

OUR GENOCIDE

בִּצְלֵם
B'TSELEM
بتسيلم

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1.

INTRODUCTION

Since October 2023, Israel has fundamentally changed its policy toward the Palestinians. Following the Hamas-led attack on 7 October 2023, Israel launched an intensive military campaign in the Gaza Strip, which is still underway more than 20 months later. Israel's onslaught on Gaza includes mass killing, both in direct attacks and through creating catastrophic living conditions that continue to raise the massive death toll; serious bodily or mental harm to the entire population of the Strip; large-scale destruction of infrastructure; destruction of the social fabric, including educational institutions and Palestinian cultural sites; mass arrests and abuse of detainees in Israeli prisons, which have effectively become torture camps for thousands of Palestinians held without trial; mass forced displacement, including attempts at ethnic cleansing and making the latter an official war goal; and an assault on Palestinian identity through the deliberate destruction of refugee camps and attempts to undermine the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). The outcome of this comprehensive assault on the Gaza Strip is severe, and at least in part, irreparable, harm to more than 2 million people living in the Gaza Strip, as part of the Palestinian people.

An examination of Israel's policy in the Gaza Strip and its horrific outcomes, together with statements by senior Israeli politicians and military commanders about the goals of the attack, leads to the unequivocal conclusion that Israel is taking coordinated action to intentionally destroy Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip. In other words: Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The term genocide refers to a socio-historical and political phenomenon that has occurred throughout human history. Since the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was signed in 1948 (and came into force in 1951), genocide has also been recognized as one of the gravest crimes in international law, involving acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Both morally and legally, genocide cannot be justified under any circumstance, including as an act of self-defense.

Genocide is carried out through multiple and parallel practices over time, with mass physical killing being only one of them. Destroying living conditions, sometimes in concentration zones or camps, systemically trying to prevent reproduction, widespread sexual violence against group members or their mass expulsion, can all be – and have been throughout history – among the means used by states or ruling authorities to destroy ethnic, national, racial, religious and other groups. Accordingly, genocidal acts are various actions intended to bring about the destruction of a distinct group, as part of a deliberate, coordinated effort by a ruling authority.

Genocide always occurs within a context: there are conditions that enable it, catalyzing events, and a guiding ideology. The current onslaught on the Palestinian people, including in the Gaza Strip, must be understood in the context of more than seventy years in which Israel has imposed a violent and discriminatory regime on the Palestinians, taking its most extreme form against those living in the Gaza Strip.

Like all regimes, the Israeli regime is a system that follows an underlying logic and uses state mechanisms to achieve its goals. As part of broader patterns of settler-colonialism, which have characterized relations between Jews and Palestinians from the early stages of Zionist settlement, the Israeli regime works to ensure Jewish supremacy over Palestinians – economically, politically, socially, and culturally. To that end, the apartheid and occupation regime has institutionalized mechanisms of violent control, demographic engineering, discrimination, and fragmentation of the Palestinian collective. These foundations, laid by the regime, are what made it possible to launch a genocidal attack on the Palestinians immediately after the Hamas-led attack on 7 October 2023. B'Tselem emphasizes three fundamental elements in particular: life under an apartheid regime that imposes separation, demographic engineering, and ethnic cleansing; systemic and institutionalized use of violence against Palestinians, while the perpetrators enjoy impunity; and institutionalized mechanisms of dehumanization and framing Palestinians as an existential threat.

Such conditions can exist over time without developing into a genocidal assault. Often, a violent event that creates a sense of existential threat among the perpetrating group is the catalyst is the catalyst for the ruling system to carry out genocide. The attack by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on 7 October 2023 was a catalyst of this kind.

The atrocious attack, aimed mostly at civilians, included many war crimes and likely also crimes against humanity. It took the lives of **1,218 Israelis and foreign nationals**, 882 of them civilians, involved extensive and severe acts of violence, including sexual violence, and resulted in **tens of thousands of people wounded** and the **abduction of 252 people** to the Gaza Strip – most of them civilians, including women, elderly people and children. The youngest child abducted was a nine-month-old baby who was killed, along with his three-year-old brother and their mother, while held in Gaza. For Israelis, the very fact of the attack, its scope and its outcomes, generated a degree of anxiety and feeling of existential threat that led to profound social and political changes in Israeli society. These instigated a shift in Israeli policy toward Palestinians in the Gaza Strip: from repression and control to destruction and annihilation.

The Israeli genocide is taking place in the Gaza Strip, where the regime's violence against Palestinians is being implemented in its most extreme and lethal form. Yet the assault on Gaza cannot be separated from the escalating violence being inflicted, at varying levels and in different forms, on Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and within Israel.

In this context, it is important to note the similarities between these areas: ultimately, the same troops are operating in Gaza and in the other areas, under the same commanders and political leadership. The practices Israel is employing in other areas often reflect the governing logic applied in Gaza: total disregard for human life, severe harm to innocents, widespread destruction of residential areas and living conditions, ethnic cleansing, and blatant flouting of moral obligations and international law. At the same time, many senior military and political figures are threatening to apply the level of force currently being used in Gaza against Palestinians in other areas.

In these areas, as in Gaza, lethal crimes are being committed against Palestinians with no accountability for the perpetrators. The violence and destruction in these areas is intensifying over time, with no effective domestic or international mechanism acting to halt them. As a result, these crimes are becoming normalized in the eyes of soldiers, commanders, politicians, media figures and Israelis in general.

While carrying out genocide in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli regime continues to control the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and within Israel. Given the ongoing, clear escalation in Israeli violence against Palestinians in all these areas – which itself includes very grave crimes – we must call for an immediate end to the Israeli genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and warn of clear and imminent danger that the genocide will not remain confined to Gaza.

Defending human rights in the face of genocide

B'Tselem is an Israeli human rights organization that documents and researches harm caused to Palestinians under Israel's apartheid and occupation regime. In the name of the duty to protect human beings, their lives, dignity, and individual and collective rights, B'Tselem has worked for over 35 years to expose Israel's systematic violations of Palestinians' human rights.

The name B'Tselem means "**in the image [of God]**" in Hebrew and is drawn from the biblical verse, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (Genesis 1:27). It reflects the principle of the inherent value of all human life. This moral foundation has guided the organization's work from the outset.

Over decades, we have gained experience in the field of human rights, developed a deep understanding of the mechanisms of Israeli oppression against the Palestinian people, and published hundreds of reports and position papers. B'Tselem documents incidents on the ground, exposes Israel's actions and crimes, analyzes the policies that guide them, and identifies the political, social, and state mechanisms that enable them. Based on the information we collect and the resulting conclusions, we are committed to presenting unequivocal positions and demands regarding the state of human rights violations and the actions required to protect these rights.

In 2021, B'Tselem joined many others, first and foremost Palestinian organizations and activists, who for decades had identified the Israeli regime as an apartheid regime. We wrote:

In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices and state violence designed to cement the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians. A key method in pursuing this goal is engineering space differently for each group.

The formal foundations of this regime were laid when the State of Israel was established, based on pre-existing ideological underpinnings. It has had a clear objective from the outset: to cement the supremacy of the Jewish group across the entire territory under Israeli control. The main tool for realizing this guiding principle has been the establishment of an apartheid regime (one that, unlike the historical and political situation in South Africa, has never been formally declared as such and, in fact, has been consistently denied by Israeli governments). This regime is designed to cement the supremacy of one group through demographic engineering, separation, shaping public discourse, indoctrination, militarism, and of course – the use of force and violence.

The regime has implemented its practices differently in every area under its control, with many changes and refinements over the years. Yet the core objective remains the same. The entire Israeli system – political, military, public, and legal – is structured to uphold Jewish supremacy, relying on a false pretense of the rule of law while, in reality, the rights of the Palestinian subjects are left unprotected.

As a human rights organization working to stop and prevent systemic and widespread state violence against Palestinians, it is our duty to analyze human rights violations on the ground in context, taking into account the regime carrying them out and its guiding political logic.

As noted, since October 2023, there has been a major shift in Israel's practices of oppression and harm towards Palestinians, both as individuals and as a group. We have gathered eyewitness testimonies and documented hundreds of incidents involving unprecedented and extreme violence against Palestinian civilians throughout the territory Israel controls, while key politicians and military commanders have openly declared the policies being implemented on the ground. Countless evidence of the consequences of these policies reflects the horrifying transformation of the entire Israeli system in its treatment of Palestinians.

At B'Tselem, Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Israel work side by side, guided by the view that defending human rights is a basic human and moral obligation. We all live under a discriminatory apartheid regime that classifies some of us as privileged subjects simply because we are Jewish, and others as undeserving of any protection simply because we are Palestinian. Together, we fight for the right we all have to live between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River without discrimination, violent repression and annihilation.

Even as we write, Israel is intensifying its brutal, merciless assault on the Palestinians. As people of this land and as human rights activists, it is our duty to bear witness to the state of affairs we and many others have documented and investigated. It is our duty to name the reality we are witnessing and living through, to recount it, and to stand with the victims.

We call on the Israeli public and on the international community to act urgently to put an immediate stop to Israel's assault on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and across all areas under Israeli control, using every means available under international law.

2.

WHAT IS GENOCIDE?

The term *genocide* refers to a sociopolitical phenomenon that has occurred throughout human history. Various definitions have been proposed for it, but at its most basic, genocide is the **deliberate, violent destruction of an ethnic, national, religious, or racial group**, or an attempt to do so, that inflicts severe and irreparable harm on the group as such. As defined by Raphael Lemkin, the Jewish-Polish jurist who coined the term, genocide is a "coordinated attack" on various aspects of life of a distinct national, ethnic, religious, or racial group, through diverse actions aimed at the destruction of the essential foundations of the group's life, with the aim of annihilating the group.

Since the adoption of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, genocide has also been recognized as one of the gravest crimes under international law. It includes acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. Morally and legally, genocide can never be justified under any circumstances, including as an act of self-defense. In 1950, the state of Israel enacted The Crime of Genocide (Prevention and Punishment) Law 5710-1950.

In most cases, genocide involves a range of long-term patterns of conduct and practices, with direct, mass physical killing being only one of them. Inflicting serious bodily or mental harm on members of the group, destroying living areas and creating life-threatening conditions, often within concentration zones or camps, attempting to prevent births within the group, widespread sexual violence against group members, or the mass expulsion of group members can, and historically have been, among the methods used by states or ruling authorities to destroy ethnic, national, racial, religious, or other groups.

As established by the UN Convention and illustrated by various historical cases, genocide does not necessarily entail an attempt to physically kill all members of a group. It is defined in the convention as including "destruction, in whole or in part" of the group, and may focus on a specific subset of the group or a specific geographic area in which they reside

(while a different policy may be applied to other members of the same group under the same regime's control). Still, genocide against part of the group increases the danger of genocidal acts extending to additional parts of the group, because a regime's shift toward carrying out genocide typically reflects a perception of all group members as a threat, a devaluation of their lives, and the stripping away of their legal protections. It also reflects the view that extreme violence, up to and including annihilation, is seen as a feasible, effective, and even necessary solution to the threat supposedly posed by the group. Once state organs begin implementing a genocide in one area, they tend to normalize the use of such violence and enjoy impunity, both domestically and internationally, thereby making its application in other areas easier.

Genocide can rarely be carried out without consent, support, and legitimization from within the perpetrating group. Yet it is important to note that societies that perpetrate genocide often do not recognize themselves as such. Usually, the genocidal campaign is perceived by its direct perpetrators, and understood by the broader public, as a legitimate act of self-defense in response to an enemy posing an existential threat. The social legitimacy accorded to extreme violence in one area lays the groundwork for its acceptance in others, increasing the risk of regime violence against the entire group. Therefore, recognizing that genocide is taking place against part of a group or in a specific location is also a grave warning: it signals the potential expansion of similar patterns of violence to other segments of the group or to other areas.

On the United Nations Convention and the legal discussion over the question of genocide

The 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (which came into force in 1951) defines several acts that are considered genocidal if committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. The international tribunals that adjudicated the cases of Rwanda and the former

Yugoslavia also included acts of widespread sexual and gender-based violence. Thus, the Convention and its legal interpretation clarify that the intentional destruction of a group may, and, in fact, tends to occur through multiple forms of action, with direct killing being only one of them.

The Convention's definition emphasizes the centrality of intent to destroy a group as such. In legal terms, this intent is often framed in terms of *mens rea* – the mental element, i.e., the intent to destroy the group in whole or in part – and *actus reus* – the physical acts taken to carry out that intent, as enumerated in the Convention. Genocide requires a specific intent (*dolus specialis*) to destroy the group in whole or in part, and each of the acts defined in the Convention qualifies as genocidal only if committed with that intent. International tribunals dealing with cases of genocide or suspected genocide have ruled that intent can be inferred not only from official documents and statements by political or military leaders, but also from the pattern of conduct of the state or of forces perpetrating the crimes, if such intent is the only inference that can reasonably be drawn from that conduct.

There is an inherent gap between the legal and the historical analysis of genocide. The legal definition is narrow, having been shaped in large part by the political interests of the states whose representatives drafted it. From a historical perspective, violent destruction of groups in both the distant and recent past has occurred in a wide variety of ways, many of which do not align with the stringent legal definition. The high threshold established by the legal standard and the dominant interpretations adopted by international tribunals have led to a paradoxical situation in which genocide is typically recognized only after a significant portion of the targeted group has already been destroyed and the group as such has suffered irreparable harm.

The case of Israel and Gaza illustrates this problem: while the legal debate over whether Israel is committing genocide in the Gaza Strip is both important and necessary, there is a critical gap between the amount of time it will take the formal legal institutions deliberating on the issue, chiefly the International Court of Justice, to issue binding decisions, and the reality of society in Gaza being destroyed before our eyes. The consequences of Israel's deliberate actions are becoming increasingly severe as time goes on, while the international community either remains passive or actively supports Israel's crimes.

This report relies on the legal definition of genocide as outlined in the UN Convention, but adopts a broader analytical framework, drawing on Raphael Lemkin's original conception as well as historical and sociological research, when examining the process that led to the genocide in Gaza and Israel's genocidal acts in the Strip. The report analyzes the conditions that preceded October 2023 and laid the groundwork for the implementation of the genocide following Hamas's attack on 7 October; the reasons why this attack became a catalyst on the path toward genocide; and the range of practices Israel has implemented in Gaza since 7 October. Together, these practices constitute a coordinated attack on the essential foundations of Palestinian society in Gaza, with the intent to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a group. The report also examines how these genocidal practices are gradually spilling over into other areas where Israel controls Palestinians and warns of the danger they pose to Palestinians in those areas, both as individuals and as a group.

3.**METHODOLOGY**

This report aims to outline the overall nature of the assault Israel has been waging since October 2023 against Palestinians across all areas under its control, with a focus on the genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Over the past 20 months, B'Tselem has collected data, information, and documentation of thousands of cases of killing, injury, forced displacement, torture, the destruction of homes, structures and infrastructure, and a wide range of other human rights violations committed by the Israeli regime against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and within the territory of the State of Israel. In order to provide as complete a picture as possible of the scope of harm to Palestinians, this report includes information and data gathered from external sources. The decision to use this information stemmed, among other reasons, from the immense difficulty involved in documenting Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip. Since the onset of the current assault, Israel has imposed unprecedented restrictions on access to Gaza by organizations and media outlets, deepening its isolation from the world. B'Tselem's field researchers in the Gaza Strip, who managed to escape with their families after months of displacement, suffering, and constant danger, continued collecting testimonies from hundreds of residents via phone calls and voice messages, despite the ongoing challenge of maintaining contact.

As we are committed to maintaining the highest standards of credibility and reliability, any data in this document not directly investigated and verified by B'Tselem was drawn from the following sources: publications and reports by human rights organizations, humanitarian agencies, UN offices and bodies, investigations and reports by reputable media outlets committed to journalistic ethics and data verification standards, expert opinions authored by internationally recognized professionals, and primary sources such as testimonies and verified documentation from the field. In addition, we drew on a broad body of scholarly literature that has examined cases of genocide committed throughout history in various parts of the world, as well as on the work of researchers who have documented widespread practices unfolding in the shadow of the ongoing war in Gaza and published their findings in recognized academic journals. The analysis of all collected information was carried out by

B'Tselem, based on its many years of experience in collecting and verifying information, and researching human rights violations.

With regard to the number of Palestinians killed and injured in the Gaza Strip, this report relies on figures published by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza. These figures are widely considered reliable and have been adopted by numerous organizations and researchers. Moreover, they are generally regarded as conservative compared to the actual number of casualties resulting from the assault. This is due to the methodology the Ministry uses to calculate the number of victims: With respect to fatalities, the Ministry only records bodies that reach hospital morgues or deaths reported to the authorities by relatives. As a result, the Ministry's lists exclude deceased whose bodies have yet to be recovered from the rubble of destroyed buildings, remains that cannot be identified, bodies buried in makeshift graves without notifying the authorities, or entire families killed with no one left to report their deaths. The same applies to the number of wounded, which includes only those who were able to reach official medical centers to receive treatment. The systematic destruction of Gaza's healthcare system has left many wounded unable or unwilling to access the few remaining hospitals in the Strip, which are overwhelmed by the number of dead, sick, and injured.

Due to the constraints described above, and the sheer, unprecedented volume of events, this section reflects only a partial picture of the scale of harm to each dimension of Palestinian life across the various areas under Israeli control. We estimate that years of documentation and research will be required to fully assess the scope of destruction that continues as of the writing of this report, and the long-term consequences, personal, cultural, social, and political, that Palestinians living across these regions are expected to face in the future.

4.

