

'OPERATION AL-AQSA FLOOD' DAY 164: ISRAELI ARMY STORMS AL-SHIFA AGAIN

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Above photo: Palestinians gather in front of UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) building to receive flour in Jabalia, Gaza City, March 17, 2024. Ashraf Amra/APA Images.

Aid Reaches Jabalia For First Time In Months.

Over a million people in Gaza face “imminent” famine as UNRWA aid trucks arrive in northern Gaza for the first time in months. Meanwhile, the Israeli army’s Chief of Staff says “a long way to go” until Israel’s military objectives are achieved.

Casualties

- 31,726 + killed* and at least 73,792 wounded in the Gaza Strip.
- 435+ Palestinians killed in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.**

- Israel revises its estimated October 7 death toll down from 1,400 to 1,147.
- 591 Israeli soldiers killed since October 7, and at least 3,221 injured.***

**Gaza's Ministry of Health confirmed this figure on its Telegram channel. Some rights groups put the death toll number closer to 40,000 when accounting for those presumed dead.*

*** The death toll in the West Bank and Jerusalem is not updated regularly. According to the PA's Ministry of Health on March 17, this is the latest figure.*

**** This figure is released by the Israeli military, showing the soldiers whose names "were allowed to be published."*

Key Developments

- Gaza Health Ministry: Israeli military storms al-Shifa Hospital for the fourth time, killing and wounding a number of people.
- 30,000 people in al-Shifa Hospital ordered to evacuate to Khan Younis.
- [Palestinian Prisoners Society](#): Thirteenth Palestinian prisoner dies in Israeli custody since October 7.
- UK charity [Oxfam](#) accuses Israel of "actively hindering" aid operations in Gaza.
- [PRCS](#) provides mental support groups for traumatized Palestinian children, medics.
- [IPC](#): 1.1 million people, about half of Gaza, face "imminent" famine.
- Nineteen aid trucks arrive in Jabalia without being blocked or fired on by Israeli forces in months.
- UNICEF chief [Catherine Russell](#): Airdrops and maritime deliveries are "a drop in a bucket" compared to the scale of humanitarian need.
- [UNICEF](#): one in three babies under the age of two in northern Gaza suffers from acute malnutrition.

- Gaza Health Ministry: Israeli attacks killed 81 Palestinians and wounded 116 in Gaza during the last 24 hours.
- Biden reportedly shouts and swears upon learning Michigan and Georgia poll numbers dropped over handling of Gaza war, according to [NBC News](#).

Israeli Army Storms Al-Shifa' Hospital...Again

In the early hours of Monday morning, Israeli forces stormed al-Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza with tanks and heavy gunfire. There have already been a “number of martyrs and wounded” in the ongoing Israeli onslaught, which began around 2:00 a.m.

Gaza’s Ministry of Health said about 30,000 people, including displaced civilians, wounded patients, and medical staff, are trapped inside the complex. Sniper bullets and quadcopters target anyone who tries to move.

A fire also broke out at the entrance to the hospital, and cases of suffocation occurred among the displaced women and children inside.

Less than two hours after the attack began, the Israeli military announced that it was conducting a “precise operation” in the al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, claiming that Hamas was using the medical facility to “conduct and promote terrorist activity.”

“We know that senior Hamas terrorists have regrouped inside the [al-Shifa] Hospital and are using it to command attacks against Israel,” Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said in a [video posted on X](#).

The Israeli military used similar [unverified](#) claims to justify three prior attacks on the medical complex, killing dozens of Palestinians.

Hagari added in his English video statement that the Israeli military would be conducting a “humanitarian effort” during the planned assault, providing food and water. At the same time, he emphasized

that there is “no obligation” for patients and medical staff to evacuate the hospital.

However, in Arabic, Israeli military’s spokesman Avichay Adraee called on Palestinians to evacuate the hospital and its surrounding area [on X](#): “In order to maintain your security, you must immediately evacuate the area to the west and then cross Al-Rashid (Al-Bahr) Street to the south to the humanitarian area in Al-Mawasi.”

Al-Mawasi, a “humanitarian zone” in western Khan Younis, is a severely overcrowded strip of land in the west of the Gaza Strip, serving as one of Gaza’s few designated safe areas despite being subjected to Israeli fire.

According to Gaza-based [Al Jazeera](#) correspondent Hani Mahmoud, “leaflets dropped by the Israeli military told people inside al-Shifa Hospital, its vicinity and the entire residential blocks surrounding the medical complex to evacuate immediately.”

