



ISLAMIC RELIEF USA - AUGUST 2024

**300 DAYS OF
UNPRECEDENTED
ESCALATION IN GAZA**

An unprecedented crisis in Gaza



In early October 2023, the population of Gaza was around 2.3 million, some 50% of whom were children. Despite the difficulties they endured living in what has been called the ‘world’s largest open-air prison’, the people of Gaza went about their daily lives, dreaming of a better future where their human rights would be recognized and upheld.

Since October, these dreams have been shattered. Palestinian families have been forced to endure Israeli bombardment and siege on a previously unimaginable scale during 300 days of unprecedented destruction and displacement. We have seen complete disregard for international humanitarian law, with relentless attacks on civilians, health facilities, homes, shelters and markets, and severe restrictions on humanitarian aid.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed (with some reports estimating the count to be in the hundreds of thousands). Others have sustained life-changing injuries or simply disappeared, likely lost under the rubble of destroyed homes and shelters. Children have missed almost an entire year of schooling and face a future full of uncertainty and fear.

Entire families have been scattered as they flee repeatedly in search of safety, which cannot be found as bombs continue to rain down on Gaza. People have been ordered to leave one area, only to be bombed in the place they were told to shelter. The international community has been unable to provide sufficient aid due to Israeli restrictions on supplies into Gaza. Few hospitals remain functional due to shortages of electricity, fuel and medicine. Trapped in one of the most densely populated areas on Earth, families have minimal access to food, water and healthcare. People are starving to death, and famine looms.

Islamic Relief’s long-term development programs in Gaza have been suspended as it quickly became one of the most difficult and dangerous places to deliver aid. Instead, we have scaled up our emergency response, distributing essentials such as food, medical aid, hygiene kits, water, clothes, and more to displaced people. Our work has had to continually adapt to meet changing needs and varying availability of items. Humanitarian staff and partners in Gaza are enduring the same challenges as the communities they support, including displacement, with one colleague saying she feels Palestinians have been ‘forgotten by the world’. Despite these enormous challenges, they remain committed to providing aid to vulnerable communities.

In 2012, a United Nations report questioned if Gaza would be a liveable place by 2020, pointing to population growth and the Israeli blockade. Now, in 2024, there remains little doubt that conditions inside Gaza have become truly unliveable.

The humanitarian situation GAZA CRISIS



Food scarcity:

Food shortages are a major concern, with the United Nations saying famine has spread in the Gaza Strip. Most families are now reliant on canned foods.



Healthcare collapse:

More than half of Gaza’s hospitals are completely shut down, with the rest facing a daily struggle to stay even partially operational due to bombing and lack of supplies. The flow of injured people is unrelenting, and the mental health impact of the crisis is severe.



Mass displacement:

More than 80% of the population is displaced - many of them displaced multiple times. In the makeshift camps, crowded conditions and a lack of safe water and sanitation have led to the spread of disease.



No escape:

A ceasefire agreement is yet to be reached and most Palestinians are unable to leave the besieged territory. Within Gaza there is nowhere safe as even school shelters and displacement camps are frequently bombed.

Damage on an unimaginable scale

The scale of the devastation in Gaza cannot be overstated. Every sector and every part of people's lives have been affected. Here, we breakdown the impact:

Food: 96% of people are facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity, according to the IPC, with at least 495,000 suffering catastrophic famine levels of hunger. With Israel restricting supplies coming into Gaza, the price of food has rocketed out of reach of most people.

Infrastructure: Electrical grids, water treatment plants and transportation networks have been severely damaged, disrupting basic services across the Gaza Strip. The cost of damage to critical infrastructure is estimated to be \$18.5 billion – equivalent to 97% of the GDP of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) in 2022. Destruction of housing accounts for 73% of the total cost.

Since October Israel has separated the north of Gaza, including Gaza City, from the south. An Israeli built road splitting the territory was completed in March, with the military restricting all movement of goods and people between the two areas. This has further restricted humanitarian aid and cut people off from their homes and land.

Economy: Many businesses have been destroyed or forced to close, leading to a steep decline in Gaza's economic output. Unemployment has rocketed to around 85%. GDP declined by approximately \$655 million last year, with the significant dip being largely attributed to the crisis. Tighter restrictions on movement and the flow of goods in Gaza have also had a significant impact.

Healthcare: The crisis has exacerbated an already-critical situation. Hospitals have closed and been destroyed, supply chains have been interrupted and surgeries postponed. People with chronic illnesses are unable to fill their prescriptions and medics in the few still-operational facilities are struggling to cope with the constant flow of injured patients. In late July, local officials declared a polio epidemic, with the World Health Organization pledging to send 1 million vaccines to Gaza to be administered to children over the coming weeks.