THE ISRAELI GENOCIDE AGAINST THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Nearly two years of an unrelenting Israeli onslaught has left most of the Gaza Strip in ruins. As of mid-July 2025, estimated figures cite approximately 58,026 fatalities, the overwhelming majority of them civilians who were not participating in the hostilities. The number of wounded is estimated at approximately 138,520. All hospitals have been destroyed or are only partially functioning, and the same is true of the vast majority of civilian infrastructure. It is reasonable to assume that the entire population of the Gaza Strip, especially children, who make up roughly half of it, is currently experiencing physical and psychological trauma of varying severity. Many more people are expected to die or suffer severe, lasting bodily and mental harm due to the ongoing hostilities and the consequences of Israel's deliberate starvation of the population and obstruction of humanitarian aid. Since Israel broke the ceasefire in early March 2025, hundreds of people in the Gaza Strip have been killed or wounded every day: from airstrikes, shooting and shelling around "aid distribution centers", and malnutrition or a lethal combination of hunger, diseases spreading in Gaza, contaminated water and a devastated healthcare system.

This reality is a direct outcome of Israel's policy in the Gaza Strip since October 2023, which cannot be justified or explained as an attempt to destroy the rule of Hamas or its military capabilities in Gaza. Statements by senior Israeli decision-makers about the nature of the assault on Gaza have expressed genocidal intent throughout. Genocidal intent was also expressed in numerous statements made by Israeli military officers of all ranks, by soldiers on the ground, by military and security experts, and by Israeli media and cultural figures. These voices articulated a worldview shared by decision-makers and a significant portion of Jewish-Israeli society, according to which all, or most, of Gaza's residents are either directly responsible for the crimes of 7 October or at the very least support them. Accordingly, for many decision-makers, as well as soldiers and commanders on the ground, the aspiration to destroy the rule of Hamas and its military capabilities and to prevent future attacks like that of 7 October were translated into targeting the entire population of the Gaza Strip. The total dehumanization of Gaza's residents has led to a perception, still widely held among Jewish-Israelis, that their lives are of negligible value compared to Israel's national goals, if not worthless altogether.

This perception is manifest in Israel's conduct of warfare in the Gaza Strip, which has included – among other things – massive, indiscriminate bombardment of population centers; starvation of more than two million people as a method of warfare; attempts at ethnic cleansing and **formally including** the ethnic cleansing of Gaza's residents in the war aims; systematic destruction of hospitals and other medical facilities, which are entitled to special protection under international law, along with the vast majority of civilian infrastructure there; and the unprecedented killing of medical personnel, aid workers, persons in charge of maintaining public order, and journalists. Israel's claim that Hamas fighters or members of other armed Palestinian groups were present in medical or civilian facilities, often made without providing any evidence, cannot justify or explain such widespread, systematic destruction.

The clear picture emerging from this pattern of conduct is of a broad, coordinated onslaught against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, with the intent of destroying Palestinian society there as a group. Since it began in October 2023, this policy has been supported, legitimized and normalized by most of Jewish-Israeli and its institutions, including the **Israeli legal system**.

The element of intent, a key component in the definition of genocide, emerges unequivocally in light of several factors: the Israeli leadership's awareness of the foreseeable consequences of its open-fire and starvation policies; the systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure that enables life; the decision to continue, and even escalate, the assault despite countless warnings and evidence regarding its impact on the civilian population in the Gaza Strip; and numerous statements by policymakers explicitly indicating that Israel is targeting the entire population of the Strip.

A thorough legal examination of this issue appears in **Amnesty International**'s December 2024 report titled "*You Feel Like You Are Subhuman: Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza*"; in the work of Physicians for Human Rights, currently being published; in the **submissions** by South Africa's legal team, whose main arguments were outlined in the application (and subsequent **evidentiary supplements** added throughout the assault) filed with the International Court of Justice (ICJ); and in **reports by United Nations experts**.

While Israel's genocide against the Palestinians is unfolding in full force in the Gaza Strip, it cannot be separated from the sharp escalation of Israel's violence against Palestinians under its control in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and within Israel itself. The regime and the military perpetrating genocide in Gaza are the same ones bombing refugee camps, killing hundreds of civilians, and carrying out policies of forcible transfer and dispossession on an unprecedented scale across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It is the same regime that enforces similar policies of expulsion, dispossession, and neglect in the Negev (Naqab), and a policy of intimidation and silencing of Palestinian citizens of Israel who attempt to protest Israel's actions in Gaza or simply express solidarity with Palestinians there. This same regime is centrally committed to denying Palestinians the right to national self-determination and suppressing any expression of Palestinian identity. All this indicates that the escalation of Israeli violence in Gaza is gradually extending to other areas under its control; that security forces carrying out extreme violence in one space are growing accustomed to using such violence elsewhere, and with fewer restraints; and that a society that legitimizes genocide in Gaza – through participation, support, denial, or indifference – naturally legitimizes increasing violence against Palestinians as a whole.

The sections below describe the broad assault on Palestinians as a group, primarily by documenting Israel's genocidal practices in Gaza, as well as by tracing the escalating violence against Palestinians throughout all areas under Israeli control. We focus on four main domains: killings, physical destruction, forcible displacement, and the destruction of political, cultural, and social life. Following sections address how Israel's genocide also targets Palestinian identity, particularly through attacks on refugees and on the Palestinian refugee status. Finally, we analyze key expressions of dehumanization and incitement against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

A. Killing and causing serious bodily and mental harm

Killing and causing serious bodily and mental harm in the Gaza Strip

As of July 2025, more than 58,000 people have been killed as a direct result of Israel's military assault on the Gaza Strip, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. A breakdown released by the Ministry in July 2025 shows 15% of the fatalities are women, 29% are minors and 7% are elderly. A study published in February 2025 estimated that during the first 12 months of the Israeli assault, the **life expectancy of men in Gaza dropped by 51.6%, to 40.5 years**, a loss of 34.9 years compared to prewar life expectancy. **For women, life expectancy fell by 38.6%, to an estimated 47.5 years**, a loss of 29.9 years.

Several studies published over the past year suggest that these figures represent an underestimation of the death toll, and that the actual number of casualties resulting from Israel's onslaught is likely much higher. The duration of the assault, the immense scale of infrastructure destruction, and the restriction of humanitarian and rescue organizations' access to Gaza are just some of the factors contributing to this underestimation, which fails to capture the full scope of the crimes committed by Israel in Gaza since October 2023.

Airstrikes and population displacement

These figures are the direct outcome of Israel's chosen open-fire policy, which systematically violates fundamental principles of international law, such as distinction and proportionality. Israel has adopted a policy that permits unprecedented levels of harm to uninvolved civilians when striking at what it considers military targets. In the current assault, Israel has extensively used technological tools to generate and criminalize targets and has permitted attacks to be carried out based on the discretion of low-ranking soldiers and commanders in the field. These practices enable the military to increase the frequency of strikes and reduce risk to soldiers at the expense of precautions intended to reduce injury to innocents.

The evacuation orders Israel issued to civilians in Gaza, ostensibly to provide advance warning before bombings or military incursions in accordance with international humanitarian law, were often unclear or misleading and did not leave residents sufficient time to evacuate. Additionally, after ordering residents to leave their homes, Israel repeatedly bombed the "safe corridors" that the internally displaced persons (IDPs) were to use to travel to "humanitarian zones". Testimonies given to B'Tselem by Gaza residents, alongside videos published in international media, revealed bodies lying on roadsides, likely those of IDPs who had attempted to evacuate their homes in the northern Gaza Strip to the "humanitarian zones" in the south.

The "humanitarian zones", which were meant to provide IDPs safety, offered unlivable conditions and were themselves systematically bombed. An analysis by the BBC found that Israeli attacks on the al-Mawasi "humanitarian zone" only increased in frequency after May 2024 – the month in which Gaza residents were ordered to relocate there. Between May 2024 and January 2025, the area was bombed 97 times.

Muhammad Ghrab, a resident of Gaza City who was displaced to al-Mawasi, east of Khan Yunis, described an airstrike he witnessed on 13 July 2024 in a testimony he gave B'Tselem. The attack, which Israel claimed targeted two top Hamas military wing operatives, including its leader, Muhammad Deif, and involved two successive bombings, was the deadliest strike on the "humanitarian zone" in al-Mawasi during those months. Many were killed and wounded in the first strike, and when rescue teams and civilians arrived to try to evacuate the wounded, air force bombed the site again. A total of 90 people were killed and 300 injured in the two attacks.

Suddenly, a ring of fire formed [...] the sky was completely covered in clouds, dust and dirt. People started running in all directions. [...] When we entered the tents that were still standing, we saw they were full of bodies, mostly of women and children. What we saw that day, at that hour, was like the embodiment of madness. Something incomprehensible. It felt like pieces of hell were falling onto the earth. It's impossible to truly describe. Language fails. It can't contain the horrors we witnessed. What I'm describing is only a small part of the horror that took place. [...] I've been afraid ever since that day. I keep expecting the tents to be bombed and for me and my family to die in a similar strike.

According to reports, several fires started in IDP tent encampments as a result of the heavy bombings. In many of the recorded incidents, people burned to death. Ahmad a-Dalu, from Gaza City, described an Israeli air force strike on an IDP camp where he and his family were sheltering in October 2024. His son Sha'ban, 20, burned to death in front of him in the fire that broke out in the tent:

[...] as I was coming back from the bathroom to our tent, I heard the loud buzzing of a drone that was flying overhead. Its loud sound really scared me, and I got very stressed. I asked God to protect us, and prayed that nothing bad would happen, but I also wondered who of us would die that night. Suddenly, a ball of fire fell on the tent and hit my children. I looked at them and saw that they weren't moving, and in an instant I decided to go in and save them. I think my fatherly instinct pushed me to do that. I threw myself into the fire and I managed to take 'Abd a-Rahman, Rahaf, Farah, and my wife, who was sleeping next to her, out of the tent. I saw the fire burning Sha'ban's body. He had been sleeping on a wooden chair right next to where the bomb fell. I saw his face melt from the flames, it was a horrific sight. In those moments I reached my peak of defeat and heart-break. I said to him, "I'm sorry, my beloved son, but I can't help you."

After breaking the ceasefire in March 2025, Israel resumed its pattern of aggressive and indiscriminate attacks across the Gaza Strip, including in the designated humanitarian zones and other areas densely populated by tens of thousands of destitute IDPs. As of 14 July 2025, the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported more than 7,450 people killed and over 26,000 wounded since the ceasefire was violated.

Open-fire regulations and kill zones

The mass killing of civilians in Gaza has been carried out not only through airstrikes using heavy bombs launched from afar, but also through permissive, and at times deliberate, live fire by Israeli soldiers on the ground. Soldiers' testimonies reveal that during the months of fighting, Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip defined "kill zones": areas with arbitrary boundaries, sometimes unclear even to the soldiers themselves, where permission was given to open fire at anyone seen within them. Soldiers and officers serving throughout the offensive and across various areas of the Strip reported the absence of any rules of engagement, or that

such rules were determined at the discretion of commanders on the ground or based on arbitrary criteria. Isolated incidents such as the killing of 15 paramedics in April 2025, or the December 2023 shooting of three Israeli hostages who had escaped captivity and were waving a white flag, illustrate that the open-fire regulations were not only relaxed, but entirely discarded. These practices were reinforced by statements from commanders regarding indiscriminate killings and by testimony from volunteer doctors in Gaza, including visual evidence of deliberate sniper shootings of children.

Wounded persons and lack of medical treatment

Since October 2023, Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip has left hundreds of thousands of people with severe physical and psychological injuries, the effects of which they will carry for many years, if not for the rest of their lives. Until 14 July 2025, a total of 138,520 people were injured as a result of Israel's military campaign. Approximately 25% of them sustained life-altering injuries that require immediate and long-term rehabilitative care, including limb amputations, spinal injuries, traumatic brain injuries, and severe burns. The figures are based on records from the Ministry of Health in Gaza and refer only to people who sought treatment at an official medical facility. Given the extreme workload in Gaza's healthcare system and the dire conditions in hospitals, many wounded individuals avoid going to medical centers in non-emergency cases. As with the death toll, it appears that the official figures on injuries also understate the actual number.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Health in Gaza to Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHRI), more than 4,700 people have undergone amputations since October 2023, including over 940 children and approximately 370 women. Conversations conducted by PHRI staff with physicians in Gaza, as well as information published by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), reveal that doctors reported a severe shortage of painkillers, resulting in amputations being performed without anesthesia, including on children. Doctors also described amputations carried out in unsanitary conditions, without adequate surgical equipment, and in some cases outside hospital facilities altogether. In instances where basic medications such as antibiotics were unavailable, doctors were forced to amputate patients' limbs to save their lives, though under normal circumstances amputations would not have been necessary.

Figures provided to B'Tselem by the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2025 noted that tens of thousands of wounded individuals and amputees were left without adequate care. Many were discharged into uninhabitable conditions: tents, destroyed buildings or makeshift shelters, without adequate access to clean water, electricity, or medication, and in many cases without family support. This has worsened their medical conditions, leading to irreversible complications. In May 2024, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities warned that people with disabilities in Gaza are "at higher risks of dying, becoming injured and acquiring further impairments" as a result of the ongoing Israeli offensive.

Ahmad al-Ghalban, a 16-year-old from Beit Lahiya, spoke in a testimony he gave B'Tselem about losing his twin brother and his uncle, as well as both legs and four of his fingers, in an Israeli shelling on 22 March 2025:

Before my injury, I was a professional gymnast. Muhammad and I competed in competitions and events. We were among the top in northern Gaza. But the occupation stole everything from me: my twin brother, my legs, my ability to do anything. My soul is broken. [...] I'm still getting treatment at the Patient's Friends hospital in the a-Rimal neighborhood. It's really hard to get there because of the rubble and debris in the streets. My father tries to get me painkillers from the pharmacy, but they are very expensive. The hospital has no ointments or bandages. We buy everything ourselves. I suffer from severe pain, and I'm in bad shape emotionally. I've lost a lot of weight due to hunger. There's no meat, no vegetables, no fruit, only lentils and chickpeas.

Indirect deaths

Over the months of fighting, various estimates have been published regarding the rate of "indirect deaths" that have already occurred or are expected to occur and cannot be prevented. These estimates range from thousands to tens of thousands of deaths, in addition to the direct fatalities caused by the Israeli assault. Despite differences among the various studies, stemming from the difficulty of assessing the full scope amid ongoing hostilities, researchers broadly agree that the official figures released by the Ministry of Health in Gaza significantly understate the number of victims.

The main causes of indirect deaths are injuries, infectious diseases, malnutrition, maternal and neonatal mortality, and complications from untreated chronic illnesses. All are a direct result of the destruction of living conditions in the Gaza Strip, Israel's restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid, and Israel's assault on the healthcare system that has rendered it unable to cope with the continuous influx of casualties. Experts warn that if the Israeli offensive continues, along with the starvation of Gaza's residents, the number of indirect deaths will rise further.

In early October 2024, about 100 American medical professionals who had volunteered in the Gaza Strip published a letter stating that almost every person they encountered there was either sick or wounded, and that nearly every child under the age of five was suffering from coughing and diarrhea. They reported that many of the surgeries they performed resulted in infections due to a combination of malnutrition, poor sanitary conditions, and a lack of medication. They also stated that malnutrition and the acute shortage of clean drinking water had led to widespread cases of low birth weight and post-partum women unable to breastfeed, often resulting in the infants' deaths. The letter further described how pregnant women and fetuses who might have otherwise survived had died as a result of the decimation of the healthcare system. A physician who volunteered at Nasser Hospital spoke of the shortage of baby formula as another cause of infant mortality. In July 2024, maternal healthcare experts reported at least a 300% increase in miscarriage rates in the Gaza Strip since October 2023. A May 2025 estimate by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) found that one in three pregnancies in Gaza was considered high-risk, and one in five babies was born prematurely or underweight, at a time when the necessary medical care for such cases was nearly unavailable throughout the Strip.

Psychological trauma

In addition to coping with injuries and physical disabilities, Gaza's residents have endured countless traumatic events during the months of assault, with long-term psychological consequences that cannot be quantified. Testimonies collected by B'Tselem indicate that within a reality of omnipresent death, relentless displacement, and ongoing hunger and disease, many are suffering psychological distress after witnessing horrific events, including the violent deaths of their loved ones.

Rajaa al-Harbiti, 35, described the incident in which her husband Akram and her sons Muhammad and Ahmad were run over by an Israeli tank in the IDP camp where they were staying in Rafah, after the camp had been bombed from the air earlier that night.

During the night, my children were very scared. I asked my son Ahmad if he was afraid, and he said no, but I saw he was trembling with fear. I promised him we'd escape, and we prepared white flags for the road. [...] Suddenly, I saw a tank speeding toward us, crushing my neighbors' tent on the way. [...] My husband threw himself over our sons Muhammad, Ahmad and Ibrahim to protect them, while I grabbed my daughter Sanaa by the shoulder, picked her up, and fled the tent. We managed to get about a meter and a half away from my husband and sons before the tank ran them over before our eyes. I grabbed my daughter's hand, lifted her up, and begged the military not to run us over too, but the tank hit us and we fell to the ground. I lifted my head and hand, and I was sure I was dying. I couldn't hear Muhammad, but I saw Ahmad, his back covered in blood, and my husband, who was bleeding from every part of his body except his face. His left hand was severed. He said to me: "Rajaa, my love, forgive me." I answered: "I forgive you, Akram."

Since October 2023, the incidence of mental health problems has increased significantly, particularly trauma-related disorders, depression, and anxiety, in a population already exhibiting high rates of mental illness due to prolonged exposure to occupation, blockade, and recurring military violence. According to a study published by MSF in December 2024, nearly all of Gaza's 1.2 million children were in need of mental health and psychosocial support due to symptoms of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and more. Another study published that month found that 96% of children in Gaza felt that death was imminent, and nearly half expressed a desire to die as a result of the trauma they had experienced.

After several weeks in the hospital, Rajaa al-Harbiti moved with her two surviving children, Sanaa and Ibrahim, to live in a tent in the IDP camp in al-Mawasi. In her testimony, she described the hardship of living with the trauma and loss they experienced.

Sanaa has trouble walking, and I use crutches. I know nothing about what happened to my husband and sons. I only know that no one was able to

reach them or their bodies, not even just to bury them. [...] I'm exhausted, and so is my soul. I can't comprehend that tanks ran my family over before my eyes. Ibrahim keeps reliving the moment the tank hit his father and brothers. He keeps describing how Muhammad's head was severed, and how Ahmad bled a lot. He has become aggressive and hits the other children around him. He screams a lot, has nightmares at night, and wets his pants. Every time Sanaa hears a loud noise, she gets very scared, puts her hands over her ears, and says, "Tank." She also suffers from involuntary urination. I feel like we're living in a horror movie.

