

Starvation as torture: Deliberate hunger violations against Palestinian children

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Key points of interest

- Israel's obstruction of aid and destruction of food, water, and health infrastructure in Gaza are intentional, systematic acts causing child malnutrition and deaths—meeting legal thresholds for starvation as a method of warfare and torture, and supporting an inference of genocidal intent.
- These practices trigger state duties—to recognize starvation as torture (*jus cogens*), ensure immediate, unimpeded humanitarian access, and pursue criminal investigations under CAT, the Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Statute, including state responsibility and universal jurisdiction.

Abstract

Introduction. This paper examines Israel's deliberate use of starvation and deprivation against Palestinian children in Gaza since 7 October 2023, arguing these are not collateral effects but a systematic, discriminatory strategy. By impeding food, water and medical care and destroying civilian infrastructure, the conduct meets thresholds for starvation as a method of warfare, torture, and genocide. **Materials and Methods.** We conducted detailed interviews using a semi-structured protocol (Defense for Children International–Palestine, 2024) triangulated with secondary human-rights reporting and legal data. **Results.** Evidence shows coordinated, prolonged obstruction of humanitarian aid and destruction of agricultural land, water systems, and medical infrastructure, producing catastrophic child malnutrition and documented deaths from starvation and disease. Where these practices are intentional and pursued with knowledge of their effects, they constitute torture under international law. The discriminatory impact on Palestinian civilians, especially children, supports an inference of genocidal intent and grounds state responsibility and universal jurisdiction. **Conclusions.** Israel's starvation policy toward children in Gaza qualifies as torture and amounts to genocide. The paper urges recognition of starvation as torture under *jus cogens*, immediate unimpeded humanitarian access, and prompt criminal investigations. States must enforce obligations under CAT, the Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Statute to protect Palestinian children's rights and dignity.

Keywords: Gaza, Palestinian children, Starvation, Torture

Introduction

Since October 7, 2023, Israel has escalated its longstanding policies of domination and control over the Palestinian people into an unprecedented campaign of destruction in Gaza. Beyond relentless bombings and ground assaults, Israel has deliberate-

ly weaponized starvation as a central tool of war. This tactic has been particularly targeted at Palestinian children, especially those with disabilities and newborns, whose acute susceptibility to malnutrition and dehydration continues to cause mass

* The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Journal, the Publisher or the Editors

death and suffering. Israel's use of starvation is a systematic strategy aimed at eradicating Palestinian life and society.

While the prohibition of starvation as a method of warfare is well established under international humanitarian law, there is growing recognition that when starvation is inflicted intentionally, systematically, and with a discriminatory purpose, it also constitutes torture under international human rights law. The deliberate infliction of severe pain and suffering through the deprivation of food, water, and medical care, with the intent to punish, intimidate, or destroy, squarely falls within the definition of torture codified under the Convention Against Torture.

This paper draws on evidence collected by Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCIP) to demonstrate that Israel's use of starvation against Palestinian children are not isolated violations, but integral to a broader strategy of torture, collective punishment, and genocide. As an occupying power under international law, Israel has an affirmative obligation to protect and sustain the occupied population's welfare, including ensuring access to food, water, and medical care. Israel's deliberate destruction of Gaza's life-sustaining resources, obstruction of humanitarian aid, and use of starvation as a weapon against Palestinians not only violate foundational components of international law, but also amount to the crime of genocide, aimed at dismantling Palestinian existence.

Recognising starvation as a form of torture has critical legal and moral implications. Torture constitutes a peremptory norm under international law, triggering universal jurisdiction and obligating the international community to act. This paper argues that international accountability mechanisms must urgently recognise and address Israel's starvation policies not merely as war crimes, but as acts of torture and components of genocide, demanding immediate and decisive intervention.