Mental health: The relentless exposure to violence and repeated displacement, with nowhere safe to go, has caused widespread trauma, anxiety and depression among children and adults.

Education: 88% of Gaza's education facilities have been damaged or destroyed, and over two thirds of schools have been converted into shelters for families forced from their homes. Some 600,000 children have no access to education, while internet and electricity blackouts present major challenges to remote learning. At least 397 teaching staff have been killed, with many others displaced and experiencing stress and trauma as a result of the crisis.

Water and sanitation: Gaza's sole water treatment system has been damaged, leading to shortages of clean water and raising health risks. Even before this escalation, people in Gaza often faced severe water shortages due to the Israeli blockade and most water was unfit for safe human consumption. Now the water supply is only a quarter of what it was before October.



"The worst thing is fetching water. It is only connected once every week and we do not have enough containers to collect all the water we need. We use cooking pots, water bottles, and any other container we can find. We have to walk long distances through destruction to reach the water sources."

– a displaced humanitarian worker

Agricultural land: About 49% of Gaza is farmland and huge swathes of it have been damaged in the past 300 days. This damage is exacerbating the current hunger crisis but will also further affect food scarcity and the livelihoods of farmers in the long term.

Banking: There are widespread shortages of cash. Banks have closed down or are operating on reduced hours, with customers facing difficulties in conducting transactions and withdrawing cash. Most ATMs are not functioning, and online banking is hindered by power cuts. There are delays in receiving payments such as salaries and remittances. With formal banking disrupted, many people rely on informal money transfer systems, but these can be less reliable and more expensive.

Treating Gaza's wounded while displaced

Mohammed worked at a pharmacy in Gaza City before he and his family fled to the Middle Area. Now displaced, he volunteers at a small healthcare point in a shelter where Islamic Relief has distributed aid, including hot meals.

“There is almost no medicine in stock, or medical supplies. It is becoming very hard to help people who have chronic diseases or need medication.”

As the bombing continues and more and more health centers are destroyed, people with illnesses like diabetes and cancer are struggling to refill their prescriptions and access critical medical care. Some 16 hospitals are still functioning across the entire Gaza Strip, and they too are struggling with shortages of medicine and supplies. Staff are overwhelmed by the huge flow of injured patients and the healthcare system – already stretched to the limit before October – has now all but collapsed.

The crisis has seen an increase in the spread of disease among displaced communities, with Mohammed saying the most common health issues are skin diseases and intestinal problems. A poor diet, unsafe drinking water and the crowded conditions of camps are all contributing factors.

At the healthcare point, Mohammed mostly helps to treat injuries related to displacement and the poor condition of shelters. Many patients have injuries from building fires to cook, cutting up wood or fixing their tents.

“Most of the injuries are to children. They are now living with their families in poor conditions that are not suitable or safe for them. Most cases are broken limbs, cuts, or burns.”

The healthcare point can provide only minimal care, and many of its supplies are donations from the local community. They have received rubbing alcohol and iodine to clean wounds, gauze and bandages, painkillers, and other first aid items. Some pharmacies in the area have also donated medicine from their own depleting stocks, particularly insulin for diabetic patients.



More than **500 healthcare workers** have been killed since October.



Uprooted again and again

Over 1.9 million people – more than 80% of Gaza’s population – have become displaced in the last 300 days, with many families having to flee multiple times as they try in vain to find safety and aid. Nearly 10 months into the crisis, the mass, ongoing displacement can be understood in several key phases:

October 7-10:

Initial shock and mass displacement

Tens of thousands of people flee their homes, seeking safety in schools, mosques, and other public buildings. Shelter, food, water, and medical assistance are the most pressing needs.

Mid-October:

Expanding attacks and mass exodus

As Israeli airstrikes and ground operations intensify, hundreds of thousands of people move from heavily bombed northern Gaza to southern areas, particularly cities like Khan Younis and Rafah.

Late October-early November:

Massive southward displacement

The Israeli military issues evacuation orders, forcing more civilians to move to southern Gaza. The huge number of people arriving exacerbates overcrowding in southern Gaza and further strains resources.

November-early 2024:

Continued displacement and humanitarian response

People frequently relocate to avoid active conflict zones, with prolonged displacement and exposure to danger taking a significant psychological toll. International aid organizations ramp up efforts to provide food, water, medical care, and shelters but severe restrictions on aid and ongoing attacks limit the scale of delivery.