“People are caught up between whether to leave and trust the statement or stay where they are. We are talking about thousands of Palestinians who have been sheltering inside the complex since the start of the war,” Mahmoud continued.

“In early December, the Israeli military made a list of allegations and stormed al-Shifa Hospital, destroyed the vast majority of its property, and severely damaged major buildings and medical equipment inside the hospital. About 250 people were arrested from inside the hospital,” Mahmoud said.

[The Times of Israel](#), citing the Israeli military, reports that the army has taken control of al-Shifa Hospital and detained 80 people since the most recent attack began.

“The crimes of the [Israeli] occupation will not create any image of victory for Netanyahu and his Nazi army,” Hamas said, as cited by [Al Jazeera](#). “The crimes of the occupation express confusion and loss of hope of achieving a military achievement.”

In a joint statement, Palestinian factions said targeting hospitals “is a continuation of the war of extermination waged by the occupation against the Palestinian people and a flagrant violation of all international conventions and laws,” reported [Al Jazeera](#).

Gaza’s Health Ministry has described the assault as a “massacre against the sick, the wounded, the displaced,” and has called on all international institutions to immediately stop the invasion.

“What the occupation forces are doing is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law,” the Ministry continued. “The Israeli occupation is still using its fabricated narratives to deceive the world and justify the storming of the al-Shifa Medical Complex.”

‘Babies Don’t Even Have The Energy To Cry’

Meanwhile, Palestinians in the besieged enclave are still being starved by Israel’s ongoing blockade, especially those living in the north, where Israeli forces have repeatedly blocked the entry of aid.

In a new [report](#), UK charity Oxfam has accused Israel of “actively hindering” aid operations in Gaza, defying orders by the International Court of Justice to prevent genocide in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Oxfam outlined seven ways Israel prevents the delivery of aid, including by only opening two crossings into Gaza, imposing a dysfunctional inspection system that keeps supplies help up, and cracking down on humanitarian missions.

“The ICJ order should have shocked Israeli leaders to change course, but since then, conditions in Gaza have actually worsened,” said Sally Abi Khalil, Oxfam’s Middle East and North Africa Director. ▪

One in three babies under the age of two in northern Gaza is suffering from acute malnutrition, according to [UNICEF](#).

Catherine Russell, the executive director of the UN's children's agency, says acute malnutrition is when "the body starts to consume itself as it has nothing else, and it's a painful, painful death for children. I have been in wards where babies are suffering from malnutrition. The whole ward is absolutely quiet because the babies don't even have the energy to cry."

"If we can get therapeutic feeding to them, they can survive, but often, they are stunted for life, and stunted means your cognitive ability is impacted as well, so it is a lifelong challenge for these children — if they survive," she continued in an interview with [CBS News](#).

While some aid is being airdropped or delivered by sea, experts, NGOs, and residents say it is nowhere near enough to meet the needs of millions of Palestinians. Russell says that the aid coming in through airdrops and a maritime route is "a drop in a bucket in both cases."

"We have so little access right now and it's very challenging. We are also facing very great bureaucratic challenges moving trucks in by land, which is by far the most efficient and effective way to get aid in," she added.

"If things are dual use, sometimes they get rejected. So, we can't get plastic pipes in, we can't get some medical kits in if they have little scissors. It's almost Kafkaesque, sometimes trying to figure out how to get things into this bureaucratic mess."

Similarly, displaced Palestinian Zahr Saqr, told [Al Jazeera](#), "The situation is so bad that no one can imagine it, and the ship, even if it helps, will be a drop in the ocean, because the entire region is in need of aid, and people are competing to take aid from the shore."

Airdrops have caused chaos and killed several people by falling pallets when parachutes failed to open.

"We keep waiting for aid. This is not a solution, whether by ship or by plane. We saw planes dropping aid and people fighting over it. There are some children who drowned in the sea for aid," Wael Miqdad, a Khan Younis resident, said.

The [UN warns](#) that nearly 600,000 people are on the brink of famine.

“The living situation is very bad. We cannot eat, or drink, and aid is very scarce. They told us there is aid in the south, but it is very scarce,” Iman Wadi, another displaced Palestinian, told [Al Jazeera](#).

“Israeli authorities are not only failing to facilitate the international aid effort but are actively hindering it. We believe that Israel is failing to take all measures within its power to prevent genocide,” Abi Khalil continued.

