

Israel-Hamas war

Israeli curbs on Gaza water supplies are 'acts of genocide', rights agency says

Human Rights Watch alleges attacks on infrastructure and repair workers contribute to thousands of deaths



HRW's report listed what it said were intentional actions by Israel that had deprived most of Gaza's 2.3mn citizens of access to water
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James Shotter in Jerusalem 12 MINUTES AGO

Israeli authorities have deliberately deprived Palestinian civilians in Gaza of water, causing thousands of deaths and committing the crime of extermination as well as “acts of genocide”, a Human Rights Watch report says.

The publication comes amid international alarm over the humanitarian situation in Gaza, where Israel has been waging a devastating offensive since [Hamas's shock attack](#) on October 7 last year.

In its [report](#), HRW listed what it said were intentional actions by Israel — ranging from destroying infrastructure to blocking water-related aid — that had deprived most of Gaza's 2.3mn citizens of access to the water needed to meet their most basic needs.

“For more than a year the Israeli government has deliberately denied Palestinians in Gaza the bare minimum [of water] they need to survive,” said Tirana Hassan, executive director at Human Rights Watch.

“This isn't just negligence; it is a calculated policy of deprivation that has led to the deaths of thousands from dehydration.”

In response, Israel [accused HRW](#) of “blood libels” and “anti-Israel propaganda”. and

...response, Israel accused Hamas of obstructing aid and using propaganda, and said it had facilitated “the continuous flow of water and humanitarian aid into Gaza”, despite attacks from Hamas. It added that it had facilitated the delivery of 1.2mn tonnes of humanitarian supplies to Gaza and would continue to “ensure humanitarian aid enters Gaza, in full compliance with international law”.

The 184-page report said that in addition to cutting off, and then limiting, water supplies from Israel to Gaza, Israel had rendered most of the enclave’s own water and sanitation infrastructure “useless” by severing electricity and fuel supplies.

Israeli forces also deliberately destroyed or damaged Gaza’s water and sanitation infrastructure, the report said, including four of its six wastewater treatment plants. It cited another case in which an Israeli soldier posted a video of himself and other soldiers blowing up a reservoir.

“In several cases, Human Rights Watch found evidence that Israeli ground forces were in control of the areas at the times they destroyed water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure,” HRW said.

“This evidence indicates that the destruction was not incidental to attacks on military objects, but rather, deliberate.”

HRW said Israeli authorities had exacerbated the problem by restricting supplies of materials needed to repair Gaza's water infrastructure, and that Israeli forces had also killed water workers trying to carry out repairs.

HRW said the precise number of deaths in the territory caused by waterborne diseases, dehydration and starvation was not being recorded.

But it said interviews with healthcare professionals and epidemiologists indicated it was "likely" that "thousands of people have died" in addition to those killed directly by fighting.

According to Palestinian officials, Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed more than 45,000 people. Hamas militants killed 1,200 Israelis and took 250 hostage during their October 7 attack, according to Israeli officials.

The hostilities have sparked proceedings in international tribunals. The UN's top court is hearing a case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of genocide. The International Criminal Court has also issued [arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) and former defence minister Yoav Gallant for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Israel has vehemently rejected allegations of genocide and called South Africa's case "profoundly distorted". Netanyahu's office has dismissed the arrest warrants as "antisemitic".

HRW's report — which follows one by Amnesty International concluding there was "evidence to believe" Israel was committing genocide in Gaza — concluded that Israeli authorities had "intentionally created conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of Palestinians in Gaza in whole or in part".

"This policy, inflicted as part of a mass killing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, means Israeli authorities have committed the crime against humanity of extermination, which is ongoing," HRW said, adding that the policy also amounted to one of the five "acts of genocide" under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

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Coupled with statements suggesting some Israeli officials wished to destroy Palestinians in Gaza . . . the policy may amount to the crime of genocide,” it said.

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