Method

Between October 2023 and July 2024, the research team documented individual cases of infant and child deaths related to malnutrition and starvation in the Gaza Strip. These cases were selected as illustrative examples of broader patterns of deprivation previously quantified by humanitarian agencies and corroborated by aggregate data from Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCIP) and other protection actors. Case identification was conducted through direct interviews with family members and review of relevant medical records provided by treating clinicians. Interviews were carried out predominantly at displaced persons' shelters and hospital premises. Interviewers included trained human rights field researchers with prior experience in documenting violations against children. All

members of the team underwent a one-day refresher training on the use of the standardized child rights documentation protocol¹ that included (a) Identification data – name, sex, age, date of birth, (b) Circumstances of displacement and deprivation – access to food, water, shelter, and healthcare during the relevant period; (c) Medical history and clinical course – symptoms, diagnoses, interventions, and outcomes, with verification from medical professionals when possible. Medical verification was obtained from paediatricians at Kamal Adwan Hospital, Al-Shifa Hospital, and other facilities. In all cases where hospital records were inaccessible due to the destruction of infrastructure or the loss of personal belongings of the family, clinician testimony was used as a secondary verification source.

The cases presented in this paper do not constitute an exhaustive list of cases, nor are they collected for epidemiological purposes. Through the analysis of individual narratives, the paper wants to exemplify the use and impacts of starvation in children.

Ethical considerations

All interviews with parents were conducted with verbal informed consent. Interviewers adhered to a trauma-informed approach.

An overview of medical literature

Starvation is a severe form of undernutrition caused by prolonged and inadequate intake of calories and essential nutrients. Clinically, it manifests as wasting (low weight-for-height), stunting (low height-for-age), and significant weight loss, all of which carry serious and potentially fatal medical complications (Alnabih et al., 2024; Abuzerr et al., 2024). In children, starvation initiates a cascade of metabolic changes, which lead to starvation ketosis, a condition that may cause lethargy, vomiting, hypoglycemia, and seizures, especially in children under ten, whose energy reserves are limited and metabolic needs higher (Alnabih et al., 2024; Abuzerr et al., 2024).

As starvation progresses, the breakdown of protein results in muscle wasting, weakened immune responses, and greater infection susceptibility (Bahour et al., 2025). Gastrointestinal function deteriorates due to mucosal atrophy, leading to malabsorption and diarrhea (Sah and Dawas, 2024). Cognitive consequences include diminished attention, memory, and psychomotor functioning, often accompanied by apathy, irritability, and social withdrawal. Children may present with stunting,

1 Defense for Children International – Palestine. (2024). *Child rights documentation and interview protocol* [Unpublished internal protocol].

wasting, or signs of kwashiorkor, such as edema from protein deficiency (Abuzerr et al., 2024).

In Gaza, a mixed-methods study conducted in April 2024 found an average weight loss of 18.7 kg among civilians in the northern governorates, indicating widespread and severe malnutrition (Alnabih et al., 2024). Children in Gaza were presenting with electrolyte imbalances, diarrhea, and secondary infections, exacerbated by lack of clean water and healthcare (Sah and Dawas, 2024; Abuzerr et al., 2024).

Long-term effects of childhood malnutrition are profound and often irreversible. Screenings in northern Gaza confirm that one in six children under two is acutely malnourished, far surpassing the WHO emergency threshold (Abuzerr et al., 2024). Malnutrition in early life, especially during the critical first 1,000 days of life, has led to permanent stunting and impaired linear growth. Studies link this to lower IQ, poor academic achievement, and persistent behavioural difficulties, likely tied to structural changes in the brain, including reduced myelination and impaired neural connectivity (Alnabih et al., 2024; Sah and Dawas, 2024). These changes contribute to a cycle of trauma and social harm, with implications for Gaza's future recovery.

Starvation has also been documented as weaponised against pregnant women. Malnutrition in pregnancy is associated with intrauterine growth restriction, low birth weight, and premature birth, all of which are documented in hospitals across Gaza (Sah and Dawas, 2024).

