

## Gaza's Devastating Hunger Crisis Puts War Coverage at Risk

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On a quiet Friday afternoon, a message from one of our Middle East correspondents broke the usual flurry of our team's group chat. The words were stark and sobering. "He says he hasn't the strength to hold a camera anymore," our producer relayed to us. "He's lost a lot of weight and can barely speak on the phone." For months, reports have trickled out of Gaza detailing crippling shortages of food and essentials, exacerbated by Israeli restrictions on aid deliveries.

He witnessed infants lying motionless in hospital beds, too weak to cry, as their mothers stood by, unable to nurse due to their malnutrition. He's seen people scramble for scarce aid drops and protests by Palestinians against Hamas for prolonging the conflict. These stories rely on the courage and skill of local journalists and videographers in Gaza, as Israel's unprecedented ban on foreign media entering the territory forces us to depend on those on the ground. He's not alone; other team members have shared similar struggles. These are Gazans reporting on Gazans, enduring the same hardships as those they cover. Their plight is inextricably linked to the story itself, and it's starting to erode our ability to report on the war.

Major news organisations are raising urgent concerns about their staff in Gaza. Agence France-Presse (AFP) recently appealed to the French government to evacuate its team. "In AFP's 80-year history, we've lost journalists to conflict, injury, and captivity," the AFP journalist union stated, "but never have we faced the prospect of colleagues starving to death."

Al Jazeera, barred from operating in Israel, echoed this sentiment. "The global journalistic community must act to support our colleagues," said Mostefa Souag, Al Jazeera's director-general, in a statement. "If we don't, we risk a future where no one remains to tell Gaza's story."

On Wednesday, numerous humanitarian organisations, including Médecins Sans Frontières and Oxfam, issued a joint statement warning that Gaza faces "mass starvation." Israel denies responsibility, blaming Hamas and dismissing reports of famine as propaganda. Yet, by barring international media from Gaza, Israel prevents independent verification of these claims.

Gaza has been largely sealed off to foreign journalists. Israel cites safety concerns, allowing only tightly controlled "embeds" with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), and interaction with locals is restricted. The last known embed occurred in June at the European Hospital in Khan Younis. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, international journalists operate freely in most areas.

The Foreign Press Association is challenging these restrictions in Israel's Supreme Court, but progress is mired in delays. As a result, foreign media organisations rely heavily on Palestinian journalists in Gaza. Yet, with many now too weak to work, compounded by connectivity issues that hinder transmitting footage, the flow of information is at risk. The

Committee to Protect Journalists reports 186 journalists killed in Gaza since October 2023, adding to the crisis.

The war, now in its 21st month, was sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking 250 hostages, 50 of whom remain captive, with 20 believed alive. Israel aims to secure their release, though its broader rhetoric suggests a goal of dismantling Hamas entirely. Ceasefire talks remain deadlocked, with Hamas accused of exploiting starvation imagery to gain global sympathy. Israel, however, controls aid access, a point of contention as humanitarian conditions deteriorate. The hunger crisis is not just a humanitarian tragedy; it's a direct threat to the world's ability to understand the Gaza war.