Killing and causing serious bodily and mental harm in the West Bank

Airstrikes

While the assault on Gaza continues, airstrikes have also become frequent in refugee camps in the northern West Bank, among the most densely populated areas in the territory. According to B'Tselem's monitoring and documentation, between October 2023 and mid-July 2025, 263 people were killed in Israeli airstrikes, including at least 44 minors. By comparison, over a span of more than 18 years, from 2005 until early October 2023, only 14 people were killed in airstrikes in the West Bank.

The lethal results of these strikes were demonstrated in January 2025, during a raid on Tammun in the northern West Bank. An Israeli aircraft fired a missile that killed three cousins, two of them children, near their homes: Adam Bsharat, 23, Hamzah Bsharat, 10, and Rida Bsharat, 8. In a military investigation published afterwards, the military claimed that the man and the two children had been identified as individuals who planted explosive devices, based on intelligence information, but no explosive devices were ultimately found in the area.

Fidaa Bsharat, 41, a mother of five, including eight-year-old Rida who was killed, said in her testimony:

I kept on holding my son, but I knew he was dead. Soon after, the soldiers brought blankets from 'Abla's house and covered the three bodies. They didn't try to give them first aid or even check them. It was clear they were dead. They took them away on stretcher. [...] Rida was our only son. He was born after four daughters. He was the prince of his class and our spoiled boy. He always wanted us to visit Jerusalem, but we couldn't because of the situation. He used to say to me: "I'll buy a car and take you to Jerusalem and buy you anything you want." He was very attached to me and would always kiss my hands and head. Even though he was still young, his thinking was much more developed than his friends. I felt like he was my friend. Every day, I feel him slipping further and further away from me.

Open-fire policy

In addition to airstrikes, the Israeli military has implemented a more lethal open-fire policy in the West Bank than ever before. According to a B'Tselem investigation, in the first three weeks of the assault on the Gaza Strip, 118 people were killed in the West Bank by Israeli military fire, 81 of whom posed no threat to anyone. By 12 July 2025, Israeli forces had killed 926 Palestinians, 195 of whom were minors. Five more minors were killed by an unidentified Israeli actor.

In February 2025, an investigation by Haaretz reported that during Operation Iron Wall, launched by the Israeli military in the northern West Bank in January 2024, GOC Central Command Major General Avi Bluth authorized his troops to shoot to kill anyone "messing with the ground," as this raised suspicion of an attempt to plant an explosive device. Soldiers' testimonies indicate that a similar directive has been in place in the Gaza Strip since October 2023. This permissive open-fire policy led, among other things, to the killing of Sundus Shalabi, a 20-year-old woman who was eight months pregnant. Kill zones were also imported to the West Bank as part of the broader "Gazafication" of Israel's methods of warfare. Soldiers interviewed for the Haaretz investigation said that Judea and Samaria Division commander Brigadier General Yaki Dolf authorized live fire at any vehicle approaching an army checkpoint from a "combat zone," in order to stop the driver before reaching the inspection point.

Jewish militias in the West Bank

Escalating Israeli violence in the West Bank is not limited to military operations and also includes attacks by settlers. In many cases, the line between the two is blurred: As part of preparation for the offensives in Gaza and the West Bank, the Israeli military recruited and armed thousands of settlers into Regional Defense Battalions stationed throughout the West Bank and entrusted with protecting Israeli settlements. The number of settlers serving in these units has increased fivefold, and numerous testimonies have since emerged of settler-soldiers threatening and attacking Palestinians. Thousands more settlers were recruited into settlement security squads and were involved in attacks on Palestinian residents. In addition, immediately after 7 October 2023, the Ministry of National Security under Minister Itamar Ben Gvir distributed thousands of firearms to settlers across the West Bank. Hundreds more weapons, including sniper rifles, were purchased and distributed by regional councils. In addition to all these, coalition agreements allocated tens of millions of shekels for purchasing observation, patrol and defense equipment for West Bank settler outposts.

The proliferation of weapons among settlers, and the support the settlers receive from the Israeli government and law enforcement agencies; the growing dehumanization of Palestinians and indifference to harm inflicted on them; the shifting of international focus from the West Bank to Gaza – all these have led to an unprecedented spike in daily attacks by settlers, often armed and equipped with full military gear, on Palestinians in the West Bank. These attacks include arson, theft, home invasions and takeovers, armed threats, beatings, and more. OCHA lists 2,617 settler attacks resulting in harm to Palestinians and/or their property between 7 October 2023 and the end of June 2025. According to B'Tselem statistics, between 7 October 2023 and 12 July 2025, 26 Palestinians were killed by Israeli settlers or "unknown Israeli parties" and dozens more were injured.

Severe psychological distress

Airstrikes and raids in the northern West Bank, intensive military activity often involving live fire, and the constant threat of violence from settlers and soldiers, especially in Area C and in rural Palestinian communities, have made life extremely unstable for residents. In March 2025, MSF reported a growing mental health crisis among tens of thousands

of IDPs from the northern West Bank, many of whom suffer from stress, anxiety, and depression due to what the organization described as "an extremely precarious situation": inadequate shelter, lack of essential services, and no access to medical care. In another publication, the organization described a 91% increase in demand for psychological first aid among residents of Area C in the month following 7 October 2023 compared to the previous month, largely due to the sharp rise in settler and military violence. This violence was later exacerbated by settler efforts to sow fear among Palestinians in the West Bank, including by placing a billboard in the heart of the territory with the slogan "There is no future in Palestine" and posting threatening messages in Palestinian online groups.

On 31 July 2024, Israeli soldiers raided the home of Hala Rajabi, 50, a mother of nine, in central Hebron. The soldiers assaulted Hala and her children, and her 14-year-old son Muhammad lost consciousness. In her testimony to B'Tselem, she described the emotional scars the incident left in her family:

My daughter tried to get the two soldiers away from her brothers, and they started hitting us both with their guns, pushed us out of the room and locked it from the inside with the key. Through the door, I heard the soldiers continuing to attack them. I knocked on the door, crying and screaming. [...] My eldest son pushed the soldiers off him and managed to get to the room I was in. He managed to pick Muhammad up and ran out of the house, even though the soldiers tried to stop him. My other son, who was in the room with Muhammad, tried to follow him but passed out and fell down the stairs leading to the road. Some young guys picked him up and took him to the car my eldest son put Muhammad in, and they drove to the hospital. [...] I tried to follow them, but the soldiers wouldn't let me. They threw a stun grenade at the front door. [...] Muhammad is still suffering from pain in his testicles and from anxiety. He's had trouble sleeping ever since the attack. He says he has nightmares about the soldiers chasing him and beating him. [...] I haven't really recovered since then. It's very difficult to stand there helplessly and listen to soldiers beat your children inside your own home.

Killing and causing serious bodily and mental harm inside Israel

Crime

Israel's assault on Palestinians has intensified incitement and accelerated the dehumanization of the Palestinian collective. These developments, unfolding against the backdrop of longstanding institutional discrimination, further deepened the neglect of the Palestinian minority in Israel, including the state's failure to address the proliferation of illegal firearms and the entrenchment of crime organizations in some Arab communities. Over the past two years, the number of Palestinian citizens of Israel killed in crime-related incidents reached a record high, nearly doubling between 2021 and 2024. In 2024 alone, 230 people were killed, most of them victims of rampant crime and the widespread availability of illegal firearms.

This deliberate neglect has become policy since Itamar Ben Gvir took office as Minister of National Security. According to a 2024 study by the Emergency Headquarters Against Crime and Violence, 87% of Palestinian citizens of Israel personally know someone who has been harmed or killed due to violence or crime, and 82% reported feeling unsafe in their own communities. In addition, 80% said they were afraid to contact the Israeli police or file complaints against members of crime organizations active in their communities. This fear is rooted in the consistent failure of the Israel Police to address organized crime. In 2024, only about 15% of murder cases in Arab localities were solved by the police. As the report summarized, the message conveyed by the Israel Police is that "the blood of Arab citizens is cheap, and the establishment does not provide them with the protection every citizen in the country deserves."

B. Destruction of living conditions

Destruction of living conditions in the Gaza Strip

Starvation and destruction of food infrastructure

Even before the current Israeli offensive, approximately 64% of the population in the Gaza Strip were classified as food insecure, and about 80% relied on some form of humanitarian aid. Immediately after launching its assault on Gaza, Israel declared a complete blockade on the Strip, which quickly led to growing shortages of food supplies. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), between October 2023 and 10 August 2024, an average of 118 trucks carrying humanitarian aid and 37 carrying commercial goods entered the Strip per day. This is much lower than the number of trucks the WFP and other organizations has estimated are required to meet the basic needs of Gaza's residents. In September 2024, 15 aid organizations published an analysis showing that Israel had blocked 83% of food assistance to the Strip. Reports also indicated that Israel attacked convoys responsible for distributing humanitarian aid, as well as the Palestinian police officers tasked, among other things, with securing them. The shortage of accessible food led to sharp price hikes across Gaza, further limiting access to food for most of the population.

In addition to blocking incoming aid, Israel has systematically destroyed much of the infrastructure that enables local food production in Gaza. For example, in November 2023, Israel bombed the only operating wheat mill in the entire Strip. By January 2024, only 15 bakeries were still functioning out of approximately 130 that had operated before the war. In April 2025, the WFP said its last supported bakery had shut down due to a shortage of flour and fuel. The situation remained much the same until early July 2025. By December 2024, 95% of cattle and more than half of sheep and goat flocks in Gaza had been destroyed. Israel's offensive has also almost obliterated the fishing industry, long a critical source of food security for Gaza's residents. Similarly, vast damage has been inflicted on agricultural lands: by April 2025, more than 80% of cropland, around 70% of greenhouses, and some 80% of agricultural wells in Gaza had been damaged. Before October 2023, 20-30% of the food consumed in Gaza was produced locally. The Israeli offensive has not only decimated existing sources of food in the Strip, but also inflicted severe long-term damage that will impair the population's ability to produce food in the future.

Use of starvation as a method of warfare

In January 2024, UN experts asserted that there was no precedent for the speed and scale of starvation inflicted on a civilian population as witnessed in Gaza, adding that "Israel is destroying Gaza's food system and using food as a weapon against the Palestinian people." Throughout the months of its assault, Israel denied that food shortages or humanitarian aid deficits existed in the Strip, claiming that if shortages were present in certain areas, Hamas was to blame for stealing aid brought in by the UN. This claim was denied by the aid agencies involved. Two U.S. government agencies responsible for coordinating humanitarian aid concluded that Israel had deliberately delayed and obstructed the entry of humanitarian assistance into Gaza and that it bore primary responsibility for the hunger there.

Contrary to Israel's claims, numerous reports and statements by policymakers indicate that one of the main reasons for restricting the entry of aid was to exert pressure on Hamas to accept a more favorable deal for the release of Israeli hostages, including by fomenting internal unrest against Hamas among Gaza's population.

Since Israel broke the ceasefire in March 2025, the starvation of Gaza's population has become official and openly declared policy, severely undermining food security in Gaza. According to an assessment from May 2025, approximately 1.95 million people, 93% of Gaza's population, were suffering from severe food insecurity. Of these, 244,000 were living in conditions of "catastrophic hunger," the most extreme classification used by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative (IPC). By comparison, in October 2024, the IPC estimated that the number of people experiencing catastrophic hunger stood at 133,000. It projected that, absent policy change, the number would reach 470,000, about 22% of Gaza's population, by September 2025.

Hala Sha'sha'ah, a 40-year-old mother of five who lived in Gaza City before the current war began, spoke to B'Tselem about how she and her children had been coping with many months of severe hunger:

It was especially hard to find vegetables and meat. There was also a flour shortage, and sometimes there was none at all. My youngest, 'Az a-Din, cried a lot and kept saying, "I'm hungry." It broke my heart to hear it,

and I cried over his situation – but that was the situation for everyone. I explained to him that everyone was hungry and there was nothing I could do. [...] Two of my children, Layan (20) and Mahmoud (17), came down with viral hepatitis and there was no treatment available. I couldn't provide them with the healthy nutrition they needed to fight the illness. We were advised to give them foods high in sugar, so we gave them what we could get – halva and jam. They had high fevers, vomiting and diarrhea. Mahmoud cried from the pain and thought he was going to die. We took him to the hospital. Layan also suffered badly and couldn't stand on her feet for two weeks. [...] 'Iz a-Din suggested we buy horse meat, and I told him, "You can't eat that." But we've reached the point where people are eating whatever kind of meat they can find, no matter its source. My children go to bed hungry, with empty stomachs. Layan and Banan (18) talk about how they miss snacks and chocolate – things that have disappeared and no longer exist here, at least not for us.

Routine killings at "aid distribution centers"

At the end of May 2025, the Israeli military and the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), a private organization with ties to the Israeli and American governments, began operating four "secure distribution sites" where Gaza residents ostensibly receive food aid. Just days after the sites became operational, UN representatives described them as "death traps" where masses of starving and exhausted people were forced to stand in extreme overcrowding, fighting over aid packages. Almost every day the centers operated, dozens of people were shot while waiting for the centers to open, or when packages ran out and the Israeli military tried to disperse the crowds still hoping to receive some food. According to Gaza Ministry of Health figures, from 27 May to July 2025, 758 people were killed and more than 5,000 were injured trying to get food at the aid distribution centers.

In an investigative report published by Haaretz in late June 2025, officers and soldiers described how they were ordered to open fire at the crowds to push them away from the food distribution points or to "disperse gatherings" around the aid centers. Firing shells, including at people attempting to flee, was described as having "become standard practice" in these areas. Regarding one of the shooting incidents, a senior reserve officer said:

"When we asked why they opened fire, we were told it was an order from above and that the civilians had posed a threat to the troops. I can say with certainty that the people were not close to the forces and did not endanger them. It was pointless – they were just killed, for nothing. This thing called killing innocent people – it's been normalized. We were constantly told there are no noncombatants in Gaza, and apparently that message sank in among the troops."

In May 2025, even before the "aid centers" began operating, OCHA and the CEO of GHF, who resigned prior to the launch, warned that the supply used by the centers would lead to a significant reduction in the delivery of humanitarian aid at a time when need was growing. The UN and other aid organizations refused to participate in the centers' operation, arguing that setting up a small number of massive distribution points, most of them concentrated in southern Gaza, would force hungry residents to relocate with their families toward the area near the Egyptian border, which could suggest a deliberate policy of forced displacement from the area. An Israeli official involved in the planning stated that the project's goal was to "put on some kind of show of distributing aid for the world solely in order to repel international pressure." All of this supports the conclusion that the centers were designed to serve the planned forcible transfer of Gaza's population, in the spirit of the Trump Plan, rather than to facilitate access to aid. In other words, it appears that the so-called aid centers effectively constitute yet another means used by Israel to carry out starvation and ethnic cleansing.

Destruction of electricity and water infrastructure

The complete blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza at the onset of the assault included the disconnection from the Israeli electricity grid, which, given how Israel constrained independent power production in Gaza, had supplied a significant portion of Gaza's electricity consumption and was paid for by the Palestinian Authority. Gaza's only power plant, which only supplied a small portion of Gaza's power to begin with, was forced to cease operations as early as 11 October 2023. The electricity shortage brought devastating and widespread consequences, severely disrupting nearly all essential systems in the Strip, the healthcare system, water supply, food production and distribution, communications, municipal services, and more. Suppliers of these services were forced to rely on generators to continue operating in a limited capacity, but at the same time, fuel entry into the Strip

was blocked, and fuel reserves were quickly depleted. In November 2023, Israel began allowing limited fuel entry, while maintaining control over who was permitted to use it.

Extensive damage was inflicted on Gaza's solar energy infrastructure, which had been developed in recent years to attempt to cope with the chronic electricity shortage in the Strip. Additionally, by March 2024, over 60% of Gaza's electricity distribution network had been damaged or destroyed as a result of Israeli bombardments. The only facility that had been reconnected to the Israeli power grid since October 2023 was the central water desalination plant in Gaza City, but in March 2025, Israel announced that power supply to that facility was also cut off.

Water supply to the Strip was cut off by Israel on 9 October 2023, and was later restored in a limited manner. As the assault continued, the Israeli military destroyed 84% of Gaza's water facilities, including those intended for drinking water and others for hygiene, sewage treatment, irrigation, and similar needs. After these facilities were hit in airstrikes, the Israeli military prevented efforts to repair them. Israel also systematically blocked the entry of assistance related to water systems and water provision for residents, including filtration systems, tanks and materials required for war infrastructure repairs. This policy, together with the widespread destruction of Gaza's sewage system, led to the use of contaminated water and the spread of diseases, resulting, according to expert assessments, in thousands of deaths.

Epidemiologists and health experts estimate that the dire sanitary conditions, alongside the destruction of Gaza's health infrastructure and the move to improvised treatment settings, created an ideal environment for the emergence and spread of antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections. Some have suggested that since October 2023, Gaza has become the center of a "transparent" biological war that poses a risk not only to the local population but also potentially to global public health.

Assault on the healthcare system

Since October 2023, Israel has carried out a widespread and systematic attack on the entire medical infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, inflicting severe and targeted damage on hospitals and medical staff. As a result, in the very first weeks of the assault, most

hospitals and clinics in Gaza could no longer provide even basic medical care. As of June 2025, only **17 out of 36** hospitals in the Strip are still partially functioning, while facing **critical shortages of staff, fuel, and medical equipment**. In May 2025, the World Health Organization **reported** that only around 2,000 hospital beds remained available across the Strip for a population of more than 2 million people, constantly under attack and suffering from hunger and extremely poor sanitary conditions. In addition, throughout the months of the assault, Israel has blocked, restricted, or delayed the entry of **critical medical supplies** such as medications, painkillers, ventilators, and more. Some of the supplies and medications that were permitted to enter the Strip were **looted** before reaching their intended destinations.