Treating childhood malnutrition requires WHO-guided, multi-phase care involving clinical monitoring, therapeutic feeding, and micronutrient supplementation. However, reintroducing food after prolonged starvation carries serious risks. Refeeding syndrome, a life-threatening condition marked by shifts in fluid and electrolytes like phosphate, potassium, and magnesium, can result in cardiac failure, seizures, and death if not carefully managed (Abuzerr et al., 2024). Such care is not accessible to the thousands of children enduring starvation in Gaza.

Starvation as Torture

Under international law, torture is the intentional infliction of severe physical or mental pain for purposes like obtaining information, punishment, intimidation, or discrimination, by or with the consent of a public official.² The constitution of

starvation as torture under international law has been debated by international scholars and can be assessed based on the intent, severity and resulting suffering of the starvation (Dannenbaum, 2024; Global Rights Compliance, 2024). One might argue that using starvation as a means of removing a civilian population from an area, rather than using lethal force, might indeed constitute a war crime, but may not function as a method of torture. Yet, in the context of Israel's ongoing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, Israel is intentional using starvation as a method of producing irreversible damage, qualifying as torture (B'Tselem, 2024). With no safe place in Gaza left for Palestinians, and the inability of most Palestinians to leave Gaza, Israel's state policy of depriving Gaza of life-sustaining resources, Israel seeks to cause slow, pain and suffering to thousands of Palestinians, especially newborns and children.

Israel's Historic Control of Palestinians' Natural Resources

Israel's control of Palestinian people's access to land, food and the means of agricultural production, from machinery to fertilizer, are hallmarks of its ongoing illegal occupation of the oPt and its continuous oppression of the Palestinian people. Since 2007, Israel has imposed a blockade on Gaza, which imposed severe restrictions on Gaza's agricultural production and fishing industry, among many other facets of Palestinians' livelihood. Fishing, a culturally vital and historic means of livelihood for Palestinians in Gaza, has been heavily restricted by Israeli authorities, narrowing fishing zones to an unsustainable limit. From the sea, the Israeli military routinely fires at Palestinian fishing vessels, causing injuries and fatalities, detains fishermen, and arbitrarily confiscates boats and equipment (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2019; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2013). On land, Israel has squeezed Gaza's use of agricultural land along the perimeter fence, illegally erected along the border of the Gaza Strip. Although this land belongs to Palestinians, Israeli forces have implemented a "buffer zone" that extends Israel's control over land along the perimeter fence. This buffer zone has been subject to aerial spraying of herbicides, further reducing an already restricted access to farmland (United Nations General Assembly, 2018).

2 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (adopted 10 December 1984, entered into force 26 June 1987) 1465 UNTS 85. Hereafter CAT. Article 1 of the UN Convention Against Torture, torture is defined as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted

on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions."

Access to potable water has also been systematically placed under the control of the occupying power. In the West Bank, aquifers are tapped by Israel's privatized water company, Mekorot, and are sold to Palestinians, the sole option for Palestinians living in villages without running water, while existing Palestinian wells are seized or destroyed by Israeli settlers, as well as Israeli authorities, who also ensure any permits for a new well to be built or repaired are routinely denied (Al-Haq, 2022). Palestinians' access to water sources in the West Bank has also severely restricted Palestinian agriculture and plantations for products such as dates, which require a large amount of water to produce. Meanwhile, in Gaza, subject to extremely poor water quality, Palestinians are forced to rely heavily on desalination plants that remain dependent on access to the electrical grid that is owned and controlled by Israel (DCIP, 2025). In addition, illegal Israeli settlements and settlers within the oPt have continued to pilage natural resources within the oPt for export, including wine, Dead Sea minerals and olives (Nicoletti & Hearne, 2012; Al-Haq & Don't Buy into Occupation Coalition, 2022).

