



[Validity of the Assertion That Israel is Using Starvation as a Weapon of War in Gaza](#)

This week, the European Union's (EU) foreign policy chief Josep Borrell stated that Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza and provoking famine. The top EU diplomat's remarks echo what prominent human rights groups have been asserting for several months. Analysts point to evidence of Israeli attacks on food distribution centers and civilians seeking aid, as well as deliberate efforts to impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance such as food and water. Just this past week, an Israeli military strike against a food distribution center in Gaza killed or injured more than 20 humanitarian workers. The heightened focus on the harmful impact that Israel's war policies have had comes amid an array of voices warning against a potential further Israeli military offensive in Rafah, and the devastation it would cause in exacerbating the already dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The prospect of an incursion into Rafah has elicited global alarm due in part to the fact that approximately 1.5 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering there.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has previously tried to draw attention to Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war through the country's policies and behavior during the past five months. HRW has documented evidence of Israel's blatant efforts to impede humanitarian aid, as well as public statements from Israeli officials expressing an aim of depriving Gazan civilians of food and water. Regarding the latter, they point to remarks made by high-ranking Israeli officials including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, and Energy Minister Israel Katz. The human rights watchdog organization also cited a report by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) that delved into the scarcity of food in Gaza as far back as early December. Israel's actions in Gaza represent a serious violation of international humanitarian law, which prohibits the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court outlines that "depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies" is a war crime. One of the other troubling occurrences is the Israeli military's repeated unlawful attacks against food distribution centers, medical facilities, and civilians seeking humanitarian aid. A particular incident late last month when more than 100 Palestinians were killed and over 700 others wounded after Israeli troops opened fire on civilians waiting for food aid southwest of Gaza City drew universal outrage and condemnation.

In recent days, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) – a group of experts who are the world's leading authority on hunger – warned that famine is "imminent" in northern Gaza and at risk of happening any time between now and May. The IPC's report on the issue determined that the enclave's entire population is facing high levels of acute food insecurity. Since its founding around 20 years ago, the organization has only ever classified a famine twice, once in Somalia and once in South Sudan, and thus its analysis on the severity of the situation in Gaza is particularly eye-opening. Furthermore, the report highlighted how the grave humanitarian crisis is an entirely man-made disaster, lending additional credence to Israel's culpability for what has taken place in Gaza. Unlike other food insecurity crises which are often times brought about by extreme weather and drought, the IPC findings outlined the human-created catastrophe in Gaza and how it can be alleviated through the implementation of a ceasefire, the opening of more border crossings, and an increase in the delivery of much-needed aid. Alarmingly, the IPC also drew attention to the spike in the number of young children who are acutely malnourished, which is now about one out of every three children under the age of two years old in northern Gaza.

If Israeli authorities go through with plans to launch a calamitous assault on Rafah in the coming weeks, the humanitarian conditions in areas of central and southern Gaza are at risk of degenerating into famine as well. As a result, there have been widespread warnings towards Israel regarding a potential military offensive in Rafah. U.S. President Biden has cautioned Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu against a ground invasion into the city of Rafah, where an estimated 1.5 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering from the onslaught of ongoing Israeli bombardment. U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters earlier this week that Biden has communicated to Netanyahu that an assault on Rafah would be a “mistake” as it would lead to more innocent civilian deaths, exacerbate the already dire humanitarian crisis, and further isolate Israel internationally. It has emerged this week that Biden asked Netanyahu to send a team of officials to Washington D.C. to discuss concerns about any potential Rafah military offensive. President Biden has voiced his issue with Israeli military operations not being connected to a clear war strategy. In addition to the United States, an array of countries have also warned Israel against a military campaign in Rafah. This includes most European nations, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, Jordan, and South Korea – among many others.

In yet another act of defiance towards President Biden, the United States, and the global community at-large, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu renewed his pledge this week to launch a military offensive on Rafah. Netanyahu did so less than a day after Biden’s latest warnings against such a move and with plans on the table to send a delegation of Israeli officials to Washington D.C. in the coming days. It remains to be seen what comes out of these soon-to-be talks, but what is certain is that the approximately 1.5 million displaced civilians who have taken refuge in Rafah have nowhere else to go, and thus an Israeli military offensive there would be an abhorrent disregard for the respect of humanity and international diplomacy.