

Israel-Hamas war

Israel scraps system protecting aid workers in Gaza, agencies say

Military no longer acknowledges notifications designed to help groups move safely around the strip



Palestinians receive bags of flour and other humanitarian aid distributed in Jabalia on the Gaza Strip © Jehad Alshrafi/AP

Heba Saleh in Cairo

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Aid agencies in Gaza say they have been forced to slash services because Israel has refused to reactivate a system that allows their workers to avoid Israeli attacks by sharing their movements within the shattered enclave.

Rachael Cummings, humanitarian director for Save the Children in [Gaza](#), said her organisation had cut its activities in the territory by 80 per cent because Israel no longer acknowledged notifications delivered via the UN-operated Humanitarian Notification Service platform.

“The HNS was to assist Israel to basically not strike us,” said Cummings. “And because we now have no system to notify, we are no longer able to provide a degree of security for our teams, so . . . we’ve had to suspend the majority of our work for children.”

The activities of UN agencies have also been hit by the suspension.

“We have not received the assurances from the Israelis that we need to be able to move around, and that’s why so much of our operation has been impacted,” a UN official said. Discussions were ongoing to establish whatever new requirements would be needed to ensure they could move safely, the official added.



Palestinians wait to receive food in front of the World Kitchen cook in Khan Younis © Abed Rahim Khatib/dpa

Gaza's 2.2mn people are dependent on supplies and services delivered by aid agencies after 17 months of war that have pulverised the territory and fuelled a humanitarian catastrophe.

The crisis deepened after Israel ended a two-month ceasefire on March 18, unleashing a fresh offensive that brought the number of Palestinians killed since the start of the war to more than 50,000, according to local health authorities.

The war was triggered by Hamas's October 7 2023 cross-border attacks, which killed 1,200 Israelis, according to government figures.

The Israeli military said it stopped using the Humanitarian Notification System during the ceasefire. Since the resumption of fighting, it said, "movement co-ordination is being conducted in various areas of the Strip . . . based on the situation on the ground".

While notifications are no longer acknowledged, aid groups still need active co-ordination with Israel to go to areas in Gaza where Israeli ground troops are present, including the buffer zone that runs inside its border. OCHA has said that Israel refused 40 of 50 co-ordination requests submitted between March 18-24.

The enhanced dangers faced by aid agencies in Gaza come as Israel earlier this month imposed a full siege on the territory, blocking entry to all humanitarian supplies, including food and fuel.

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Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA, the main UN agency in Gaza, posted on X that humanity was “at its darkest hour”, with no aid entering the territory for more than three weeks.

“This is [the] longest that Gaza has been without any supplies since the war began . . . Parents cannot find food for their children. The sick are without medicine. Prices are soaring,” he said.

The World Food Programme warned of “the risk of severe hunger and malnutrition”, adding that the expansion of military activity in Gaza was “severely disrupting food assistance operations and putting the lives of aid workers at risk every day”.

On March 19, a UN building serving as accommodation for international staff — the location of which had been notified to Israel — was struck by a projectile which killed a Bulgarian worker and severely injured six others.

The attack, which the UN said came from an Israeli tank shell, prompted the organisation to announce it was reducing by a third the number of international aid officials in the enclave. Israel denied it had struck the compound.

More than 300 Palestinian aid workers have been killed in the war. The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported that at least eight were killed between March 18 and 25.

Israeli officials are drawing up plans to take control of all aid distribution in Gaza — including by Israeli troops or private security contractors — as part of a renewed full-scale ground offensive.

“We’re being set up to fail,” said Gavin Kelleher, humanitarian access manager for the Norwegian Refugee Council, another agency working in the enclave.

“We’ve never been allowed to bring in enough supplies. We’re not being allowed to move around safely and we’re not being able to meet the needs of the people of Gaza.”

Additional reporting by Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv

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