In its capacity as an illegal occupying power, Israel has entrenched a regime of control over Palestinians' access to food and water, creating a dependency on international aid and products parasitically sold by Israel for survival. Under international law, an occupying power must administer resources for the benefit of the occupied population. The Hague Regulations of 1907 make clear that natural resources must be preserved and may not be exploited for the occupier's benefit (Hague Convention (IV), 1907). Israel's exploitation and destruction of Palestinian resources violate these obligations, establishing an economic and physical stranglehold that predates the most recent siege. It is within this context that we must explore Israel's use of starvation as a tool of torture.

Israel's Actions in Gaza: Environmental and Economic Destruction

Following October 7, 2023, Israel has further exploited its control over Palestine's natural resources by attacking all life-sustaining agriculture, water supplies and farmland throughout and across Gaza. Israeli forces have directly targeted agricultural areas within Gaza, attacking greenhouses, food warehouses, mills and bakeries, aiming to eliminate Palestinians' capacity to grow and produce enough food to feed the population (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Israel has deliberately cut electricity to what few desalination plants have not been destroyed within Gaza, deliberately minimising Palestinians' drinking water (Associated Press, 2025). The relentless military campaign has resulted in large-scale environmental destruction amounting to ecocide (Forensic Architecture, 2024). The systematic targeting of Gaza's agricultural land, water infrastructure, and food pro-

duction facilities has deliberately undermined the environmental foundations necessary for human survival. Farmlands have been razed, irrigation systems destroyed, and water sources contaminated, rendering vast areas of Gaza uninhabitable. This environmental devastation is intentional and calculated to inflict conditions of life that make the continued existence of the Palestinian population impossible. By destroying Gaza's environment, Israeli forces have contributed to a broader aim of genocide by eliminating Palestinians from their homeland.

Israel's Use of Starvation against Palestinian Children

On 9 October 2023, Israel halted all entry of food, water, medicine, fuel and electricity into Gaza. Throughout the subsequent 15 months, Israel allowed only a limited amount of aid to enter Gaza, while simultaneously targeting aid convoys, aid workers, and Palestinians collecting such aid. In June 2024, famine was declared to have spread throughout Gaza (OHCHR, 2024), as Israel's deliberate strategy of deprivation and starvation expanded the precarious food situation within Gaza into a catastrophic collapse of all food and healthcare systems, resulting in the widespread starvation of children.

In the first months of 2024, paediatricians at Kamal Adwan Hospital reported admitting between 70 and 100 cases of malnourished children daily, with severe cases rising steadily amid Israel's total blockades on aid and supplies. Table 1 reflects case examples to illustrate clinical presentation and causes of death.

Among the victims was Karam Mohammad Adel Qadada, a 10-year-old boy, who succumbed to malnutrition and electrolyte imbalances on 30 March 2024. Trapped for a week in Al-Shifa Hospital without food supplies and later transferred between collapsing medical facilities, Karam's death illustrates one of the first cases of the direct consequences of the systemic deprivation of food.

Abdulaziz Abdurrahman Salem, a newborn infant displaced multiple times during his mother's pregnancy, died of cardiac arrest at just one week old. His mother, unable to breast-feed due to extreme hunger, found no formula available in the besieged hospital, leading to Abdulaziz's death from hunger and lack of oxygen. Similarly, Anwar Mustafa Al-Khudari, a three-month-old boy, died of malnutrition. As there was no formula due to Israel's blockade, and as his mother could not produce any milk due to her own lack of nutrition, Anwar would cry all night from hunger. His temperature rose and he started having convulsions. He died four days later on 14 February 2024.