Throughout the months of the assault, the Israeli military imposed a blockade and raided hospitals, claiming they were being used for military purposes by Hamas, a claim that, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), was **not substantiated** in most cases, and in some instances contradicted existing evidence. A **report** by MSF followed the case of Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, the second largest in the Strip, as a case study of the broader Israeli assault on hospitals. In January 2024, the military imposed a total blockade on Nasser Hospital, and many patients trapped inside died from treatable medical conditions. The following month, the military raided the hospital, caused widespread destruction to its facilities and equipment, and arrested dozens of staff members, patients, and their relatives. Since then, targeted military aggression against the **hospital** and its **surrounding area** has continued, and in June 2025, the military issued an evacuation order for the hospital grounds. In response, the **World Health Organization** warned of the imminent collapse of all activity at the hospital, which would leave the millions living in southern Gaza without any medical services.

As part of the assault on hospitals and medical centers, many medical staff and emergency responders have been harmed. As of January 2025, approximately **2.5%** of medical personnel in Gaza had been killed. In addition, **medical professionals have been arrested and subjected to severe abuse**, which, in **several cases**, resulted in their death in Israeli custody. Dr. Husam Abu Safiyah, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, was **detained** in December 2024 during an Israeli military raid on the hospital, which ultimately led to the closure of the last functioning medical facility in northern Gaza. During the raid, Abu Safiyah **refused** the military's demand to evacuate the hospital

and abandon his patients. In mid-July 2025, his lawyer reported that Abu Safiyah had lost about one-third of his body weight and was suffering from hunger, deprivation of medical treatment, and abuse by prison guards at Ofer Prison.

In a testimony he gave B'Tselem, paramedic Mu'in Abu al-'Eish described the siege, raids, and military attacks on Al-Awda Hospital in Jabalya, where he worked. In October 2024, he was asked to accompany a woman and an infant as part of an ambulance convoy full of patients, sick and wounded, headed to Kamal Adwan Hospital. As they approached the hospital, the military fired a shell that struck the rear of the ambulance.

Everyone in the ambulance was screaming. I got out to check on the people I was driving. I found one of the women dying, literally drawing her last breaths. There was nothing I could do for her. [...] Then they started shooting at us heavily, so I ran away with the injured boy and his father and one of the women and her daughter. We hid inside some warehouse. The other woman and her daughter ran toward Kamal Adwan Hospital. The two other women and the newborn stayed inside the ambulance.

From his hiding place, Mu'in managed to contact the ambulance drivers and have two come to the site. As soon as they arrived, the military fired a shell at them.

Thank God, they survived. One of the ambulances drove off and I put the wounded people into the other ambulance along with the paramedic who was with me. But we didn't have time to transfer everyone and had to run away. The women and the baby stayed inside the damaged ambulance. [...] Later, a man who passed by the area where the ambulance was shelled arrived at the hospital. He told us he'd heard a baby crying inside the ambulance. That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about the baby, that I had to get to him and save him, but I was afraid for myself and my colleagues.

Mu'in returned to the same spot overnight to pick up more dead and wounded killed in another Israeli strike:

[O]n our way back, we stopped near the ambulance. I found the newborn baby crying inside the ambulance. The body of one of the women was

there, and the body of the other woman was outside. Dogs had torn them both apart, but the baby somehow survived. We took the baby and the bodies and drove to Kamal Adwan Hospital. The baby was put in the NICU and was in good health. By God's grace, the dogs didn't get to him.

As a result of the ongoing assault on the healthcare system, many residents of the Strip suffering from chronic illnesses and various disabilities are not receiving essential medical treatment. American medical professionals who volunteered in Gaza estimated, conservatively, that 5,000 people with chronic illnesses died in the Strip during the first year of the assault. Some of these patients could have survived had they been granted access to treatment elsewhere, but Israel prevented them from leaving the Strip.

In a testimony she gave B'Tselem, Aya Kahil, a 28-year-old from Gaza City who was displaced with her family, spoke about her five-year-old son, Nabil, who was diagnosed with leukemia:

After about a month in the tent, I felt that something was wrong with Nabil. [...] [A]round that time, he started waking up at night screaming. He would come and sleep huddled next to me. He didn't want to eat, either. He had diarrhea, and I thought it might be a digestive system infection again [...] but Nabil didn't get better.

After his diagnosis, Nabil was put on the list of patients cleared to travel through Rafah Crossing to receive medical care in Egypt, but the family was told the next day that the crossing had closed due to Israeli military activity:

I thought the crossing would open within a couple of days. [...] In the meantime, Nabil's condition got worse. He couldn't walk anymore and kept complaining about stomach pain. His whole body was swollen. [...] [H]e never got chemotherapy.

It took the family three more weeks to get Nabil to the West Bank for treatment:

Nabil was taken into the ICU right away. He cried a lot because he wanted me to stay with him, but because of his weak immune system, at first they didn't let me sit next to him. [...] In the early afternoon, I was standing

next to him, and he asked me to come closer. Suddenly he had convulsions, and started trembling and twitching. He grabbed my hand and his teeth chattered loudly. When he let go of my hand, I fell down. I started screaming, crying and slapping myself. I was told not to be afraid, that maybe they were just convulsions. The director of the hospital came in. Nabil was dying. They tried to resuscitate him. His heart started beating again for a few seconds and then stopped again. They couldn't save him. He died. [...] I couldn't go with him to the cemetery because my permit didn't allow me to leave the hospital. Nabil was buried in Ramallah. A relative of ours who was there, went with him. He took a picture of the grave and sent it to us.

Domicide (destruction of housing)

According to recent estimates, approximately 92% of all residential buildings and about 69% of all structures in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or severely damaged. Entire neighborhoods, and even entire cities, have been all but wiped off the map.

Aya Hasunah a-Susi, a 31-year-old from northern Gaza City, watched her husband and small children being killed in a bombing on their IDP camp in the al-Mawasi in August 2024. Still grieving for her loved ones, she decided to return to Gaza alone. She described the scale of destruction she encountered in a testimony she gave B'Tselem:

I walked along the coastal road and saw people going home with their children. My heart ached. I was returning to Gaza without my husband and children. They were supposed to be with me and the loss overwhelmed me. Terrible pain. [...] My brother Ibrahim was waiting for me along the road, at a-Nabulsi Square. He asked, "What can you see that stands out?" so he could find me, but I didn't know the places and didn't recognize them among the ruins. I didn't recognize the streets of Gaza because they were completely destroyed. I didn't know where the city began and ended. [...] The area we lived in, in the north of Gaza City, was completely destroyed. There's no sign of life left there.

The destruction of Gaza's urban space is expected to continue as long as the Israeli offensive persists. Soldiers who served in the Strip have testified that the systematic demolition of homes, public buildings, infrastructure, and farmland is not carried out solely for operational purposes but has become a goal in and of itself. In this context, the torching of homes by soldiers has also become widespread, whether by order or at the soldiers' own discretion – supported by the prevailing military mindset.

As of June 2025, approximately 85% of the Gaza Strip is under Israeli military control and/or designated as evacuation zones by the military. Alongside this extensive territorial takeover, the vast majority of Gaza's residents have been forced into increasingly crowded "humanitarian zones," which have themselves been subjected to systematic bombing.

Economic destruction

In the first days of the assault, large parts of the a-Rimal neighborhood in Gaza City were destroyed under heavy Israeli bombardment. A-Rimal had been considered the economic and administrative center of the Strip, home to a high concentration of businesses, banks, schools, universities, telecommunications companies, health facilities, and both international and local organizations, including UNRWA's local headquarters.

Since the extensive attacks on a-Rimal, Israel has continued to systematically target Gaza's commercial and economic infrastructure throughout the months of fighting. According to a joint report by the World Bank and the United Nations from April 2024, nearly four out of five public, commercial, and industrial businesses were damaged or destroyed as a result of the Israeli assault, bringing about the near-total collapse of economic activity in Gaza. Between early October 2023 and the end of September 2024, the unemployment rate in Gaza averaged 79.7%. During this period, the vast majority of Gaza's population lived in poverty. By October 2024, the Israeli assault had pushed Gaza's level of economic development back by approximately 70 years—to levels comparable to those of 1955.

Destruction of living conditions in the West Bank

In the West Bank, Israel directly controls nearly every aspect of Palestinian life, including work permits in Israel and in the settlements, Palestinian tax revenues, movement and access, construction and development permits, house demolitions under the guise of building laws, and more. This control serves to intensify the oppression and dispossession Palestinians have endured since the occupation of the West Bank in 1967 and enables Israel to implement far-reaching changes "under the radar," without drawing the attention that might prevent the Israeli regime from advancing its goals.

Domicide (destruction of housing) and restrictions on movement

Since the Israeli offensive began in October 2023 and until the end of June 2025, Israel demolished 1,572 structures in the West Bank, and 397 in East Jerusalem, on the pretext of construction without a permit. Of all the structures demolished, 729 were homes. As a result, 2,598 people lost their homes, including 1,304 minors. In 2024 alone the number of structures demolished by Israel marked a two-decade high, with 2025 expected to be even worse if demolitions continue at their current pace. Simultaneously, the military's assault on the northern West Bank included massive demolition operations of buildings and infrastructure using explosives and bulldozers, causing extensive damage to homes in cities and refugee camps under the pretext of military necessity. According to estimates by the Jenin municipality, in February and March 2025, approximately 600 homes were demolished or rendered uninhabitable in Jenin Refugee Camp alone. In May 2025, the Israeli military announced its intention to demolish around 100 homes in the Tulkarm and Nur Shams refugee camps, in addition to the roughly 300 homes already demolished or severely damaged according to UNRWA estimates as of April 2025.

At the same time, Israel imposed severe movement restrictions on Palestinians across the West Bank. The network of movement obstacles maintained by Israel expanded significantly and, as of May 2025, includes 849 checkpoints and roadblocks. West Bank residents describe a daily reality of living in a "large prison," where even a simple trip outside the home can involve hours of traffic congestion, often caused by extended wait times due to intensified inspections at military checkpoints, often involving arbitrary harassment.

Economic destruction

Since October 2023, Israel has deliberately targeted the two central pillars of the West Bank economy: access to work in Israel and Palestinian Authority funding. In 2022, 22.5% of all employed Palestinians in the West Bank worked in Israel and in the settlements, and about 20% were employed in the public sector and received their salaries from the Palestinian Authority. Immediately after 7 October, Israel revoked the entry permits of some 150,000 West Bank residents working in Israel, and the vast majority of those permits have not been reinstated. In the first three months of the assault, approximately 306,000 people across the West Bank lost their jobs, and in 2024, the unemployment rate in the West Bank reached around 31%, compared to 18% in 2023.

In addition, in the first half of 2024, Finance Minister Smotrich blocked the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. These revenues constitute about 60% of the Palestinian Authority's annual income. The move plunged the Palestinian Authority into an unprecedented fiscal deficit, threatening its ability to pay public sector salaries and provide basic services such as healthcare and education.

All of these developments, in combination with the freeze on trade between the West Bank and Gaza, increasing difficulties accessing farmland, particularly during the olive harvest, and the sharp rise in movement restrictions across the West Bank, which severely hindered residents' ability to reach their workplaces, have led to the deepest economic recession recorded in the West Bank in over three decades. At the end of 2024, the World Bank described the collapse of the West Bank's economy as a "free fall." In 2024, 87.2% of workers in the West Bank reported a drop in household income; short-term poverty rates more than doubled, from 12% in 2023 to 28% by mid-2024; and household food insecurity rose sharply. According to the WFP, at least 700,000 West Bank residents required food assistance in 2024, an increase of nearly 100% compared to the period prior to October 2023.

Destruction of water and agricultural infrastructure

Restrictions on access to farmland and escalating settler violence have made agricultural work, especially the olive harvest, almost impossible since October 2023. At the same time, cases of killing, poisoning, and theft of livestock by settlers have been trending

upwards, while grazing land available to Palestinian herders has been reduced due to the dramatic expansion of settler farm outposts, which have taken over vast areas of land. These conditions have accelerated the rate at which Palestinians are giving up farming and shepherding, livelihoods that have sustained Palestinian communities for generations, in turn, exacerbating the economic hardship experienced by Palestinians.

In cities and refugee camps in the northern West Bank, military activity caused severe damage to water infrastructure and disrupted access to drinking water for tens of thousands of people. Nawaf Shahin, 64, a father of nine, described the growing water shortage in al-Far'ah Refugee Camp, alongside a severe lack of food and other essential supplies affecting his community in the weeks before the military forced his family to leave in February 2025:

The army raided the camp dozens of times; a lot of young people were killed, and people lived in suffering and terror. But the raid this week was different from previous ones. It was the hardest, cruelest time the people in the camp and my family have been through. Eight days ago, a lot of soldiers raided the camp and closed it off from all sides. They destroyed roads and water pipes. They surrounded the houses and took over many of the rooftops. People had to live as if they were in prison, while food ran out in their homes. People were left without food, water and medications.

Since October 2023, there has also been a dramatic increase in the number of incidents in which settlers vandalized and seized control of water sources and pipelines, as well as generators and other electricity infrastructure belonging to Palestinian communities. The destruction carried out by settlers is compounded by the "formal" destruction of water and electricity infrastructure routinely executed by the Civil Administration, which also prevents many communities from connecting to the water supply system.

There are many additional cases of impaired access to water or water supply by entire communities. In the Jordan Valley, the military reportedly reduced the operating hours of the checkpoint through which residents of herding communities, who are not connected to the water grid, transport water to their villages. The Palestinian Water Authority reported that Israeli water company Mekorot reduced the already minimal amount of water allocated to various areas of the West Bank. The State of Israel has also disavowed

responsibility for supplying water to Kafr 'Aqab, a neighborhood within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem with a population of more than 100,000, who have been gripped by an acute water crisis since October 2023.

Assault on the healthcare system

The already limited capacity of the West Bank's healthcare system has been further curtailed since the start of the assault. The financial crisis that the Palestinian health system was facing worsened significantly, particularly during the months in which Israel withheld tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority. The situation was compounded by the Israeli government's campaign against UNRWA, which operates 43 primary healthcare facilities and one hospital, and provides free health coverage to approximately 895,000 refugees, about a third of the Palestinian population in the West Bank (for more, see "Assault on the Palestinian refugee status" in this report).

In the northern West Bank, the Israeli military's routine of killings and destruction included frequent attacks on hospitals and medical facilities, sometimes involving raids and takeovers, disruptions to regular operations, or blocking access and denying care to patients in need. In addition, according to the World Health Organization, at least 172 on-duty medical staff were detained between April and December 2024, and 25 patients were detained while in care. Due to all of this, a report by MSF stated in February 2025 that since 7 October 2023, the West Bank healthcare system has been in "a state of perpetual emergency."

C. Forced displacement

Forced displacement in the Gaza Strip

Approximately 1.9 million Palestinians, about 90% of Gaza's population, have been **forcibly displaced** at least once since October 2023. Most of the displaced are refugees or descendants of refugees who were expelled from their homes during the 1948 Nakba. Over the course of the assault, they became refugees for a **second, third, or even fourth time**. The collective and personal trauma that has shaped Palestinian society for nearly eighty years became, once again, a lived reality.

This is how B'Tselem field researcher **Olfat al-Kurd** described it:

Seventy-five years ago my grandparents were forced to leave their village, Majdal, which was on the western shore of Lake Kinneret. They became refugees in the Gaza Strip, and my grandmother used to tell me about the pain of abandoning the village and the harsh winter they experienced that year in the Strip in a tent she shared with my grandfather and his sisters. She told me about her longing for Majdal, for the life she had and that no longer existed. Now, living with my family in a tent made of plastic and cloth in the southern Gaza Strip, I don't stop thinking about her. I'm sure that she never imagined that her granddaughter would also have to live in a displaced persons camp.

On 13 October 2023, the military issued the first mass **evacuation orders** to residents of Gaza. The orders instructed residents of the northern part of the Strip to immediately leave their homes and flee south. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to decide where to escape, without knowing if or when they would be allowed to return. By the end of 2023, the military began establishing the **Netzarim Corridor**, a buffer zone that cuts across the Strip from east to west along the southern edge of Gaza City, effectively severing the north from the south. Over the course of the Israeli assault, the buffer zone expanded, reaching up to seven kilometers in width at its peak. This area was designated a kill zone, meaning any Palestinian found in it would be shot and killed. The purpose of this division was, among other things, to **control the movement of residents** to southern Gaza and prevent their return northward. Over time, Israel repeatedly ordered residents

to evacuate, and as of June 2025, 85% of the Gaza Strip is either included in military evacuation orders or under the control of the Israeli military.

Beginning in October 2024, Israel stepped up its campaign to destroy northern Gaza's urban and agricultural environment and implemented a deliberate, and particularly extreme, starvation policy aimed at permanently depopulating the area, as explicitly stated by Israeli military officials. These operations were carried out in accordance with a plan developed by former senior military officers, known as the Generals' Plan. Though never officially adopted by the Israeli military, the plan did inform its conduct on the ground. Israel's actions in northern Gaza were described by many experts, including the UN Secretary-General, as an attempt to carry out ethnic cleansing. In practice, by November 2024, some 100,000 people who had lived in northern Gaza had been displaced from their homes.

Various reports assessing the scale of destruction wrought by Israel across the Gaza Strip suggest that, given the absence of clear military objectives, Israel's goal is likely to transform the "temporary" displacement of Gaza's population into a permanent one. The reorganization of the physical space in Gaza is also seen as indicative of an Israeli plan to remain in the Strip long-term and to lay the groundwork for the establishment of Israeli settlements in the future. The existence of such plans was explicitly affirmed through numerous public statements by Israeli officials during the assault, as well as by actions taken by the military to entrench its hold over captured territory.

In early 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump announced his intention to promote the "absorption" of displaced Gazans in neighboring countries. According to various reports, including statements by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, this plan was, in fact, based on a proposal formulated by the Israeli government several months earlier. The widespread public support in Israel for this initiative made it clear that the practice of forced displacement, or expulsion, is now perceived as a legitimate and desirable solution to the "Palestinian problem," that problem being the very presence of Palestinians in areas under Israeli control.

