



GAZA :

A GENOCIDAL ASSAULT



What is genocide?

According to international law, genocide means 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups'.

The term was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer of Jewish descent who led the campaign to have genocide recognised as an international crime. According to Lemkin, a key component of genocide is 'criminal intent to destroy or cripple permanently a human group.'

Victims are deliberately targeted not as individuals but because of their membership of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

Acts of genocide

Israel is perpetrating 3 of the 5 acts that fall under the legal definition of genocide in Gaza:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part

What's happening in Gaza

Since 2007, Israel has defined the Gaza Strip as a whole as an "enemy entity". In 2012 a UN report warned that 2.3 million people in Gaza are subjected to Israel's crippling blockade, which has been imposed for 16 years and the UN has called 'collective punishment'.

Israel has unleashed a massive military assault, wiping out entire families, razing neighbourhoods and destroying essential infrastructure. As of 20 October, 3,785 Palestinians have been reported killed, including over 1,500 children, and 12,000 injured. Many more are reported to lie under the rubble.

On 13 October the Israeli military ordered 1.1 million Palestinians to evacuate from the north to the south. They have continued an indiscriminate bombing campaign across the Gaza Strip from the air, sea and ground, and there is nowhere safe for the population to go.

As of 18 October 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) has documented 59 attacks on health care (including Al Ahli Hospital), resulting in 491 fatalities and 370 injuries, including health care workers. The attacks have affected 26 health care facilities, with 17 hospitals now damaged, and 23 ambulances. Four hospitals in northern Gaza have had to be evacuated and are no longer operational.

Intent

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Gazans would pay an “immense price” and that Israel would turn parts of Gaza’s densely populated urban centres “into rubble”.

Israel’s President suggested the entire Palestinian population was a legitimate target: “it is an entire nation out that is responsible.”

Israel’s Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, announced a ‘complete siege’ to stop electricity, food, water and fuel reaching Gaza’s population. He said: ‘We are fighting against human animals and we will act accordingly... Gaza won’t return to what it was before. We will eliminate everything.’

Israel’s Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Israel Katz added: ‘All the civilian population in Gaza is ordered to leave immediately. We will win. They will not receive a drop of water or a single battery until they leave the world.’

Complicity

Over 800 scholars and practitioners of international law, conflict studies and genocide studies have signed a public statement warning of potential genocide in Gaza. UN experts have also called for the prevention of genocide. The international community has a legal duty to protect the Palestinian population and human rights organisations and activists are calling for immediate intervention.

Despite this duty, the US and the UK have continued to give unwavering diplomatic and military support to Israel and are active partners in its assault on Gaza. On 18 October, the US also blocked a UN Resolution to allow humanitarian corridors into the Gaza Strip, a pause in the fighting and the lifting of an order for civilians to leave the north of the besieged territory, while the UK abstained.

The international community has a legal duty to prevent an impending genocide. Conspiracy, incitement, attempt, and complicity in genocide are also punishable under international law. The Genocide Convention is clear that those who carry out such acts, whether they are ‘responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals’ could be held criminally liable.

