

Israel-Hamas war

Gaza aid falls to lowest level since start of war despite US warning to Israel

Biden administration letter threatened to withhold military help if humanitarian crisis did not urgently improve



Palestinians receive medical attention at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, on Monday © AFP/Getty Images

FT reporters 9 HOURS AGO

Aid to Gaza has fallen to its lowest level since the war began, despite the US warning Israel that military assistance could be at risk if conditions did not improve.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken and secretary of defence Lloyd Austin wrote to the Israeli government on October 13 giving Israel 30 days to “surge all forms of humanitarian assistance” in the strip and “end isolation of northern [Gaza](#)” immediately.

But humanitarian officials say conditions have deteriorated still further since the leaked letter was sent two weeks ago, with aid entering Gaza at a lower rate in October than in any month since the start of the war a year ago.

Only 704 truckloads of humanitarian aid entered the strip between October 1 and October 22, according to the UN, a sharp decline from the rate of entries the previous month. Three thousand truckloads entered the strip in September.

The aid arrivals represent a fraction of the quantities demanded by the US, which said in its warning letter that a minimum of 350 truckloads should enter Gaza each day. A total of 246 truckloads entered the strip in the week before the letter, UN data showed, and 232 the following week.

Gaza's north remains largely cut off from aid and under heavy bombardment, with tens of thousands of residents displaced under forced evacuation orders.

“The situation in northern Gaza is worse today than it was when the letter was written,” said Scott Paul, Oxfam America’s director for peace and security. “The areas that are being depopulated right now have received nothing.”

Almost 800,000 people in Gaza are enduring “emergency” or “catastrophe” levels of food scarcity, according to the IPC, a multi-agency initiative for measuring food security.

The US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, told the Security Council on Tuesday “that the United States rejects any Israeli efforts to starve Palestinians”.

“The US has stated clearly that Israel must allow food, medicine and other supplies into all of Gaza, especially the north, and especially as winter sets in, and protect the workers distributing it,” she said.

In its response sent after publication, the Israel Defense Forces said it had been making “extensive efforts to enable and ease the transfer of aid to Gaza” since the beginning of the war and that “several concrete steps are expected to be implemented soon”.

It said aid deliveries in northern Gaza had slowed down due to military operations in and near the Jabalia refugee camp, where hundreds of people have been reported dead by local health authorities.

“In light of IDF operations in the region over the past month, only specific, co-ordinated movements were allowed in combat areas, due to operational constraints and tangible risks to the lives of aid workers and forces on the ground,” the IDF said. “The State of Israel is not a bottleneck in transferring humanitarian aid to Gaza.”

All of Gaza's population is experiencing food insecurity

IPC food insecurity classification	Current situation Sep-Oct 2024 (% of population)	Population affected
 Catastrophe: Extreme lack of food; starvation; death	6.00	132,987
 Emergency: Large food consumption gaps	31.00	663,721
 Crisis: Food consumption gaps	49.00	1,044,353
 Stressed: Minimally adequate consumption	14.00	299,557
 None: Able to meet basic food requirements	0.00	0

FINANCIAL TIMES

Source: IPC

The further squeeze on aid provision comes as Israel’s parliament on Monday [approved legislation that will ban the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, from operating within Israeli territory once it takes effect.](#) Several allies of Israel have warned that the measures would have devastating consequences for humanitarian assistance to Gaza.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO GAZA.

The Israeli government said in a recent court filing that it had forbidden the entry of humanitarian food aid into Jabalia, the northern refugee camp where the most intense attacks are taking place in an Israeli military operation that began this month.

Despite the US letter's demands, humanitarian missions largely cannot cross from south to north and few enter through northern crossings, though Cogat, the arm of the Israeli defence ministry that deals with the occupied Palestinian territories, said on Tuesday that 50 trucks had entered the north through the Erez crossing. The IDF statement said "625 aid truckloads are awaiting collection by the UN on the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing".

The few deliveries that do arrive in the north are making their way to Gaza City but do not reach the areas most affected by the current military operation, aid officials said.

Humanitarian officials in the strip say much of the aid is looted before it can reach distribution points, after a breakdown of law and order resulting from the conflict and after several aid convoys were hit by Israeli strikes.

"The entire population of north Gaza is at risk of dying," acting UN relief chief Joyce Msuya said this week. An Israeli military official said on Monday that about 50,000 civilians had left Jabalia in recent days, but they remained in northern Gaza. An estimated 10,000 people were still in Jabalia, the official said.

The US's letter requested specific steps to improve the humanitarian situation, including approving more drivers and items and opening a new crossing point. The IDF said it had allowed repairs, widened roads, expanded operating hours at border crossings, enabled humanitarian pauses and allowed the entry of dozens of empty trucks and forklifts. It did not say when it had made those changes.

Blinken told reporters in Tel Aviv on October 23 that the US had "seen progress", citing the opening of a fifth crossing into Gaza. State department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday that more trucks had been entering Gaza and that Israel had taken "some other steps" but that these were not enough.

Aid officials said that pointing to small logistical improvements while the overall situation deteriorated allowed the US to claim a diplomatic success without alleviating the crisis for Palestinians.

“You cannot look at the erasure of northern Gaza and then go back to these narrow metrics and decide that ‘we’re making progress slowly, slowly,’” said Paul of Oxfam.

Data visualisation by Aditi Bhandari

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