Jude Ahmad Al-Barsh, another one-week-old infant who died on 2 March 2024, was deprived of both breastmilk and infant formula due to Israel blocking the entry of aid into Gaza. Jude's mother, who had given birth to triplets after a decade of

Table 1. Deaths by starvation. *Kawal Adwan Hospital*

Name	Age	Date of death	Key deprivation factors	Reported clinical course / outcome	Notes (facility / context)
Abdulaziz Abdurrahman Salem	1 week	2 March 2024	Mother unable to breastfeed due to extreme hunger; no infant formula available	Kamal Adwan Hospital. Cardiac arrest; death due to hydrolytic disbalance and lack of oxygen	Mother displaced multiple times during pregnancy
Anwar Mustafa Al-Khudari	3 months	14 Feb 2024	No formula due to blockade; mother unable to lactate due to under-nutrition	Kamal Adwan (Beit Lahia) Persistent hunger. Fever and convulsions preceding death from malnutrition	—
Jude (Joud) Ahmad Al-Barsh	1 week	2 Mar 2024	Deprived of breastmilk and formula due to aid blockade	Kamal Adwan Hospital Placed in nursery for a week. Died from starvation after seven days	One of triplets; aid entry blocked
Sahar Tawfiq Al-Zabda	Neonate	28 Feb 2024	Malnutrition with severe dehydration; mother couldn't breastfeed;	Kamal Adwan Hospital ICU with severe respiratory distress during 10 days until death by exhaustion	Father unable to register birth amidst siege and displacement.
Mila Saleh Younis Abdunabi	3 years	2 Mar 2024	Deprived of food. Electrolyte deficiencies (potassium & magnesium)	Kamal Adwan Hospital ICU with severe respiratory distress during 4 days until death.	Mother is ICU nurse at Kamal Adwan Hospital.
Musab Salem Abu Asr	4 years	11 Feb 2024	Family unable to afford food prices as they spiked under blockade. Emaciation and progressive wasting.	Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, transferred to Kamal Adwan Progressive “skeletal” malnourishment → death	Transferred due to shut of ICU unit at Al-Ahli hospital due to power outages
Nahed Othman Haboush	3 months	3 Apr 2024	Repeated dehydration; Two hospitalizations. Mother unable to breastfeed due to lack of food; no formula due to siege	Kamal Adwan Hospital ICU and respiratory support for 3 days	Second child in family lost to starvation

infertility, was forced to witness one daughter die from starvation within days of her birth. Sahar Tawfiq Al-Zabda, who died on 28 February 2024, similarly died of malnutrition after spending ten days on a respirator at Kamal Adwan Hospital, her father unable even to register her birth amid the ongoing blockade.

Deprived of food, three-year-old Mila Saleh Younis Abdunabi died from malnutrition and severe deficiencies in potassi-

um and calcium on 2 March 2024 after relying on respirators in the days leading up to her death. Her mother, who worked as an intensive care unit nurse at Kamal Adwan Hospital, was unable to save her daughter.

The family of Musab Salem Abu Asr, a four-year-old boy who deteriorated into skeletal malnourishment before his death on 11 February 2024, was not able to buy any food due

to the skyrocketing prices of food due to the Israeli blockade. Nahed Othman Haboush, only three months old, died on 3 April 2024, after repeated hospitalisations for dehydration. Nahed was the second child his family lost to starvation, as his mother was not able to breastfeed due to the lack of food, nor was any baby formula available due to the Israeli siege.

On 2 March 2025, Israel once again barred all aid from entering Gaza. As of 30 April, Israel has still not allowed any aid to enter Gaza, as aid organisations' food supply runs dry, such as the World Food Programme (United Nations, 2025). As of 25 April 2025, at least 52 children have died from starvation in Gaza, while thousands more are at risk, as Israel continues to prevent lifesaving supplies from reaching the Palestinian people in Gaza (Al-Mughrabi & Farge, 2025).

Starvation in Israeli Detention

Israel's use of starvation extends to its treatment of Palestinian detainees, including children. According to documentation collected by DCIP, child detainees report receiving spoiled or insufficient food in Israeli prisons. The deliberate manipulation of food quality constitutes cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and torture.