This broad political and public support for the policy was not merely aspirational. For many months, the Israeli government actively attempted to promote the relocation

of displaced persons from Gaza to various countries in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South America. In March 2025, the Israeli cabinet approved the establishment of a Voluntary Departure Administration tasked with executing the departure of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from the Strip. Beginning in May 2025, senior Israeli officials explicitly declared Gaza's ethnic cleansing as a central objective of the war, stating that the destruction of the Strip and Israel's control over humanitarian aid were means of realizing this goal. As part of an ongoing legal proceeding (July 2025), Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir denied that forcible transfer is one of the goals of the operation. However, statements made by Israeli decision-makers tell an entirely different story. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted in a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in early May as saying: "We are destroying more and more homes, and Gazans have nowhere to return to. The only inevitable outcome will be the wish of Gazans to emigrate outside of the Gaza Strip. The "main problem" he added, "is with the countries where they would emigrate to." Netanyahu also said, referring to the humanitarian aid distribution plan in Gaza, that access to "aid compounds" would be conditional on Gazans not returning to the areas they had come from. Days earlier, Minister Smotrich explained: "I think we'll be able to declare 'victory' within a few months. Gaza will be completely destroyed, its civilians will be concentrated from the Morag Corridor [which cuts the Strip from east to west between Khan Yunis and Rafah] southward, and from there, they'll depart in large numbers to third countries."

Making Gaza's ethnic cleansing one of the official "goals of the war" and using starvation and the destruction of infrastructure and homes to achieve it are not only grave crimes and genocidal acts on their own right, but they also reveal the mindset and intentions of senior decision-makers throughout the war.

Forced displacement in the West Bank

Since October 2023, military attacks and settler and military violence in the West Bank have displaced Palestinian communities on a scale not seen since Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967. Since that time, 38 Palestinian communities, comprising 67 residential compounds, have been forcibly transferred due to violence, and eight others, comprising nine residential compounds, were partially displaced. A total of 2,409 people, including

at least 1,056 minors, have been uprooted from their homes. As of June 2025, thousands more people living in dozens of other Palestinian communities are at real risk of expulsion due to ongoing daily settler attacks.

Palestinian communities in Area C have for years been subjected to pressure by Israeli authorities, a campaign that intensified significantly after October 2023. With state support, dozens of settler shepherding outposts have been established around these communities with the main goal of driving Palestinians out and seizing as much land as possible. The violence perpetrated by settlers from these outposts has escalated, reaching an unprecedented high during Israel's assault on Gaza. This violence, which has become a terrifying daily reality for Palestinians, includes severe physical assaults, settler raids into communities and homes during the day and night, arson, expulsion of shepherds from grazing areas and farmers from their fields, killing and theft of livestock, crop destruction, theft of equipment and personal belongings, and road blockages.

The military's Operation Iron Wall, launched in January 2025 and concentrated mainly in refugee camps in the northern West Bank, led to the displacement of over 40,000 Palestinians. While the army claimed it had no official policy of evacuating these areas, testimonies given to B'Tselem and Haaretz newspaper described soldiers forcing residents to leave under threats and, at times, at gunpoint. Many displaced families were forced to sleep in overcrowded conditions in community centers or event halls, relying on local residents and aid organizations for food, water, and other basic needs. Like Gaza residents, most people living in refugee camps in the northern West Bank are refugees expelled during the 1948 Nakba or their descendants. Many described this new experience of displacement as reawakening their own or their families' trauma.

In February 2025, Minister of Defense Israel Katz announced that the army intended to remain in the refugee camps throughout the coming year and that residents would not be allowed to return during this time. Since January 2025, cities and refugee camps in the northern West Bank have become ghost towns, now occupied solely by military forces. In May 2025, Jenin Refugee Camp, completely depopulated, was described as "a big military outpost," and reports indicated the army was continuing to demolish buildings in the camp to create routes for military vehicles.

This violent displacement in the West Bank, East Jerusalem included, is also officially supported by the State of Israel through legal and bureaucratic means. In 2024, the amount of land declared "state land," the budgets allocated to settlements, the number of construction permits issued for settlement housing, and the pace of new illegal outpost construction all reached multi-decade highs. Between October 2023 and March 2025, at least 14 new outposts were established on or near the ruins of evacuated shepherding communities. From these outposts, settlers have continued efforts to drive out remaining communities and ethnically cleanse the area of its Palestinian population.

For example, in May 2025, the community of Maghayer a-Deir, numbering 150 people, was expelled just days after a new outpost was established inside a sheepfold belonging to one of the residents. The members of the community, whose families had originally been displaced from the Negev Desert in the 1950s, were forced to leave and scatter among various nearby villages.

In July 2025, the community of al-Mu'arrajat, home to some 36 families and hundreds of people, was forcibly displaced. It was one of the largest communities to be driven out since October 2023. The community, which had endured years of relentless settler violence and harassment, was uprooted under threat after settlers established an outpost inside the village. Today, in this part of the Jordan Valley, an area spanning some 150,000 dunams (1 dunam = 0.1 hectares), only one community remains: Ras 'Ein al-'Auja Jahalin, which is now left completely exposed to settler violence.

Forced displacement inside Israel

In April 2024, the Israeli government transferred the Authority for the Enforcement of Land Laws from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of National Security, headed by Minister Itamar Ben Gvir. In the months that followed, the ministry announced that in accordance with the minister's policy, there had been a 400% increase in demolition orders issued for homes in the Negev. According to police data, 3,746 dunams (1 dunam = 0.1 hectares) of built-up area were demolished in 2024, the majority of it in the Negev. This figure represents a 274% increase compared to 2023. Two villages, Wadi al-Khalil and Umm al-Hiran, were nearly completely razed, and three additional neighborhoods were wiped

off the map. As a result, over 1,000 people were left homeless.

In May 2025, Israel began demolishing all 300 homes in the unrecognized village of a-Sar, home to approximately 3,000 residents. Reports indicated that some residents demolished their own homes to avoid the fines Israel imposes for demolition, and dozens were displaced to a community center and a school that have effectively become makeshift displacement camps. Israel plans to build a number of Jewish communities or expand existing ones on the ruins of these unrecognized villages, whose residents have been forcibly transferred, and on land belonging to villages in the Negev slated for future demolition.

D. Social, political and cultural destruction

Social, political and cultural destruction in the Gaza Strip

The spread of anarchy

Under the pretext of its war against the Hamas regime, Israel has waged an unprecedented assault on the civil and social order of the Gaza Strip. All public order enforcement agencies in Gaza, including police officers and commanders, as well as civil defense units, have been systematically targeted by Israeli forces throughout the months of fighting. As a result, and amid acute shortages of basic necessities for survival, the OHCHR said in July 2024 that "anarchy is spreading" across the Strip leading to the "unravelling of the fabric of society in Gaza, setting people against one another in a fight for survival and tearing communities apart."

Throughout the course of the offensive, widespread mob justice, as well as violent clashes over territory and resources, have been reported. In addition, the power vacuum created in Gaza was filled by armed criminal gangs operating throughout the Strip. Israel has not only allowed these gangs to gain power but also suggested it might entrust them with future responsibility for maintaining public order. Israeli officials have even said that Israel had provided them with weapons.

As a result of all this, just as the majority of the population is being forced to share increasingly overcrowded displacement camps, community relations in Gaza have steadily eroded. Residents report violent altercations between hungry, exhausted families over the placement of a tent in a camp, "wild behavior of children," or "jealousy after someone was able to get his hands on a food package."

Shadi al-Kurd, a resident of Jabalya Refugee Camp and father of five, was displaced from his home and now lives with his family in a tent he set up in the a-Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City. He told B'Tselem about the anarchy at aid distribution centers:

There are armed gangs that arrive in vehicles. They get to the trucks before anyone else, start shooting in the air, scare people, and seize large quantities of flour sacks. [...] It's total chaos, people fighting, everyone trying to protect their package so it won't get stolen. [...] When I manage to get a sack of flour, I carry it on foot for at least five kilometers. When I get tired, I sit somewhere to rest for about 10 minutes, all the while holding a knife in my hand, afraid that one of the thugs will try to steal the flour sack from me. That's happened to many people on their way back from the aid distribution centers [...] Most of the time, I go to the distribution center with a friend, and sometimes I take my son Ahmad with me so he can protect me while I carry the sack of flour on my shoulder.

Assault on the family unit

Israel's assault has had a devastating impact on the family unit in the Gaza Strip. Between the start of the offensive and March 2025, approximately 14,000 women in the Strip were widowed and are now solely responsible for their families. Around 40,000 children have lost one or both parents, in what appears to be the largest orphan crisis in modern history. A UNICEF survey from April 2024 found that 41% of families in Gaza are caring for children who are not their own.

Hanaa al-Qreinawi, from al-Bureij Refugee Camp, described how she came to raise her orphaned nephew after his parents were killed in a testimony she gave B'Tselem. Hanaa's sister, Amani, had been in the final stages of pregnancy when the Israeli offensive

began, after almost 16 years of trying to conceive. She gave birth to her son, Ousamah, in December 2023 under heavy bombardment. About two weeks after he was born, her husband was killed in an airstrike on their home in al-Bureij R.C. About six months later, Amani herself was killed in an airstrike on the school in Deir al-Balah where she worked. Hanaa told B'Tselem:

Losing my sister is unbearable, but I accept this fate from God. Ousamah is now nine months old. Amani always asked me to look after him and care for him, as if she knew in advance she was going to die. She always told me, "You'll be the one to take care of him, because you're like me." He was everything to Amani, and after his father was killed, she tried to make it up to him. [...] Before she was killed, my sister used to show Ousamah a picture of his father on her phone and tell him, "Look, this is your dad," so he'd recognize him. Now I show him pictures of his mother and father on the phone so he'll know who they were, and in the morning, I say to him, "Look, here are your parents. Say good morning to them." I don't know what Ousamah did to deserve growing up without a mother and father. There's no explanation for it. They were murdered in cold blood, and their son was orphaned. I'm heartbroken for him, and for my sister and her husband, who waited 16 years for a child, and when they finally had Ousamah – they were killed and left him forever.

Throughout the months of the offensive, displaced families were often forced to leave behind elderly or ill relatives unable to withstand the harsh conditions of displacement. Many families have remained separated from their loved ones for extended periods, with some unaware of what became of them. According to Gaza health authorities, more than 11,000 residents of the Strip are still classified as missing, with most presumed dead and buried beneath the rubble. In addition, thousands of men and boys were separated from their families and disappeared during arrests carried out by the Israeli military over the course of the offensive. In most cases, their families have had no way to find out what happened to them, including whether they were alive or dead, let alone make contact.

Testimonies collected by B'Tselem field researchers throughout the offensive indicate that families in Gaza are breaking apart under the weight of knowing they cannot protect their children or meet their most basic needs. Women and men described the helplessness

they felt watching their children die as a result of gunfire, airstrikes, runovers, hunger, cold or disease. In March 2025, an American doctor volunteering in Gaza testified to the existence of a designated area in the emergency room at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, where children who are beyond saving, either because of their condition or because of unmanageable workloads and meager resources in the hospitals, are placed. These dying children's family, members the doctor said, wait there by their side until they pass.

'Adnan al-Qassas, 36, from Bani Suheila east of Khan Yunis, spoke about his newborn, 'Aishah, who froze to death at 23 days old when her family lived in a tent in the al-Mawasi IDP camp:

On Friday, 20 December 2024, it was very rainy and cold, with strong winds. During the night, the tent got flooded. Rana and I kept the children close to us. I stayed up until 4:00 A.M. to make sure the tent wouldn't sink into the water, and then I went to sleep. Just before I dozed off [...] We woke up at 6:00 A.M. I picked 'Aishah up and she was like a block of ice, cold and stiff and blue, and her eyes were open. I held her in utter shock. She wasn't breathing. I ran with her to the Red Crescent first aid center, 500 meters away. They tried to resuscitate her, but they couldn't, so they took us both in an ambulance to Naser hospital in Khan Yunis, where they tried to revive her again, but couldn't. They said her heart and circulatory system were hurt by the cold. 'Aishah was buried immediately.

Rana and I are crushed. The death of 'Aishah, our only girl out of five children, hit us like a bolt of lightning. Rana's heart is broken [...] I fear for the lives of our remaining children in this tent, which gives us no protection. We survive thanks to food aid, and we only eat canned food and lentils. It's not enough, and I'm afraid of losing another child to cold and hunger. Yesterday it poured again, and our tent sank. I feel helpless. I've lost my baby, and I don't want to lose another child.

The Israeli offensive also disrupted residents' ability to observe mourning rituals. Due to the sheer scale of death, digging graves, including mass graves, near hospitals and in public spaces became commonplace. In April 2024, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor published a map marking over 120 mass graves across the Strip, located in courtyards of

homes and hospitals, at road junctions, banquet halls, sports fields, schools, and mosques. Harrowing images of dismembered or decomposing human remains left in public areas, and stray dogs feeding on unburied bodies, were widely reported in international media and in countless testimonies collected by B'Tselem field researchers.

In many cases, soldiers prevented families from retrieving the bodies of their loved ones and burying them. In others, soldiers filmed themselves desecrating Palestinians' bodies, including by crushing them with bulldozers and tanks, a practice also documented during Israeli operations in the northern West Bank. Israeli forces were reported to have transferred dozens of Palestinian bodies into Israel and returned them in body bags, so decomposed they were no longer identifiable. Families searching for the remains of their loved ones under rubble or in the streets were forced to rely on teeth and bones, or remnants of clothing and jewelry still attached to severed limbs, for identification. Many of those whose bodies were buried were often laid to rest without headstones, with names handwritten on white shrouds or body bags. Funeral prayers were said hastily, if at all, in hospital corridors or outside morgues.

All of this, alongside the prolonged displacement, the destruction of mosques and churches, and the damage to cemeteries that made it difficult to hold prayers, funerals, and mourning gatherings, further undermined the ability of families to process their losses.

'Azizah Qishtah, 67, from Rafah, recounted how she and her 70-year-old husband Ibrahim, who was blind, remained alone after their family was displaced by Israeli bombings, and how after Ibrahim was killed by shrapnel, she had to bury him herself in a makeshift grave:

I picked up my husband and carried him on my back. His body was limp from the injury and very heavy. There was no one to help me, and I had to carry him on my own. I walked for a bit, rested, and then continued [...] Suddenly, I noticed his left hand was shaking badly. I asked if he wanted a massage, but then I saw he was dead. I checked again—I wasn't mistaken. He died right there, in my arms. There was no one around. I looked around and saw a small pit near an olive tree in my uncle's yard. I had no cloth for a shroud. I took a curtain from the window and a plastic bag, wrapped him up by myself, and slowly rolled him into the pit. It took

me two hours, on my own. It was very hard, but God gave me strength. I buried him by myself. I put tin sheets and a wooden board over him, and covered it with soil. I recited a few prayers and cried. I sobbed quietly, in pain. [...] I stayed like that, alone in the house, for two weeks after Ibrahim died, until on 24 May 2025, I was almost out of water and food. That day, I heard shooting outside. I went out and saw that the tin I covered my husband's grave with was riddled with holes, and my husband's head was sticking out of the ground. I couldn't bear it... I put him back in the pit, covered it with new tin sheets and wood, and buried him again. I wasn't afraid anymore. I thought only of the pain, the loss, the suffering.

Assault on education

By April 2025, approximately 90% of all schools in Gaza had been damaged due to aerial bombardment, shelling, and even deliberate arson and destruction carried out by Israeli forces. Many of the buildings that remained standing were converted into IDP shelters, which themselves became repeated targets of attack. As a result, by June 2025, none of Gaza's school, aged children, approximately 658,000, had attended school for more than 18 months.

Various organizations warned that this devastation would have severe and long-term consequences for the emotional, intellectual, and social development of Gaza's children, who have been deprived of any form of routine, the support networks typically provided by educators, and spaces for interaction, recreation, and play with peers. The reports further estimate that these deprivations will have a profound impact on the children's mental health and increase their vulnerability to neglect, violence, and abuse.

The destruction of Gaza's education system is expected to leave deep scars on Palestinian society for generations. Studies indicate that when children are kept out of school for extended periods, not only does learning grind to a halt, it also regresses. Experts predict that this dramatic setback will have long-term repercussions on the employment prospects of Gaza's children, and by extension, on the community's human and economic development as a whole.

Interference with press coverage

During the current assault, Israel has all but barred journalists from entering the Gaza Strip to report on the situation. In the few instances when foreign journalists were granted access, they were allowed to enter only limited areas, under the supervision and escort of Israeli military personnel, and the material they collected was subject to review and approval by Israeli military censors.

At the same time, Israel carried out a campaign against the local press in Gaza. According to data released by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), approximately 160 journalists were killed in Gaza between October 2023 and January 2025, most of them on duty and while wearing clearly marked press vests. This makes Israel's assault on Gaza the deadliest for journalists documented by CPJ in the past three decades.

Numerous investigations published over the course of the assault revealed that Israel deliberately and systematically targeted journalists, in some cases threatening, arresting, and imprisoning them. According to the 2024 round-up published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), "Gaza became the most dangerous region in the world for journalists, a place where journalism itself is threatened with extinction."

Assault on historical and religious heritage

By June 2024, Israel had destroyed approximately 206 archaeological and historical sites in the Gaza Strip, including public markets and ancient neighborhoods, some over a thousand years old. In several instances, reports indicated that Israeli military forces looted antiquities from archaeological sites and museums across the Strip.

Libraries, museums, archives, theaters, and other cultural institutions were also destroyed, including Gaza City's central archive. The historical records kept there, some dating back 150 years, were destroyed in a fire. A UN commission of inquiry assessed that the building's interior was likely set on fire during the period when Israeli forces were operating in the area.

Israeli airstrikes also inflicted extensive damage on ancient mosques and churches in the Gaza Strip, at times while prayers were being held inside. In two strikes examined by the UN commission of inquiry, approximately 200 worshipers were killed. Extensive damage was reported to Gaza's oldest mosque, al-'Omari, and to a fifth-century Greek Orthodox church considered one of the oldest in the world. In a video from August 2024, soldiers were seen burning copies of the Quran in a mosque they had raided.

