

Europe must act: a unified call to end complicity in the Gaza famine and genocide

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The last 22 months, Palestinians have been living through starvation, forced displacement, indiscriminate killing, the blockade of humanitarian aid at the borders and the deliberate destruction of health facilities and ambulances by the Israeli army.¹ This is not simply a humanitarian crisis. It is a public health catastrophe—engineered by the Israeli government, and recognized as a man-made famine² and a genocide.³ Despite this, European governments have remained surprisingly silent for almost two years of its unfolding, or—worse—actively complicit. Symbolic actions now are not enough. We call on all European States to take immediate, coordinated, and courageous action to stop the mass suffering and uphold the international legal system.

Half a million people are now living in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 5 famine conditions, while the entire population is at risk.⁴ Malnutrition-related deaths—especially among children—are surging with thousands more requiring urgent clinical treatment. Hospitals have been systematically attacked, with at least 125 facilities targeted and more than 2600 health care workers killed or injured⁵ and 10% of the population has been killed or physically injured by Israeli military operations.⁶ Such actions constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law and echo the crimes seen in Rwanda in 1994, and the Biafra famine. Today, Gaza's civilians, especially its children, are living through daily starvation that leaves lifelong growth and psychological effects. Evidence from historical famines, such as the 1944/45 Dutch Hunger Winter,⁷ shows that survivors suffer intergenerational trauma and chronic disease for decades. Starvation is not only a war crime; it is a tool of societal torture.

European countries have largely failed to confront the deliberate starvation policies imposed by Israel and the blockade on impartial humanitarian aid. There was no shortage of evidence to act upon, as Gazan civilians and journalists have relentlessly documented these atrocities, at great personal cost, since October 2023.

These policies of inaction were maintained as hospitals were bombed, international law was ignored, and aid was militarized through the inhumane Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. This inaction stands in stark contrast to the efforts of European countries and their demonstrated solidarity with Ukraine.

Israel has already caused the displacement of the entire population of Gaza, forcing almost two million people into an ever-shrinking, densely packed area in the south of the Strip that increasingly resembles a concentration camp.⁸ At least 10% of the population has been displaced outside Gaza, scattered across uncertain borders with little to no protection. Over 115,000 Palestinians are now in Egypt, facing an “invisible health crisis”.⁹ Lacking formal refugee status, excluded from national health systems, and without the protection of UNRWA or UNHCR mandates, they remain in a legal and humanitarian void.

Leading researchers, global health consortia, and public health associations have denounced these acts. The Standing Together for Nutrition Consortium has condemned the deliberate obstruction of food and medical aid and called for unimpeded, unconditional humanitarian access. Over 3000 academics and professionals have already signed open letters urging recognition of the Gaza genocide.¹⁰ These initiatives echo the strong voices from Palestinians globally. It is time for European governments to listen.

We call on European countries to:

1. **Recognise the famine and the genocide in Gaza as man-made and criminal**, and support the investigation of these acts as violations of international humanitarian law.
2. **Cease all forms of military exports and intelligence cooperation** with Israel until humanitarian access is restored and indiscriminate violence ceases.
3. **Uphold international law and protect its core institutions** in the face of ill-intentioned attempts—foremost by the United States and Israel—to undermine them or apply exclusionary interpretations.

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4. **Fully reinstate funding and access for UN agencies**, especially UNRWA, WHO, and WFP, ensuring their operations are unimpeded.
5. **Open humanitarian corridors** for food, fuel, and medicine coordinated by impartial humanitarian agencies, and provide safe refuge for displaced civilians currently excluded from formal systems outside Gaza.
6. **Support independent scientific assessments**, including documentation of excess mortality, famine-related deaths, and destruction of health systems to guide the humanitarian response and reconstruction efforts and legal accountability.

Silence is no longer tenable. Europe has remained a passive bystander to the most visible famine and public health genocide of our time for too long. Upholding the principles of medical ethics, human rights, and international law requires urgent collective action. To delay is to deepen complicity.

Contributors

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Declaration of interests

No conflict of interest declared.

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