli leaders to support its claim that depriving Gazans of necessities was a policy implemented by the country's armed forces.

An Israeli government spokesman, Eylon Levy, rejected the report as "a lie" and blamed Hamas for hijacking aid intended for civilians in Gaza.

Human Rights Watch cited a statute of the [International Criminal Court](#) that lists as a war crime the act of "intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies."

On Oct. 9, two days after Hamas-led attacks killed roughly 1,200 people in Israel, according to Israeli authorities, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant ordered a "complete siege" of Gaza, a territory already impoverished by a [16-year blockade](#) by Israel and Egypt. Mr. Gallant said that no food, water or fuel would be allowed into the territory, which is home to about 2.2 million people.

Trucks carrying food, water and medicine began trickling into the Gaza Strip through a crossing with Egypt about two weeks after the fighting began, but humanitarian officials have said the aid that is entering the territory is only a sliver of what is needed.

But Mr. Levy, the Israeli government spokesman, said that Israel had the capacity to inspect more than twice as many aid trucks as were entering the territory.

"We're still pumping water into Gaza through two pipelines and have placed no restrictions on entry of food and water," he said.

The lack of basic goods has caused many of Gaza's hospitals to cease functioning and led the United Nations to warn in November that [civilians in Gaza](#) faced the "immediate possibility of starvation." The U.N. World Food Program said last week that more than half of Gaza's households were facing "severe levels of hunger."

Human Rights Watch also cited comments by other Israeli officials who said that permission to deliver humanitarian aid into Gaza would be contingent on the release of hostages captured by Hamas during its Oct. 7 attacks. In one example, it cited a comment by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in October in which he said he would not allow food and medicine into Gaza from Israel while hostages remained held.

During a weeklong truce between Israel and Hamas last month that allowed for the release of roughly 100 hostages in exchange for about 240 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel, the Israeli authorities allowed more supplies, including fuel, into Gaza, but aid groups have warned that the amount getting in is a fraction of what is needed.

"Israel has been depriving Gaza's population of food and water, a policy spurred on or endorsed by high-ranking Israeli officials and reflecting an intent to starve civilians as a method of warfare," said Omar Shakir, Human Rights Watch's director for Israel and the Palestinian territories.

"World leaders should be speaking out against this abhorrent war crime, which has devastating effects on Gaza's population," Mr. Shakir [said in a statement](#).

Nearly 20,000 people have died in Gaza, many as a result of Israeli airstrikes, according to Gazan health authorities, who say that the majority of those who have died have been women and children.

— [Matthew Mpoke Bigg](#)