Social, political and cultural destruction in the West Bank

Assault on education

Over the past two years, the right to education for children and youth in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has suffered severe harm. In the northern West Bank, nearly 12,000 children displaced by Israeli military attacks are currently sheltering in IDP centers, most without access to learning spaces or resources. Schools across the West Bank have reduced in-person instruction due to movement restrictions and economic hardship, resulting in students missing up to half of the 2024 school year.

Residents told B'Tselem that due to a lack of necessary technological equipment, many children are unable to study on days designated for remote learning. On such days, many parents are forced to stay home to care for their children, further impacting their livelihood. This is compounded by settler and military violence, which includes violent attacks and vandalism by settlers targeting schools in Area C, causing many parents to fear sending their children to school. Moreover, in April 2025, following the passage of laws targeting UNRWA, police officers entered six UNRWA-run schools in East Jerusalem during school hours and handed out closure orders (for more, see "Assault on the Palestinian refugee status" in this report).

Assault on historical heritage and religious rituals

The broad offensive Israel is waging against Palestinian identity and culture also includes attacks on religious practice and places of worship in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. During the months of Ramadan in both 2024 and 2025, collective restrictions were imposed

on the entry of Palestinians from Israel and East Jerusalem into the al-Aqsa Mosque. In Ramadan 2024, Israeli police were documented using extreme violence against Palestinian youths attempting to access the mosque for prayer. Reports also described threats by Israeli authorities against Muslim clerics, including arrests and bans on access to the compound. Meanwhile, Jewish public figures were routinely permitted to enter the site, pray, and incite, despite Israel's own ban on Jewish prayer at the compound (except at the Western Wall).

Interference with burial and mourning rituals is also a familiar part of daily life with violent military presence. For years, Israeli forces in the West Bank have imposed restrictions that delay the transfer of bodies for burial, limit the number of funeral participants and attack civilians during funerals. The military has also snatched the bodies of Palestinians, sometimes to use as bargaining chips. Since October 2023, B'Tselem has investigated and documented numerous incidents in which Israeli soldiers prevented the removal of bodies for burial, seized the bodies of Palestinians, including children, and denied families access to their loved ones' remains. These incidents were often part of the military's frequent raids on refugee camps and cities in the northern West Bank. Additional incidents included restrictions on funeral attendance and even gunfire at condolence gatherings. According to data provided to B'Tselem by the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC), as of mid-July 2025, Israel is holding the bodies of 316 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, including 28 minors.

Social, political and cultural destruction inside Israel

Censorship and silencing

Throughout the months of Israel's assault on Gaza, any expression of solidarity with Gaza's residents or criticism of Israel's deadly policy was framed as treason and met with harsh consequences, or, at times, was outright banned. For example, the police imposed a blanket ban on Palestinian protests and rallies, whether they were held in opposition to Israel's actions in Gaza or had unrelated aims but involved displays of Palestinian identity. A wave of arrests that began in October 2023 swept across every sphere of public life. Palestinian cultural figures, educators, academics and activists, were arrested and interrogated mostly for expressing solidarity with Gaza, displaying Palestinian symbols, or posting religious content, including on social media.

Under the leadership of the minister responsible for the police, Itamar Ben Gvir, police violence and suppression have intensified, including against Jewish-Israeli citizens calling for an end to the war and even against the families of Israeli hostages held in Gaza who are advocating for a deal for their release. In higher education institutions in Israel, the freedom of speech and personal safety of Palestinian students and faculty members been severely curtailed, as they have faced harassment, suspensions and dismissals on an unprecedented scale over any such expressions. The assault on Palestinian culture within the Green Line has also escalated, including the arrest of Palestinian cultural figures and bans on Palestinian art, often under direct orders from the Minister of Culture.

On the legislative front, proposed amendments to the Counter-Terrorism Law, which passed their first reading in the Knesset during 2024, sought to entrench the offense of incitement as a tool for the Israeli government to silence critical voices. A bill that passed a preliminary reading in October 2024 aimed to reduce, to the point of eliminating, the representation of Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Knesset.

The proceedings for the removal of Knesset Member Ayman Odeh in June 2025 marked another escalation in the delegitimization and silencing of the Palestinian public in Israel and its representatives. The attempted ouster came in response to statements Odeh made in support of a deal between Israel and Hamas that included the release of both Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners. Although the deal had been approved by the government itself, coalition and opposition MKs exploited Odeh's support for the release of Palestinian prisoners to portray him as a terrorist sympathizer and justify his removal.

Crime

Attempts to fragment and weaken Palestinian society within Israel also include the systematic and deliberate neglect of efforts to combat organized crime, which is eroding the community from within. In a 2024 survey by the Israel Democracy Institute, about two-thirds of Palestinian respondents reported a low sense of personal security. This precarity has created a climate of fear and mutual suspicion, severely undermining community cohesion.

Abandoning the lives of Palestinian citizens of Israel to criminal gangs is the result of longstanding discrimination and neglect by the Israeli state. Since Itamar Ben Gvir assumed the role of Minister of National Security, this neglect has become official policy and has claimed many lives (for more, see "Killing and severe bodily and mental harm inside Israel" in this report). Even before October 2023, Ben Gvir halted the canceled a campaign designed to tackle crime in Arab communities, and halted funding for the national plan to address crime and violence. Reports also indicate that during his tenure, cooperation between various governmental departments on crime prevention in Arab communities was stopped.

These developments were compounded by the fact that government funding allocated for the development of Palestinian towns in Israel, designed, in part, to help address the crime crisis, were among the first to be canceled or slashed to help finance Israel's assault on Gaza after 7 October. These cuts were three times larger than cuts made to other government allocations.

Children and youths have been among the hardest hit by this neglect. According to the Arab Society's Anti-Violence and Crime Headquarters, hundreds of children have been orphaned in the past two years as a result of crime-related violence. These children were reported to suffer from high rates of anxiety, trauma, and impaired function. Due to the limited availability of services in Arab society, they struggle to receive appropriate psychosocial care and are at increased risk of becoming involved in crime themselves.

Moreover, the Headquarters' 2024 report described how all children and teens in Arab communities are now more regularly exposed to criminal activity in their immediate surroundings. In a separate publication, it was noted that criminals exert significant peer pressure to recruit youths. Parents reported fearing letting their children walk the streets, even during the day, and children said they are afraid to attend school, a space that has been deeply affected by the pervasive reality of crime.

E. The prison system as a network of torture camps

For decades, Israel has imprisoned hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, including many members of the community and political leadership across various regions. The incarceration project was designed to deter against any political involvement and send a clear message to activists that any attempt to resist Israeli oppression may be met with imprisonment without trial, violent repression, and even severe torture.

The transformation of Israel's prison system into a mechanism aimed, in large part, at the systematic abuse of Palestinian detainees began before 7 October, stemming from the racist and violent policies of National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, who openly boasted about downgrading conditions for Palestinian prisoners. The escalation of Palestinians' dehumanization in Israeli public discourse since October 2023, alongside complicity from the legal system, which is supposed to safeguard detainees' rights, enabled the full implementation of the minister's policies.

Under cover of the assault on Gaza, Israeli prisons have become spaces where state violence is at its most blatant and brutal. Since October 2023, thousands of Palestinians from Gaza, the West Bank, and inside Israel have been detained and held in Israeli prisons, on top of the thousands who were already incarcerated. Meanwhile, the Israeli prison system has undergone a fundamental shift, effectively turning its prisons and detention centers into a network of torture camps for Palestinian detainees. Regular, severe, and arbitrary violence; sexual abuse; humiliation and degradation; deliberate starvation; forced unhygienic conditions; sleep deprivation; and denial of medical treatment have all become systemic and institutionalized practices. As a result, more than 73 prisoners have died in Israeli custody to date, including minor. According to figures available to B'Tselem, about 48 were residents of the Gaza Strip, 22 were from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and three were citizens of Israel.

This transformation did not involve only the Israel Prison Service, which falls under Ben Gvir's authority, but also included military detention facilities established at the start of the war for individuals detained during the assault on Gaza. Detainees held in these facilities, most of whom were taken into custody arbitrarily without due process, including many who were injured and required urgent medical care, were subjected to inhumane conditions with almost no oversight.

"I saw people arrive at the facility from the Gaza Strip wounded, then be starved for weeks without medical care," said an Israeli soldier who served at the Sde Teiman torture camp, "I saw them urinate and defecate on themselves because they weren't allowed to use the bathroom. I can still smell it. Many of them weren't even members of the Nukhba (the Hamas commando force that led the October 7 attack), just regular Palestinian civilians from Gaza detained for investigation and, after enduring brutal abuse, released when it turned out they were innocent. It's no wonder people died there. The wonder is that anyone survived."

Throughout the Israeli assault, several investigative reports exposed severe abuse by Israeli soldiers against detainees held in these military detention camps. One of the most horrifying cases involved the rape of a handcuffed detainee by several soldiers. Despite the severity of these acts, the soldiers suspected of carrying out the assault received broad public support, including from members of the Knesset.

In October 2024, Adham Abu Naser, a 33-year-old father of three, was arrested at a military checkpoint in Jabalya, as he and his family were searching for shelter, having been displaced for the fifth time:

[The] soldiers called me over and ordered me to undress in front of my wife and children. It was a deeply humiliating moment. My daughter Ahlam ran over to me while I was undressing and clung to me. A soldier told me to call my wife to take her away or they would arrest both of us. My wife came and took Ahlam, who cried, "I want my dad! I want my dad!" Everyone around us was in tears. [...] [In a room at the Jabalya checkpoint] [s]oldiers attacked us all with batons. I screamed in pain from the beatings and the tight cuffs. Every time I raised my hands to protect myself, the zip ties cut into me even more. They poured cold water on us, cursed us, and called us names: "You faggot, you Nukhba, you shit, you dirt... we'll send you to hell."

For weeks, Abu Naser was severely abused by soldiers, including while held at the Sde Teiman detention facility, where he was repeatedly questioned about the location of Israeli hostages:

On the first day [at Sde Teiman], I was surprised to discover they had a unit called Qam'ah ["suppression"]. They would come and throw tear gas canisters into the hut. Some detainees lost consciousness, others bled from their nose and mouth from breathing the gas. [...] The "suppression" units would come more than once a day. The occupation soldiers would burst into the hut and start beating us hard with batons all over our bodies. Then they would search us one by one, throw us on the ground, step on us with their army boots and hit us with their helmets.

The experience of incarceration leaves deep physical and psychological scars on Palestinian detainees even after their release. Many have reported ongoing physical and mental distress resulting from the abuse they endured in detention, describing how it disrupted their lives, interrupting studies for younger detainees and harming employment and family life for adults.

The cycle of suffering and its psychological impact extend beyond the prisoners themselves. Family members, who were often unable to make contact or learn anything about their loved ones' fate during the long months of imprisonment, paid a heavy price as well. Many children were left without a mother or father. Women and men were forced to raise children alone. Children were taken from their parents. Families had to spend their savings and go into debt to cover legal costs, while teenagers lost close friends suddenly and without explanation.

F. Assault on the Palestinian refugee status

Over many decades of displacement and life in refugee camps since the Nakba in 1948, the refugee status has become a founding ethos of Palestinian society and a central element coalescing its collective identity in areas under Israeli control and beyond. Since its establishment, Israel has invested significant efforts in denying Palestinian refugeehood and rejecting the rights and protections granted to refugee populations under international law, foremost among them the right of return.

This context adds another layer to understanding the profound meaning of the deadly assault on the Gaza Strip, where roughly two-thirds of the population are Nakba refugees

and their descendants, as well as the destruction of refugee camps in the northern West Bank. The attempt to target what Israel describes as "hornet's nests" and perceives as nuclei of threat to the state is, in practice, a broad assault on the institutions that preserve refugeehood as a central element of Palestinian identity and culture.

The most conspicuous example of Israel's assault on Palestinian refugees and refugeehood is the ongoing effort to disrupt the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). The agency, established by a UN resolution in 1950, was created to provide aid, education, healthcare, vocational training, and other services, and has for decades served as the primary body supporting Palestinian refugees. Prior to the Israeli assault, the agency operated 284 schools in the Gaza Strip, serving around 290,000 students, and 96 schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, serving approximately 46,000 students. UNRWA also ran 22 medical clinics in the Gaza Strip and 44 health centers in the West Bank, including one hospital. In total, the agency provided services to about 1.7 million people in the Gaza Strip (approximately 80% of the population) and around 900,000 people in the West Bank. It also employed about 30,000 staff members across both areas.

As part of this effort, Israel has also targeted the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which has provided formal status and institutional support to Palestinian refugees since 1950. Citing alleged ties between agency staff and Hamas, the Israeli government has waged a fierce campaign against UNRWA since October 2023, culminating in legislation passed in January 2025 banning its operations within Israeli territory.

Since the beginning of the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, UNRWA schools in the Strip have served as shelters for hundreds of thousands of IDPs, while the agency's clinics have provided initial treatment to countless wounded, helping to ease the immense load on the collapsing healthcare system. UNRWA staff have also played a central role in facilitating and distributing humanitarian aid, supplying drinking water to the beleaguered population, providing psychosocial support to hundreds of thousands of Gaza residents, and more.

The Israeli government seized the moment to launch a fierce assault against UNRWA's operations, justifying it with allegations of collaboration between the agency and Hamas

during the 7 October attack. The head of the agency denied any collaboration, describing any connections with Hamas as "minimal and technical, stemming from the fact that the organization controls Gaza." Nine UNRWA employees (out of approximately 30,000 staff members) were dismissed following a UN inquiry which concluded they may have taken part in the 7 October attack.

The assault on UNRWA is expected to have a devastating impact on many aspects of Palestinian life, and it is too soon to assess its full humanitarian consequences. However, beyond the practical harm to the agency's operations and the material support it provides to Palestinian refugees, it is also important to acknowledge the damage to the visibility and representation of Palestinian refugees in the eyes of the international community, and more broadly, to refugeehood itself, a core component of the Palestinian collective identity.

G. Incitement to genocide and dehumanization since October 2023

Dehumanization and incitement are inherent components of a regime's turn toward committing genocide. They serve as key tools in the process through which victims are placed outside what sociologist Helen Fein termed the "universe of obligation" of the perpetrators. In all known cases of modern genocide, the perpetrating regimes systematically employed both mechanisms to generate motivation for violent action and to provide it with moral, social, and political justification.

Dehumanization is the process by which members of the victim group are stripped of their human characteristics, portrayed as inherently immoral or dangerous, and seen as collectively responsible for every negative act committed by specific individuals or organizations within their group. In this way, the victims come to be viewed as persons to whom moral norms do not apply, or as people who have "brought their suffering upon themselves." This perception enables a society to inflict violence upon them without disrupting its own self-image of morality.

Dehumanization often coincides with incitement, which is aimed at mobilizing the public to commit, or passively consent to violence against a particular group. Incitement is

often carried out through the dissemination of false information, distortion of facts, or emotional manipulation such as spreading fear.

In term of international law, "direct and public incitement to commit genocide" constitutes a crime in itself under the Genocide Convention (1948, Article 3(c)). Israeli criminal law also addresses this issue, including a prohibition on "publication with intent to incite to racism" (Section 144B(a) of the Penal Law) and a prohibition on "incitement to violence or terrorism against a group or part of a group" (Section 144D2(a) of the Penal Law), as well as Section 3(2) of The Crime of Genocide (Prevention and Punishment) Law 5710-1950.

In Israel, the process of dehumanizing Palestinians, particularly those in the Gaza Strip, and framing them as a "security threat," has been decades long, aided by the maintenance of near-total separation between Jewish and Palestinian communities in all areas under Israeli control. In this context, the 7 October attack and the effect it had on Israelis, created fertile ground for the intensification of a discourse that denies the humanity of Palestinians in Gaza, while simultaneously discarding and ignoring any moral or legal obligation toward them.

Since October 2023, it has been Israel's political leadership that has led the process of dehumanization and incitement to genocide. A partial list of genocidal statements by senior Israeli officials, journalists, and other public figures appears over dozens of pages in South Africa's submission to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and illustrates the horrifying scope of this phenomenon. Israel's most senior decision-makers have participated in the discourse that strips Palestinians of their humanity and portrays them as "animals" that should not be treated as humans.

For example, on 9 October 2023, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant declared: "A complete siege on the city of Gaza. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly."

When Israel launched its ground invasion of the Gaza Strip, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed Israeli soldiers using the phrase "Remember what Amalek did to you," a reference to the biblical story of God's command to the Israelites to annihilate the Amalekite people. In the Israeli cultural context, this statement is clearly understood as a call for the complete destruction of the Palestinians.

Major General Ghassan Alian, head of the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), addressed residents of the Gaza Strip in Arabic: "Human animals must be treated as such. [...] You wanted hell, you will get hell."

This rhetoric is not limited to politicians and public figures affiliated with the Israeli right. Throughout the months of the assault, many public figures from the political center and center-left have also participated in the incitement. Benny Gantz expressed support for the expulsion of residents from Gaza, and others echoed the notion that "there are no uninvolved civilians in the Gaza Strip," while calling for a tightening of the blockade and restrictions on humanitarian aid.

The Israeli media played a significant role in the process of dehumanization, in part by portraying the entire population of the Gaza Strip as complicit in the atrocities committed against Israeli civilians on 7 October, or as supportive of them. For many weeks and months after 7 October, Israelis were repeatedly shown footage of Gazan civilians taking part in the attack and in the abduction of Israeli civilians, or expressing support for Hamas. Israeli media frequently published polls indicating high levels of Palestinian public support for the Hamas attack on 7 October, often without noting that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians had not been exposed to visual documentation of the atrocities committed during the attack or did not believe that Hamas had, in fact, committed them.

All of this contributed to the intensification of the image of Palestinians in Gaza as barbarians, "human animals," bloodthirsty, and "Nazis," a process that grew more entrenched until it became a normative and widespread position in Israeli political, media, and public discourse.

