

If nothing changes in the war in Gaza then famine is imminent – this week’s Integrated Food Security Phase Classification report is yet another reminder of that. For some it’s already too late – children are beginning to die of starvation and dehydration. These deaths, and the famine-like conditions in Gaza, are not the result of some unexpected natural disaster; they are human-made.

Israel’s prosecution of this war has destroyed large parts of the Gaza Strip – decimating infrastructure essential to human survival. The scarcity of humanitarian access to and within the Strip continues to prevent aid workers from distributing life-saving supplies. We should not become numb to this injustice. It can never be normal for parents to use animal fodder or grass to feed their children.

International humanitarian law is resolutely clear that all parties to a conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need. That is especially true for Israel as the occupying power and applies urgently in northern Gaza, despite the many challenges of delivering aid in a war zone. Israel’s planned military ground operation in the South will only further worsen an already intolerable situation.

Parachuting aid or building temporary harbours is unlikely to meet the urgent and monumental humanitarian needs of Gaza’s starving population. They are imprecise, inadequate and do not reach those in most need. Reports from the Anglican run Al Ahli hospital in Northern Gaza tell of how US air drops have damaged the hospital’s solar panels and their power capacity. Hundreds of desperate people then entered the hospital taking the aid so that the hospital received nothing.

Meanwhile thousands of trucks are stuck in Egypt and Jordan, containing food, shelter and other essentials, because the Government of Israel refuses to give them access. It is unacceptable that the number of aid lorries entering Gaza in March – an average of 169 per day, – remains significantly below the operational capacity of both the Rafah and Karem Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) border crossings. This number is woefully short of the target of 500 trucks per day required to meet the basic humanitarian needs and to avert a famine in Gaza.

As I have said before, and I repeat again now: the only effective solution to this catastrophic situation is an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, and sustained humanitarian access for the provision of essential supplies and services to those in need. Another way must be found. I continue to pray for the Palestinian Christian community in Gaza and the West Bank, for the people of Palestine and Israel, and for justice, peace and security for all the peoples of the Holy Land.

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