The systematic use of starvation within Israeli detention facilities represents an extension of Israel's broader policy of deprivation against Palestinian civilians, now manifesting through the direct targeting of imprisoned children.

The death of Walid Khalid Abdullah Ahmad, a 17-year-old Palestinian child detainee from Silwad in the central occupied West Bank, illustrates the lethal effects of deliberate starvation policies in detention. Held in Megiddo prison located in northern Israel, Walid suffered prolonged malnutrition, dehydration, and untreated infections, leading to extreme body wasting, colitis, and fatal internal injuries. An autopsy revealed that Walid exhibited signs of blunt force trauma, deep muscle and fat wasting, and inflammatory damage likely from beatings. Despite multiple visits to the prison clinic where he reported head injuries and severe hunger, Walid was systematically denied adequate food, water, and medical treatment until his collapse and death in March 2025. His death — the first documented death of a Palestinian child inside Israeli prisons in the history of Israel's occupation — is emblematic of a pattern where starvation, medical neglect, and abuse are deliberately employed against Palestinian child detainees.

Similarly, Mustafa (pseudonym) was abducted by Israeli authorities in January 2025 and was first held at Sde Teiman detention camp, where detainees were forced to kneel for hours while blindfolded, denied access to clean water, and given

moldy, insufficient food unfit for consumption. The absence of clean water led to widespread dehydration, illness, and infections among the children. After two weeks, Mustafa was transferred to Megiddo prison, where he continued to suffer from deliberate starvation, receiving only a few spoonfuls of rice per day. The severe caloric deprivation caused malnutrition, constipation, fungal infections, and persistent physical weakness. Medical requests were systematically ignored or met with violence, deepening the physical and psychological harm he endured throughout his detention.

These cases reveal the use of starvation, contaminated food, and denial of necessities as methods of torture designed to break down the physical and psychological resilience of Palestinian child detainees. Moreover, starvation within Israeli detention facilities is not a byproduct of war but an intentional tactic wielded to inflict maximum harm on Palestinian children, thereby advancing broader goals of control, punishment, and extermination.

Hunger-related deaths in Gaza

Beyond deaths from direct starvation and from disease exacerbated by hunger, a human-rights accounting must also include civilians killed while seeking food. As of 13 August 2025, United Nations reporting estimated 1,373 such deaths—859 near distribution sites and 514 along convoy routes—with children reportedly comprising at least half of the victims.³

Legal Implications

Israel's use of starvation against Palestinians constitutes multiple, overlapping violations of international law (Defense for Children International - Palestine, 2025). The use of starvation as a method of warfare is prohibited under customary international law and is explicitly recognised as a war crime under the Rome Statute, as well as a crime against humanity, when carried out systematically against a civilian population (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005; Rome Statute of the ICC, 1998). Moreover, the obstruction of humanitarian assistance, including food, water, and medical supplies, breaches the Fourth Geneva Convention (GCIV) and violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), particularly Articles 6 and 24, which safeguard children's rights to life, survival, and access to health services (GC IV, 1949; CRC, 1989). Together, these violations demonstrate that Israel's starvation policies are not isolated infractions, but are part of a broader framework of inter-

3 United Nations. (2025, August 13). Gaza: Nearly 1,400 Palestinians killed while seeking food, as UN warns airdrops are no solution. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/08/1165552>

national crimes amounting to systematic and widespread attacks against a civilian population.

In the context of Israel's ongoing illegal occupation, Israel's obligations are even more stringent. Under the GCIV and the Hague Regulations, Israel, as the occupying power, has an affirmative duty to ensure the welfare of the civilian population, including providing adequate food, medical care, and humanitarian relief, specifically obligating the occupying powers to ensure the provision of food and medical supplies and mandates special protections for children. These obligations are reinforced by international human rights law, including the CRC and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantee children's rights to life, health, and protection from torture and inhuman treatment even in situations of armed conflict and occupation (ICCPR, 1966; CAT 1984).