The dehumanization and labeling of Gaza's entire population as responsible for, or supportive of, the crimes committed on 7 October provided moral justification and social legitimacy for harming civilians in the Gaza Strip. In mainstream media, popular culture, and everyday conversation, a perception took hold that almost any form of harm against Gazans was acceptable as part of the effort to defeat Hamas and secure the release of Israeli hostages. Polls published throughout the months of the assault illustrated the full normalization of this view within Israeli society. For example, surveys found a majority of the Israeli public agreed with the statement that "there are no innocents in Gaza,"

opposed the transfer of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, and supported the idea of forcibly transferring its residents.

In addition, genocidal rhetoric and calls for mass killing, displacement, and ethnic cleansing have been, and continue to be, voiced daily across Israeli media platforms. Leading the charge is Channel 14, along with popular journalists such as Amit Segal, who called for "erasing the memory of Amalek" or Almog Boker who declared that "no such thing as uninvolved [people] in Gaza."

With the exception of Haaretz, no major Israeli media outlet provided regular reporting on the scale of civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip. When death tolls were mentioned, they were usually based on information provided by the Israeli military, which systematically categorizes most Palestinian casualties as "terrorists." For example, on 18 March 2025, the day Israel broke the ceasefire agreement with Hamas and killed 404 Palestinians, mostly women and children, Channel 12 News reported: "Around 400 militants killed."

In many respects, the Israeli media enabled the Israeli public's blindness to the crimes being committed in the Gaza Strip. Throughout the months of the assault, only a fraction of its horrific consequences were reported, and the violence against Palestinians in other areas was scarcely covered. Instead of reporting on what was taking place on the ground, Israeli media outlets, often without a hint of criticism, amplified the government's and the military's propaganda regarding the supposedly moral and lawful conduct of the fighting, and the allegedly low rate of civilian casualties compared to other armed conflicts. These claims have been repeatedly debunked by international experts, UN institutions, and human rights organizations.

Similarly, the media has prominently denied reports and testimonies about the spread of hunger in Gaza and Israel's responsibility for it. A common claim in public discourse is that Israel has allowed sufficient humanitarian aid into Gaza, and that any shortages are solely the result of Hamas systematically stealing the aid. This claim, too, has been refuted over the course of the assault, including by the head of OCHA. In a chilling feedback loop, large segments of the Jewish-Israeli public expressed a desire to avoid seeing or hearing about harm to Palestinians, and the media responded accordingly, reinforcing the justifications for such avoidance. For example, a survey conducted by the aChord Center found that 64%

of the Israeli public believed the media's coverage of the situation of civilians in Gaza was adequate and that no additional reporting was needed.

Evidence of how dehumanization and incitement have tangibly shaped military conduct can be found in the words of numerous commanders, including the most senior among them, and in soldiers' statements in the field. Brigadier General Yehuda Vach, commander of Division 252 operating in the Netzarim Corridor, turned the notion that "there are no innocents in Gaza" into an operational doctrine. Under his command, the corridor was designated a vast kill zone, and anyone crossing into it, including children, was shot. Civilians killed in this area were systematically classified as "terrorists." Brigadier General Dado Bar Kalifa, commander of Division 36, wrote in a letter to his troops at the end of October 2023: "The enemy's barbaric and murderous nature has been exposed to all, in Israel and around the world. Their true face has been revealed. [...] We will crush every cursed place from which it came. We will annihilate it and erase its memory. We will pursue it in homes, in streets, and in tunnels, and we will not return until it is destroyed."

Social media was flooded with genocidal statements, as documented in South Africa's ICJ submission and in publications by journalists and various organizations. Countless videos circulated showing Israeli soldiers proudly documenting the destruction they inflicted on Gaza or humiliating its residents in various ways.

Although the dehumanization and incitement campaigns primarily target residents of the Gaza Strip, Palestinians in the West Bank and within Israel have also been frequently portrayed in public discourse and by decision-makers as a bloodthirsty enemy population. In the very first weeks following 7 October, public officials made clear that the war Israel was waging was not limited to the Gaza Strip but was aimed at all Palestinians living under Israeli rule. In late November 2023, in response to a survey indicating support for the Hamas attack among Palestinians in the West Bank, Minister Bezalel Smotrich declared: "There are two million Nazis in the West Bank," later adding that "Funduq, Nablus, and Jenin must look like Jabalya." Defense Minister Israel Katz likewise made clear that Israel would act, if necessary, in the West Bank as it was acting in the Gaza Strip. In a poll conducted among Israelis, 82% of respondents expressed support for the forcible transfer of Gaza residents, and 56% supported a forcible transfer of Palestinian citizens of Israel as well.

The same wild incitement has also been directed at the thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli detention facilities since October 2023, the vast majority without charge or trial. These detainees, including ones taken into custody in mass round-ups in Gaza, rather than on concrete suspicion, have been repeatedly portrayed in Israeli public discourse as Nukhba operatives. Reflecting both the prevailing public sentiment and the racist, violent policies of National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, whose office is also responsible for Israel's prison system, these detainees have been regarded, and continue to be treated as "scum" undeserving of basic conditions.

The scale of the crimes committed over the past 20 months by the Israeli regime against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip has been made possible, in part, by the deep moral and cognitive distortion that has taken root within Israeli society. The systematic stripping of Palestinians of their humanity—whether residents of Gaza, inhabitants of the West Bank, Palestinian prisoners, or Palestinian citizens of Israel—has led to a reality in which genocide and the destruction of Palestinian society are presented not only as legitimate, but as a security and moral imperative.

5.

GENOCIDE AS A PROCESS

Genocide is usually the result of a gradual development, sometimes over many years, of conditions that lay the groundwork for a repressive and discriminatory regime to turn genocidal: to act with deliberate intent to destroy a distinct group. This process typically progresses through stages that include depriving the targeted group of rights, dehumanization that portrays the group as a threat to be eliminated, normalization of violence against the group in public, political, and legal discourse, and the use of direct physical violence. However, such conditions can persist for many years without culminating in mass atrocities, including genocide. More often, it is a triggering event, or a series of events, that drives the regime to transform its violence against the group into a policy of systematic, large-scale destruction. One such catalyst can be a violent attack that generates or reinforces a sense of existential threat in the group that will become the perpetrators. In many cases, the policy of destruction and annihilation is framed as necessary for maintaining or restoring the security of the perpetrating group.

This section examines the long-term political and social processes that generated the preconditions for Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip; the events of 7 October 2023 as the catalyst that profoundly shifted Israeli society and policymaking; and the public and political climate in Israel that propelled the implementation of genocide. It is important to note that the conditions and circumstances described in this section exist in other areas where Palestinians live under Israeli control, making the danger of the regime devolving into commission of genocide beyond Gaza very real.

A. Foundations of the regime (1948–2023)

Throughout its existence, the Israeli regime has laid legal, social, and political foundations that are recognized in history and research as preconditions enabling genocide (when combined with other circumstances discussed below). This section focuses on three features of the Israeli regime that laid the foundation for a shift toward a policy of destroying Palestinian society and committing genocide against Palestinians in the

Gaza Strip: **the apartheid regime, including separation, demographic engineering, and ethnic cleansing; dehumanization and conceptualization of Palestinians as an existential threat to Israelis; and the systemic and institutionalized use of violence against Palestinians, carried out with de facto impunity for the perpetrators.**

The Israeli apartheid regime – demographic engineering, ethnic cleansing and separation

From the early stages of Israeli statehood, the relationship between Jews and Palestinians was marked by settler-colonial patterns, including widespread settlement involving displacement and dispossession, demographic engineering, ethnic cleansing and the imposition of military rule on Palestinians. It is important to note that settler-colonialist practices do not contradict the national features of the Zionist movement, including the Jewish people's historical connection to the Land of Israel, continuous presence of Jewish communities in the region for thousands of years, and antisemitic persecution and the genocide of Jews in Europe. The term settler-colonialism refers to a colonial project in which an organized immigrant population settles on land already inhabited by an Indigenous population and aspires to displace and replace them. The presence of the Indigenous people is perceived as a national and demographic problem to be solved, at times through violent means, particularly when the Indigenous group resists the dispossession. In many cases, this leads to widespread and systematic killing to the point of the full or partial annihilation of the Indigenous group. As the fight over land tends to result in full destruction of the Indigenous group, many scholars believe settler-colonialism is particularly at risk for turning genocidal. Known cases of settler-colonialism include Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Namibia and South Africa.

The regime that took root once the State of Israel was established institutionalized Jewish supremacy and consistently applied patterns of violent control, discrimination, and separation against Palestinians. This systemic conduct amounts to apartheid – a term denoting an institutionalized regime in which laws, structures, and practices are employed in order to maintain the dominance of one group over another across all territories under its control, usually presenting this supremacy as a moral and existential imperative. Under Israel's apartheid regime, the deadly violence inflicted on the Gaza Strip, the violent military rule imposed on millions of civilians in the West Bank, and the institutionalized

discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, have all come to be seen by many Israelis as natural, or at the very least, inevitable.

Separation

Over the years, Israel has established a system of legal and physical separation between Jewish and Palestinian spaces, as well as between Palestinian communities in various areas. East Jerusalem has been annexed to Israel and cut off from the West Bank; Palestinian communities in the West Bank have been cut off from each other by harsh Israeli restrictions on movement between them; and the closure of the Gaza Strip on all sides had grown more extreme. With the rise of Hamas to power in 2007, Gaza's physical, economic and legal isolation became almost complete, primarily due to the **blockade** imposed by Israel.

Gaza's isolation is rooted in the Israeli perception of the Strip as a uniquely threatening space, in part because about **two-thirds** of its population are refugees expelled during the 1948 Nakba and their descendants. Palestinian refugee camps, in Gaza and elsewhere, are known in Israeli **parlance** as "hornets' nests" – sites of terrorism and of Palestinian resistance to Israel's very existence. From the early days of the occupation in 1967, Israel sought to **break up** the refugee camps and thereby to perpetuate the legacy of Palestinian expulsion, dispossession, and oppression in the Gaza Strip. This was evident, for example, in Israel's efforts to **depopulate Gaza** in the years immediately following its occupation in 1967, and in killing and massive destruction campaigns concentrated in Gazan **refugee camps** during the 1970s, led by Ariel Sharon. It is no coincidence that the first Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation took place in Gaza, with the outbreak of the **first intifada** in December 1987.

In recent decades, and especially since 2007, Gaza has served as Israel's "**laboratory**" for testing extreme military and administrative practices, with **escalating levels of violence**. Armed attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip, including attacks on Israeli civilians, which continued after the 2005 removal of Israeli settlements, **served successive Israeli governments** as justification for imposing a suffocating blockade on Gaza and further entrenching its isolation from the West Bank. Gaza has effectively become an enormous prison, its residents perpetually kept on the brink of a humanitarian crisis and subjected to extreme violence, largely out of sight of the Israeli public. For

example, in 2008, Israel calculated the minimum caloric intake that could be allowed into Gaza without causing a humanitarian disaster. Widespread harm inflicted on civilians in Gaza has become normalized over the years, as reflected in Israeli military operations there in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021, the lethal fire used against demonstrators during the 2018-2019 Great March of Return protests, and the absence of any public or legal accountability for these actions.

Demographic engineering and ethnic cleansing

The term 'demographic engineering' refers to state-led intervention in demographic processes, both social and spatial. Under apartheid, demographic engineering is key to ensuring the ruling group is a majority in chosen areas. Methods of implementation include population transfer from one area to another, dispersal of a group across different regions, discriminatory immigration and citizenship policies, and restricted areas of residence for certain groups.

Ethnic cleansing is an extreme form of demographic engineering, and consists of the violent removal of an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group from a specific territory. Its objectives may include creating an ethnically homogeneous geographic area, removing a population seen as a demographic or security threat, or seizing land considered strategically, religiously or nationally valuable. Ethnic cleansing is often accompanied by destruction of the physical structures belonging to the targeted group.

To establish a Jewish majority and maximize Jewish control over land, Israeli governments have employed various spatial engineering tools, including ethnic cleansing and brazenly discriminatory laws concerning citizenship, residency, and immigration. Israel, much like in South African apartheid, this has been pursued while preserving a narrative of a "democratic state" among the dominant group, by ensuring members of that group constitute a majority among those defined as "citizens" within the territory defined as the "state."

The goal of political Zionism was to establish the Jewish majority needed to found a Jewish state, and find a long-term solution to Palestinian resistance to Jewish settlement and the Zionist national project. The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the early years after Israel's

establishment was the combined outcome of security considerations, aimed at protecting the Jewish settlement, and plans for demographic engineering. It involved expelling approximately 750,000 Palestinians and preventing their return; appropriating most of their land and property; and destroying and wholesale erasure of Palestinian towns, villages, and cultural sites. Laws designed to cement the results of this ethnic cleansing were passed in the early years of statehood, chief among them being the 1950 Absentees' Property Law and the 1950 Law of Return, which enshrined the fundamental discriminatory principle that Jews anywhere in the world have the right to immigrate to Israel, while the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland has never been recognized.

Various practices of demographic engineering and ethnic cleansing continued to shape Israeli policy toward Palestinians in the country the decades that followed and were quickly applied to Palestinians in the territories Israel occupied in June 1967. At the time, Israel forcibly transferred hundreds of thousands of people from their home and completely erased some of the villages from which they were expelled, including in the Latrun area, in the refugee camps around Jericho, in the Mughrabi Quarter of Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. The vast majority of Syrian residents of the Golan Heights, approximately 130,000 people, were also forcibly transferred. In a covert operation carried out in January 1972, Israel expelled between 6,000 and 20,000 Palestinians from their land in the Rafah salient area of the Sinai Peninsula and demolished their homes. Over the past decade, the idea of organizing space through violence has become a legitimate part of Israeli public and political discourse, partly due to the vision of politicians such as Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, who now play a central role in government.

Mechanisms of dehumanization and framing Palestinians as an existential threat

Dehumanization and demonization, which legitimize extreme violence against a distinct group, are a necessary enabling condition for the perpetration of genocide.

From the early days of Zionist settlement, Palestinians were dehumanized in various ways in order to enable ethnic cleansing, dispossession, and establishing a regime of Jewish supremacy. In the dominant Zionist-Israeli narrative, the territory defined under the British Mandate as Palestine was portrayed as a "wasteland" and internalized in the

public psyche as "a land without a people for a people without a land." Palestinian national identity was often denied altogether or depicted as rooted solely in opposition to Jewish settlement. Palestinians were frequently described as recent migrants from neighboring Arab countries. To this day, public debate continues in Israel over whether "Palestinian peoplehood" even exists.

Negative stereotypes and racist generalizations about Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians have long been a feature of Israeli public discourse. Popular metaphors, such as describing Israel as "a villa in the jungle" of the Middle East, portray Israel as an island of civilization and enlightenment in an otherwise primitive expanse. Palestinian culture, and Arab-Muslim culture more broadly, are often described as glorifying death and teaching hatred.

Meanwhile, Palestinian birth rates and physical presence anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea are commonly described as a "demographic threat", a "ticking time bomb" and an "existential threat" in Israeli discourse among the security establishment, mainstream media, leading research institutes, and politicians across the board.

Another central form of dehumanization is framing all Palestinians as inherently "barbaric" or committed to a fanatical and uncompromising ideology. History shows that portraying an entire ethnic, national, religious, or racial group as a serious security threat or existential danger, usually based on the actions of individuals or organizations within it, has consistently been an enabling condition for mass atrocities, including genocide.

Palestinians are perceived by Israelis as a permanent and existential security threat. The long and bloody conflict between the Zionist movement and the State of Israel, on one side, and the Palestinian national movement, on the other, has included numerous attacks by Palestinians against Israeli armed forces, as well as civilians, over the years, killing thousands of people. This fact, along with statements and official documents from Palestinian leaders who supported or were involved in armed resistance, including deliberate attacks on civilians, guides the regime's portrayal of the entire Palestinian population as a constant threat to the security of the state and its citizens.

Since the late 1980s, when the first intifada began, direct contact between Jewish-Israeli civilians and Palestinian civilians from the occupied territories has steadily declined, making personal acquaintance between the two populations increasingly rare. The second intifada, which included attacks on Israeli civilians, exacerbated the sense of threat felt by many Jewish-Israelis. Because the second intifada broke out soon after several years of negotiations that included unprecedented concessions, from an Israeli perspective, this reinforced the perception that Palestinians are not interested in a political solution but in the destruction of the State of Israel.

The "disengagement" from the Gaza Strip in 2005, quickly followed by Hamas' rise to power and continued attacks on Israel from Gaza, further cemented the Israeli view that "conceding" territory to Palestinians results in terrorism.

Meanwhile, Israeli authorities have consistently treated any Palestinian attempt at nonviolent resistance, including diplomatic efforts, human rights advocacy, and calls for boycott, as acts of terrorism or existential threats. In effect, Palestinians have no avenue to resist the oppression to which they are subjected without being cast as "terrorists" by the Israeli state.

For example, the Palestinian request for an ICC advisory opinion was perceived in Israel as a strategic threat. The BDS movement has been repeatedly portrayed as a hostile terrorist actor. Nonviolent protest campaigns in the Bank villages, including in East Jerusalem, have been violently suppressed, often with deadly outcomes. Defense Minister Benny Gantz's October 2021 designation of six Palestinian human rights organizations as terrorist entities, despite widespread rejection of the move by numerous states, including European countries and the United States, expresses the same logic.

The Israeli perception of Palestinian presence as a constant threat breeds a power-focused, militaristic worldview that is deeply embedded in the fabric of Israeli culture and identity. This outlook is widely recognized as a defining element of regimes that are based on ethnic supremacy, including apartheid South Africa.

In Israel, compulsory military conscription for Jews has been in place since 1949, with enlistment rates among Jewish men historically ranging between 70% and 90%. The

Israeli military is perceived not only as a defense force, but also as a foundation of social cohesion, with military service considered a morally principled act that demonstrates commitment to society, the state, and the regime. The elevated status of the Israeli military and the framing of the Palestinian collective as a security threat, together with years of dehumanization, have over time formed a clear hierarchy in which the lives of Israeli soldiers are above the lives of Palestinian civilians.