May-June 2024:

New forced movement and evacuation orders

The Israeli military orders people to leave Rafah and parts of Khan Younis, where most people were sheltering. These so-called ‘evacuation orders’ force people to move and put the most vulnerable at risk. People are sent to so-called “safe zones”, but Israel continues to bomb and attack these areas.

July-present:

The search for stability and long-term solutions

The Israeli military announces evacuation orders within Gaza City. Ongoing uncertainty and destruction have made it impossible to move displaced people into more permanent shelters. With no ceasefire in place, plans are focusing on providing long-term support to displaced families.

Challenges facing displaced people

Overcrowding	<i>Tents and schools are densely packed, with many families sharing a limited space. This affects their privacy, hygiene, dignity, and overall wellbeing.</i>
Poor sanitation	<i>Some shelters and camps have no bathroom or bathing facilities, leading to hygiene and health concerns.</i>
Water scarcity	<i>Access to clean water is limited, making drinking, cooking, and bathing a challenge.</i>
Health concerns	<i>Large numbers of people are living in dirty and unsafe conditions. Diseases are spreading as a result, and injuries from cooking and mending tents are commonplace.</i>
Lack of protection	<i>Displacement camps and shelters face frequent Israeli attacks, and people also face risks from unexploded ordnance and the collapse of civil order.</i>



‘A never-ending eviction’



“It is a never-ending eviction from one hard place to an even harder one,” says Majdi*, who has had to uproot his family multiple times since the crisis began. “We’ve never rested in the last nine months... I don’t think we will find any comfort soon.”

Majdi fled his small village soon after the escalation began. He had lived there his whole life, but when airstrikes began to land near his family’s home, he knew they had to leave.

The family headed to a UN-school-turned-shelter, thinking this would be the safest place. They stayed for a few weeks while the shelter struggled to provide for the increasing number of displaced people arriving. One day, an airstrike hit just beside the school’s fence.

“Everyone was running for their lives, leaving their belongings and family members behind them. I couldn’t stay any longer. I moved with my family to another school,” Majdi says.

The new shelter was slightly better, but it was only a short time before bombing forced the family to flee for a third time. A missile hit the shelter, others were killed and injured, but the family survived.

Collecting what belongings they still had, the family moved to the southern city of Rafah. Fuel was already scarce when they first fled home but finding enough to fill their car this time was even more challenging. Eventually, they succeeded, only for the

car to break down a short distance into the journey. The family spent the night by the side of the road waiting for help.

Majdi and his family would spend four months in Rafah in a tent which in time they turned into a shack made from metal sheets. They started to feel safer and dreamed of returning to their village in the north. The relative stability they’d found was broken on May 26 when an airstrike targeted the camp, leaving a huge blaze and mutilated bodies in its wake.

“Everything was burnt including my car, my savings, my wife’s gold bracelets, and everything we managed to gather together during our displacement.”

Majdi lost more than possessions in the strike that night. His wife, brother, and sister died and everyone else in the family was injured, including him. His son is still in hospital in a critical condition.

Majdi’s story is shared by so many others in Gaza who have endured displacement and lived in constant uncertainty since October. Caught up in a crisis that shows little sign of resolution, Palestinians in Gaza are doing all that they can to survive against increasingly difficult odds. In this environment, hopes for the future are a powerful source of resilience.

For Majdi, he wishes to be able to travel to his home in the north, to start the journey of rebuilding his life once more, and to live that life in peace and security.



*Name has been changed to protect privacy

How is Islamic Relief USA supporting vulnerable people in Gaza?



Aid is being procured locally within Gaza to the extent possible. IRUSA partners are also bringing in aid via the shifting entry points into Gaza, which have included the Rafah crossing and other locations depending on the conditions and permits at the time of importation. However, due to the continuously changing requirements and the instability of border crossing locations, the delivery of aid into Gaza has been plagued by delays. While some aid is getting in, it remains insufficient to meet even the basic needs of the people.

We are working to support the most dire needs in Palestine including food, water, fuel, medicine and medical supplies, psychosocial support, and essential items such as blankets, mattresses, and winter clothing. We're reaching families across all of Gaza, including the North, Gaza City, Rafah, Khan Younis, and the Middle Area. As conditions in the West Bank continue to worsen, we hope to provide more aid to families there as well.

Islamic Relief USA continues to call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and for international law to be upheld. We are calling for an end to the Israeli siege so that humanitarian aid, commercial goods, and critical supplies such as fuel can enter Gaza in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of its population.



HOT MEALS
7 MILLION+



CLEAN WATER
10 MILLION LITERS



NON-FOOD ITEMS
FOR 39,000+ PEOPLE



HEALTH AID
FOR 600,000+ PEOPLE



EMERGENCY SHELTER
FOR 9,000+ PEOPLE



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