Israel's systematic use of starvation against Palestinians must be recognised not only as a war crime and grave breach of humanitarian law, but also as a method of torture under international law. Israel's deliberate infliction of severe pain and suffering through starvation, combined with coercive and discriminatory intent against Palestinians, constitutes acts of persecution and inhuman treatment under the Rome Statute and the CAT. The *actus reus* of Israel's starvation tactic has been made all too clear through our extensive documentation. However, it is the demonstrable intentionality behind these actions, evident by statements from Israeli leaders and military commanders (Law for Palestine, 2024), that highlights the *mens rea* behind Israel's actions. It is clear that Israel's use of starvation is intentionally designed to punish, intimidate, and weaken the Palestinian population collectively and individually, with the clear involvement and authorization of Israeli state authorities.

Recognizing starvation as torture is not a semantic exercise but has real legal consequences. Torture is prohibited absolutely under all circumstances, including war, occupation, and national security emergencies. Importantly, it is a *jus cogens* norm — a peremptory norm of international law from which no derogation is permitted. Acts of torture trigger universal jurisdiction obligations, requiring states to investigate and prosecute offenders wherever they are found. States that fail to act may themselves be in breach of their international obligations under treaties such as the CAT and the Geneva Conventions. Framing Israel's starvation policies as torture thus highlights the gravity of the violations and underscores the corresponding international responsibility to hold perpetrators accountable and to provide reparations to victims.

Beyond its classification as torture, Israel's starvation strategy also constitutes collective punishment, itself prohibited under Article 33 of GCIV. Collective punishment refers to the

imposition of penalties, suffering, or retaliation against a civilian population for acts they have not individually committed. Israel's policies of starvation affect the entire civilian population of Gaza without distinction and are paradigmatic examples of collective punishment. The Rome Statute further recognises collective punishment as an inhuman act under crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population (Art.7(h), Rome Statute of the ICC, 1998). The intentional infliction of mass suffering through starvation functions not only to punish individuals but to break the collective social fabric of Palestinian society. In this sense, Israel's use of starvation amounts to a form of societal torture, systematically dismantling the structures for survival that sustain a community and people's life.

The deliberate starvation of Palestinians must be understood not only as a violation of specific legal categories but as part of a broader, coordinated policy of extermination, dehumanisation, and genocide. Israel's starvation of Palestinians is not merely a violation of humanitarian norms; it is part of a broader genocidal strategy aimed at dismantling Palestinian existence.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the above findings, we recommend:

- Enact an immediate and comprehensive arms embargo and unilateral sanctions alongside diplomatic and financial pressure to pressure Israeli authorities and forces to end the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, the Israeli apartheid regime, and the Israeli military occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory;
- Protect the integrity of investigations by the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court that aim to hold perpetrators accountable, including condemning sanctions and other punitive threats or actions toward members of the Court;
- Use all available means, including those above, to demand Israeli authorities to uphold Palestinian children's rights as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the State of Israel has ratified; and
- Enact the provisional measures as ordered by the International Court of Justice by providing immediate and uninhibited aid to Gaza, by any means necessary, as is the *erga omnes* duty of all UN member states under international law.

Conclusion

The starvation of Palestinian children is not a collateral consequence of armed conflict; it is a deliberate policy employed with precision and intent. As this paper has demonstrated, Israel's systematic deprivation of food, water, and medical aid—compounded by its direct assaults on Gaza's agricultural and human-

itarian infrastructure—constitutes torture under international law. Israel's use of starvation is not merely a war crime or violation of humanitarian principles; it is the intentional infliction of severe physical and mental suffering for purposes of domination, punishment, and erasure.

Israel's starvation policy violates core obligations under international law and further breaches the non-derogable prohibition of torture as a *jus cogens* norm, triggering universal jurisdiction and compelling international accountability. The denial of aid and the targeting of civilians, including children, through starvation must be recognized as both individual and collective torture—acts that dismantle not just bodies, but the social fabric of a people.