This prioritization is evident in the military's longstanding policies regarding various combat scenarios, such as the use of civilians as human shields, permissive open-fire regulations that exceed the limits of international law, and widespread, imprecise bombing of civilian areas to protect soldiers on the ground. These practices have been especially prominent in Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip over the past two decades, but are also applied in other areas under Israeli rule.

The view of Palestinians as a permanent existential threat to Israel must also be understood in light of the sense of victimhood ingrained in Jewish-Israeli identity, discourse, and ethos. Despite Israel having become a regional military power; despite a long history of expulsion, dispossession, and the imposition of a violent military regime; and despite the vast power imbalance between the two sides – most Jewish-Israelis continue to see themselves as the sole victims, who have no choice but to kill and be killed in order to survive while surrounded by enemies constantly seeking their destruction. This victimhood is rooted in a history of antisemitism, persecution, and pogroms against the Jewish people culminating in the Holocaust. Over the years, the Israeli regime has exploited this history to justify, among other things, its violent control over the Palestinians.

Culture of impunity

An institutional, political, social, and legal culture of impunity, where perpetrators are shielded from accountability for crimes committed against members of a distinct group, is a well-documented enabler of extreme crimes, including, under certain conditions, genocide.

In the vast majority of cases in which Palestinians have been harmed by Israel over the years, the state, its decision-makers, soldiers, commanders, police officers, or civilians

have not been held to account. The longstanding support Israel has received from Western countries, particularly the United States, has given it de facto immunity from the political, legal, and economic mechanisms available to the international community to prevent violations of international law. Members of Israel's armed forces have rarely stood trial for harming Palestinians, and the same applies to Israeli civilians, especially settlers.

For example, according to Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din, in the five years preceding the current war, Israel's military law enforcement system received 862 complaints regarding offenses committed by Israeli soldiers against Palestinians in the West Bank (a figure significantly lower than the number of actual incidents). Of these, only 258 resulted in criminal investigations, and only 13 led to indictments. Out of 219 complaints submitted regarding the killing of Palestinians, only one investigation was opened (according to B'Tselem's monitoring, during this same period, 950 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip.)

A broader review of military investigations of complaints regarding harm to Palestinians by soldiers since 2000 reveals that investigations rarely lead to indictments, and even more infrequently to convictions. Similarly, approximately 94% of settler violence cases against Palestinians in the West Bank opened by the Israel Police over the past two decades were closed without indictments. Of the investigations that were opened, only 3% resulted in full or partial convictions.

This pervasive and systemic impunity was particularly evident during Israeli military operations in Gaza over the past two decades, as well as in the Great March of Return protests in 2018. In Operation Cast Lead (from December 2008 to January 2009), Israeli forces killed approximately 1,391 Palestinians. At least 759 of them did not participate in hostilities, including 344 minors. Over 5,000 were wounded. Out of more than 400 incidents reviewed by the Military Advocate General's (MAG's) office, only three investigations resulted in indictments. The harshest sentence was handed down in a case involving the theft of a credit card.

During Operation Pillar of Defense in November 2012, Israeli forces killed 167 Palestinians. At least 87 of them did not take part in hostilities, including 32 minors. An internal military committee reviewed more than 80 incidents of suspected breaches of law. Of these, 65 were forwarded to the MAG, who determined that none warranted a criminal investigation.

In Operation Protective Edge, in the summer of 2014, Israeli forces killed approximately 2,200 Palestinians, hundreds of them in their homes, including about 526 minors. Some 63% of those killed did not participate in hostilities. Yet only a few investigations were opened, with only one resulting in an indictment to date – over looting.

During the Great March of Return protests, held from March 2018 to July 2019, Israeli forces killed 223 Palestinians, 46 of them minors, with live fire, rubber-coated metal bullets, tear gas canisters and more. More than 13,000 Palestinians were wounded. Of the investigations opened, only one led to an indictment.

In Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021, hundreds of sites across the Gaza Strip were bombed, including civilian infrastructure, neighborhoods, residential towers, schools, and hospitals. According to B'Tselem's figures, 233 Palestinians were killed in the operation, 137 of whom were civilians not participating in hostilities, including 54 minors. According to UN data, more than 2,000 Palestinians were injured. Of the 84 incidents referred to the Israeli military's fact-finding mechanism, only one led to a criminal investigation and an indictment.

When the Israeli military law enforcement system acts, if at all, it focuses on isolated incidents in which relatively low-ranking soldiers or commanders are suspected of breaching orders. Senior commanders are rarely investigated, and the system lacks the authority to examine the orders themselves or the military policies guiding them. The investigations are often conducted negligently and rely almost exclusively on soldiers' testimonies, rather than on an independent review of relevant evidence. These testimonies are frequently collected long after the incident, allowing suspects to coordinate their stories and significantly hindering effective investigation. Soldiers' accounts are consistently prioritized over those of Palestinians, whose testimonies are often not collected at all. In essence, the military law enforcement system serves primarily to whitewash military policies in the eyes of both the Israeli public and the international community and its institutions.

Israel's Supreme Court, for its part, provides a façade of legal oversight over actions taken by state authorities in regard to Palestinians. In fact, for years, the Court has either sanctioned the vast majority of these actions or refrained from intervening, even when they clearly violated international law. The Court's prestige, bolstered by its international

reputation as an independent and liberal institution tasked with upholding human rights, has strengthened Israel's impunity on the global stage. Until the past year, this misguided perception helped shield Israeli leaders from prosecution at the ICC, in part due to the principle of complementarity, whereby the ICC does not intervene when a country has functioning domestic mechanisms for investigation and prosecution.

This ongoing impunity gave Israeli decision-makers reasonable grounds to assume that even an unrestrained, disproportionate, and indiscriminate response to the 7 October 2023 attack would receive the support of Western allies, or at least their tacit approval, alongside token statements about harm to Palestinians. Likewise, Israeli commanders, soldiers, and forces in general, as well as settlers in the West Bank, could safely assume they would continue to enjoy near-total immunity for harming Palestinian civilians.

B. The 7 October 2023 attack: A triggering event

On 7 October 2023, Hamas and other Palestinian armed factions carried out the deadliest attack ever perpetrated against Israeli civilians, killing a total of 1,218 people in southern Israel or after abducting them to Gaza. Of these, 882 were civilians and members of community emergency response squads, including 280 women and 40 children. A small number of civilians were killed by Israeli military fire during the fighting or while attempting to prevent their abduction by armed Palestinians. Tens of thousands were injured, and 252 people were abducted, alive or dead, to Gaza. The vast majority of hostages abducted were Israeli civilians, including women, elderly people, children, the youngest of whom was a nine-month-old baby.

As of mid-July 2025, 205 hostages have been returned to Israel, 148 alive and 57 dead. Some hostages were killed by their captors or by Israeli bombings, and some are still being held captive, in unbearable conditions and without access to critical medical care.

The attack by Hamas and other Palestinian armed factions included grave acts of violence, including sexual violence, some ending in killing. The duty to avoid harming civilians as much as possible, and the absolute prohibition on taking civilians hostage, are fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and binding moral imperatives. These

acts constitute war crimes and likely also crimes against humanity. B'Tselem strongly condemns these crimes.

The genocidal assault on the residents of Gaza, and on all Palestinians as a group, cannot be understood without acknowledging the impact of the 7 October attack on Israeli society. The shock, fear and humiliation elicited by the attack, and the societal upheaval it triggered, served as a driving force for a shift in government policy toward the Palestinians – from oppression and control to destruction and annihilation.

Many Israelis perceived the 7 October attack an event that occurred outside of time and space – devoid of context or background. In mainstream local discourse, mentions of the broader context, namely years of violent control, occupation and blockade of the Gaza Strip, are wrongly labeled as an attempt to deny or justify Hamas' actions. By denouncing any discussion of context, and later of the crimes being committed in Gaza, the Israeli public reveals the persistence of its blind spots.

Since its inception, the Israeli apartheid regime has worked to physically and mentally separate Jewish-Israelis from Palestinians. Over decades of violent military occupation, Israeli exposure to the violence inflicted upon Palestinians has been minimized. The fact that Palestinians live under a discriminatory, racist, and violent apartheid regime has been effectively erased from the Israeli psyche. This distorted perception of reality, combined with the sense of security provided by the Israeli security apparatus, led most Jewish-Israelis to never imagine that the violence wielded daily, for decades, against millions, would one day lead to lethal counter-violence on a previously inconceivable scale.

The 7 October attack was so traumatic for Israelis not only because of its outcomes, or the military's failure to protect civilians. Within hours, it shattered basic paradigms that generations of Israelis grew up with, including the belief that violence and oppression could be confined to one side of the fence, while peace and safety would prevail on the other.

There is scarcely a home or family in Israel left unscathed by the Hamas-led attack and its aftermath. The magnitude of the assault and the unprecedented scale of Israeli casualties meant that many experienced loss, either personally or within their social or family circles. Since that morning, Israelis have been inundated with footage of the attack, as well as

testimonies from survivors and members of rescue teams and armed forces who were present. These have left an indelible mark on Israeli society. The Hamas-led attack vividly evoked, more tangibly than ever before, scenes defenseless Jews being massacred that are etched in collective memory, shaking the individual and collective sense of security among the Jewish public in Israel to the core.

The state of fear, rage, and desire for revenge, prevalent among many Israelis immediately after 7 October and prominently reflected in public discourse, served as fertile ground for incitement against Palestinians in general, and Gazans in particular. This atmosphere, amplified by public figures, senior politicians, military commanders, and media personalities, was a key driver of the Israeli regime's shift from a policy of control and deterrence via repeated military offensives (deadly in their own right) and a blockade to a policy striving for "total victory" via systematic, indiscriminate, and wholesale destruction of Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli public readily rallied around the ideology of "total victory," a concept that supports the illusion that military might will restore the lost sense of security. When Benny Gantz announced he was rejoining the government on 8 October, he said: "Together we will win and turn Bloody Saturday into the moment that shapes Israel's strength and regional military superiority for years to come." His statement reflected the public mindset that would, in the months to follow, enable the decimation of Palestinian society in Gaza with unbridled military force.

The 7 October attack has also served, and continues to serve, as a seemingly moral justification for all actions undertaken by the Israeli military in Gaza and beyond, including Iran. From the outset and throughout, the Israeli assault on Gaza has been framed as an act of self-defense, a necessary response to the Hamas attack. The fact that, for many Jewish-Israelis, this is the absolute justification for every action taken by Israel in the Strip has allowed the Israeli regime to shed any legal obligation or moral constraint with virtually no public criticism. A clear illustration of the shift in public discourse can be found by comparing reactions to genocidal rhetoric before and after 7 October. For example, when Bezalel Smotrich called in March 2023 to "wipe out" the Palestinian town of Huwarah, south of Nablus, following an attack on Israelis by a local resident, his remarks attracted wide rebuttal, including by those associated with the Israeli political center. After 7

October, similar calls regarding Gaza and the West Bank became common, accepted, and even widely supported by the public.

The reality since October 2023 reveals the extent to which a society governed by an apartheid regime, which includes segregation, denial, and violence, can slide toward a policy of genocide, as a direct extension of entrenched patterns of domination and denial. The destruction wreaked on Gaza is not only the product of existential fear, but a conscious choice to imagine a future in which there is no place for Palestinian life. In this context, the Hamas attack, as brutal as it was, is not only a terrible disaster that befell Israeli society, but also a mirror reflecting the human cost of maintaining a decades-long regime of oppression, a mirror Israel refuses to face with indignation and fire.

C. Exploitation of the opportunity by a far-right government

The current assault on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip must also be understood in light of the composition and character of the current Israeli government. In December 2022, ten months before the Hamas attack, Israel formed the most extreme right-wing government in its history. From the outset, the government's actions were guided by the principle of maintaining and entrenching Jewish supremacy, as publicly expressed in official policy documents, such as the coalition agreements and the government's guiding principles, which emphasize that, "The Jewish people have an exclusive and indisputable right to all parts of the Land of Israel."

This government is led by senior ministers who have proudly and publicly espoused violent and genocidal ideologies. For example, in October 2021, Minister Bezalel Smotrich told Palestinian members of Knesset that they were "here by mistake, it's a mistake that Ben-Gurion didn't finish the job and didn't throw you out in 1948." Rhetoric that erases the Palestinian narrative, and, in some cases, denies the very existence of the Palestinian people, is also common among these figures. In March 2023, for instance, Smotrich declared, "There's no such thing as a Palestinian people." For many years, while serving in various public positions, these officials have made it clear that they intend to translate their worldview into action, saying they would promote a so-called voluntary transfer

of Palestinians, the annexation of the West Bank into Israeli territory, and create the conditions necessary for Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip, all while openly rejecting the rules of international law and the institutions that uphold it.

In 2017, Smotrich released his plan for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Dubbed, the Decisive Plan, it offered Palestinians a choice between relinquishing their rights and facing expulsion and extermination. The very appointment of a man who conceived this as a minister in the Ministry of Defense, responsible for the Civil Administration, sends a clear message that the Israeli government endorses the use of violence (including settler violence) to seize lands and ethnically cleanse the area of Palestinians. Accordingly, the number of settler attacks against Palestinians between January and September 2023 nearly doubled compared to the same period the previous year. Since the current government was sworn in, such attacks have taken on a new character - mass pogroms, which began with the Huwarah Pogrom in February 2023 and have continued ever since on a weekly basis. In the days leading up to 7 October 2023, efforts by members of the far-right to advance the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, surged, as expressed in incitement to violence and direct participation in settler provocations and violent actions. As is common in the West Bank, this violence was often made possible by the presence of the Israeli military, and at times, with its active participation.

To fully grasp the circumstances in which Israel launched its genocidal assault on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, one must take into account that, for a significant and central segment of Israel's decision-makers and government ministers, this moment was an opportunity to implement far-reaching plans to expand Israeli territorial control through the expulsion and dispossession of Palestinians. As Minister of Settlement and National Missions Orit Strock has said, for them, this is "a time of miracles." While the genocide is being perpetrated by the Israeli apparatus as a whole, the fact that many of its most central architects and policy shapers overt and explicit in their extremism and genocidal intentions is a major factor driving and enabling its execution.

6.

CONCLUSION

Since Israel launched its assault on the Gaza Strip, we have witnessed relentless human suffering and loss of life on a scale unimaginable just months prior. Entire cities bombed and razed, with scarcely a house left standing; hundreds of thousands torn from their lives, roaming dusty roads like human shadows, with what little they could take on their backs, searching for temporary shelter; adults and children jostling in endless lines for a little food, risking life and limb for the chance to feed their starving families; and above all, death looming everywhere. This is a human catastrophe being broadcast live from the inferno.

Genocide goes beyond the horrific harm to its direct victims. It is an assault on humanity itself: on the fundamental belief that every life is precious, and the core principle that every human being is entitled to basic rights affording protection from arbitrary violence. History shows that attempting to eradicate a group of human beings is a crime with catastrophic consequences – a crime that every person has the duty to oppose and act to stop immediately. This is a moral, legal, and human imperative: to acknowledge the facts, call them by name, stand with the victims, and demand an end to destruction and extermination while they unfold.

The review presented in this report leaves no room for doubt: since October 2023, the Israeli regime has been responsible for carrying out genocide against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Killing tens of thousands of people; causing bodily or mental harm to hundreds of thousands more; destroying homes and civilian infrastructure on a massive scale; starvation, displacement, and denying humanitarian aid – all this is being perpetrated systematically, as part of a coordinated attack aimed at annihilating all facets of life in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, Israel's decision to continue this assault despite countless warnings and ample evidence of its deadly consequences, combined with repeated public clarifications by Israeli policymakers that the target is the entire population of Gaza, demonstrate the intent of Israel's political and military leadership to irreversibly destroy Palestinian life in the Gaza Strip.

While genocide is underway in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli regime is leading an assault on the Palestinian population in the West Bank and a policy of egregious rights violations against Palestinian citizens of Israel. The form and extent of these actions may vary across the different areas under Israel's control, but they are rooted in the same underlying logic: denial of Palestinian humanity. In a process beginning with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and expedited after the criminal Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, the lives and dignity of Palestinians have come to be regarded as disposable by most Jewish-Israelis, and violence against them normalized.

The routine killing and destruction in the Gaza Strip and the forced displacement of tens of thousands in the West Bank would not have been possible without international inaction in the face of the unfathomable scale and severity of these crimes. Most of these crimes have been extensively documented and made public throughout almost two years of war. Yet many state leaders, particularly in Europe and the United States, have not only refrained from effective action to stop the genocide but enabled it – through statements affirming Israel's "right to self-defense" or active support, including the shipment of weapons and ammunition. Even after the International Court of Justice ruled there is plausible risk that Israel's actions amount to genocidal acts, and even after the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and then-Defense Minister Gallant on suspicion of war crimes and crimes against humanity, the international community failed to bring these actions to an immediate halt and hold those responsible to account.

The genocidal nature of Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip and the international community's failure to prevent them will not only affect Israel's future conduct toward the Palestinian people. They are also likely to reshape norms of conduct in international relations and the protection of human rights around the world. Trampling fundamental principles of international law underfoot, and blatantly disregarding the moral norms that shaped the post-WWII world order, may turn the use of indiscriminate lethal force and deliberate targeting of civilians into the starting point in the conduct of future violent conflicts.

Confronting the immense destruction and moral disintegration requires not only acknowledging the crimes but also commitment to action and to accountability – both international and domestic. We acknowledge that rebuilding after such devastation will be a long and arduous task that will require a fundamental shift in the foundations of the

Israeli regime. This change is essential also because the Israeli regime, which has stripped every moral value and obligation of meaning, is a danger to all people under its rule. Therefore, everything must be done to prevent it from claiming more victims.

In the immediate term, the recognition that the Israeli regime is committing genocide in the Gaza Strip and the deep concern that it may expand to other areas where Palestinians live under Israeli rule demand urgent and unequivocal action from both Israeli society and the international community.

This is the time to act. This is the time to save those who have not yet been lost forever, and use every means available under international law to stop Israel's genocide of the Palestinians.