Israel has created “the perfect storm for humanitarian collapse and only the state of Israel can fix it,” she added.

Over A Million Gazans Face “Imminent Famine” As Aid Reaches Jabalia

On Sunday evening, [Al Jazeera](#) cameras captured a convoy of 19 aid trucks entering the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza. The trucks were carrying flour, rice, and other foodstuffs on their way to a UNRWA distribution center.

The delivery marks the first convoys to travel from the south to the north of the Gaza Strip without incident in four months.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the body responsible for assessing and monitoring famine, said that about half of Gaza is facing “imminent” famine.

“Between mid-March and mid-July, in the most likely scenario and under the assumption of an escalation of the conflict including a ground offensive in Rafah, half of the population of the Gaza Strip (1.11 million people) is expected to face catastrophic conditions (IPC Phase 5), the most severe level in the IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale,” the IPC [said in a statement](#). “This is an increase of 530,000 people (92 percent) compared to the previous analysis.”

The IPC also said that the rest of Gaza will likely face “a risk of famine” in July 2024 in the event of a “worst-case scenario.”

“The southern governorates of Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis, and the Governorate of Rafah, are classified in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency),” the IPC said.

Long Way To Go Until Israeli Military Goals Are Achieved

The Netanyahu administration shows no intention of ending its war on Gaza anytime soon, despite a growing choir of voices, including Israeli allies, calling for the end of the ongoing assault.

Israeli military Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said in a press statement that much has been achieved during a “multi-front and complex war,” but that it will take time to achieve more, according to [Al Jazeera](#).

“We still have a long way to go until the war goals are achieved,” he said.

Halevi also said the army continues to plan operations in “areas where we have not yet operated,” in reference to Rafah in southern Gaza, where more than 1.5 million Palestinians are sheltering.

“The military is preparing for offenses in the additional areas and together with the political echelon we will decide on the timing and the appropriate conditions,” he said.

“We are determined to act wherever Hamas is building its strength. It is wrong to leave Hamas brigades and Hamas battalions functioning.”

However, former military commander Yitzhak Brick says Israel has already lost its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

“You can’t lie to many people for a long time,” Yitzhak Brick said in an article in Israel’s Maariv newspaper, as reported by [Al Jazeera](#).

“What is happening in the Gaza Strip and against Hezbollah in Lebanon will blow up in our faces sooner or later.”

Brick said the Israeli home front “is not prepared for a regional war, which will be thousands of times more difficult and serious than the war in the Gaza Strip.”

Biden Fears Upcoming Elections

U.S. President Joe Biden’s endless support for Israel’s genocide in Gaza has jeopardized his chances of winning elections in 2024, reportedly sending him into a frenzy.

Biden began to shout and swear after learning that his poll numbers in the battleground states of Michigan and Georgia had dropped over his handling of the Gaza war, according to [NBC News](#).

The report cited a lawmaker familiar with the private meeting in January at the White House, where the scene played out.

He believed he had been doing what was right despite the political fallout, Biden told the group, according to the lawmaker.

When asked about the episode, White House spokesman Andrew Bates said: “President Biden makes national security decisions based on the country’s national security needs alone — no other factor.”

In a [post on X](#), Amnesty International reminded President Biden that Israel used U.S.-made munitions to kill more than 30,000 people in Gaza and called on the President to demand a ceasefire and stop the transfers of arms to Israel.

On Sunday, during a shamrock ceremony at the White House, the U.S. President said he agreed with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar on the need for a truce deal in Gaza, still offering no plans to put material pressure on Israel.

“The Taoiseach [Irish leader] and I agree about the urgent need to increase humanitarian aid in Gaza and reach a ceasefire deal that

brings hostages home and moves toward a two-state solution, which is the only path for lasting peace and security,” Biden said, according to CNN.

Varadkar says the Irish have such empathy for the Palestinian people because: “We see our history in their eyes, a story of displacement, of dispossession, a national identity questioned and denied, forced emigration, discrimination, and now hunger,” he said.

The Irish leader, who has previously criticized U.S. arms transfers to Israel, said he “was not shocked” that Washington has decided to continue arming Israel.

- [Gaza](#), [Genocide](#), [Humanitarian Aid](#), [Israel](#), [Operation Al Aqsa Flood](#), [Palestine](#), [Starvation](#)