These acts are not isolated, but form part of a coordinated strategy aimed at dismantling Palestinian life and sovereignty. The international community must respond with clarity and urgency. Legal accountability is not optional—it is a legal and moral imperative. Failing to act in the face of weaponized starvation erodes the foundation of international law and leaves children in Gaza to die not of hunger, but of impunity.

Addendum

This paper was submitted in April 2025 and collected evidence of a systematic practice of Starvation against children. Accord-

ing to data reported by WHO, UNICEF, and the Nutrition Cluster⁴ in mid-2025, Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) index was 24% in North Gaza and Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) was 9% in the same area.

In August 2025 (see Table 2) the United Nations System declared famine (IPC Phase 5) in Gaza Governorate⁵ (Gaza city). The three famine thresholds were breached: Global Acute Malnutrition (prevalence of acute malnutrition among children) > 30%, SAM: Severe Acute Malnutrition (critical malnutrition) > 10%, CDR (Crude Death Rate (deaths per 10,000 people per day) > 2/10,000/day; U5DR (Under-Five Death Rate (deaths per 10,000 children under five per day) >

- 4 World Health Organization. (2025, July 27). Malnutrition rates reach alarming levels in Gaza. <https://www.who.int/news/item/27-07-2025-malnutrition-rates-reach-alarming-levels-in-gaza--who-warns>; UNICEF & WFP. (2025). Gaza Nutrition Cluster Brief – June 2025. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int>; OCHA. (2025, August 12). Flash Update #116: Gaza Humanitarian Impact. <https://reliefweb.int>, WFP. (2025, April). Emergency Food Security Assessment – Gaza Strip. Retrieved from <https://www.wfp.org>
- 5 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Children's Fund, World Food Programme, & World Health Organization. (2025, August 22). Famine confirmed for first time in Gaza.

Table 2. UN-Confirmed Famine in Gaza City (August 2025): Reasons, Evidence, and Sources. Date: 24 August 2025

Reason / Driver	What UN/IPC Reported	Key Figures (as cited)	Primary Source / Date
Famine criteria met (IPC Phase 5)	UN-backed IPC assessed—on reasonable evidence—that the three famine thresholds were breached in Gaza Governorate (Gaza City). FAO, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO jointly confirmed the famine status.	Area-level criteria: extreme food deprivation; GAM $\geq$ 30% (or SAM $\geq$ 10%); CDR > 2/10,000/day (or U5DR > 4/10,000/day). >500,000 already in IPC 5; projection >640,000 by late Sep 2025.	Joint FAO/UNICEF/WFP/WHO release, 22 Aug 2025
Collapse of food access	Household hunger indicators sharply worsened, with adults skipping meals so children could eat; many reported going days without food.	In Gaza City, very severe hunger >3× higher vs. May; 39% reported going days without eating.	Joint FAO/UNICEF/WFP/WHO release, 22 Aug 2025
Child & maternal malnutrition surge	A sharp rise in child acute malnutrition and risks for pregnant/lactating women; poor birth outcomes rapidly increasing.	>12,000 children newly acutely malnourished in July (6× since start-2025); 1/4 severe; 1 in 5 babies premature/underweight.	Joint FAO/UNICEF/WFP/WHO release, 22 Aug 2025

Acronyms: IPC: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (global standard for classifying food insecurity and famine); GAM : Global Acute Malnutrition (prevalence of acute malnutrition among children); SAM: Severe Acute Malnutrition (most critical form of acute malnutrition). CDR: Crude Death Rate (deaths per 10,000 people per day). U5DR: Under-Five Death Rate (deaths per 10,000 children under five per day).

4/10,000/day). Almost 40% reported “days without eating”. The projection is that more than 640,000 persons will be in IPC5 by late September.

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