

U.S. Envoy Visits Gaza Aid Site Amid Worsening Humanitarian Crisis

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U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff visited a humanitarian aid distribution center in southern Gaza on Friday, as the region continues to suffer from food shortages and mounting civilian deaths. The visit, made alongside U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, highlights Washington's increased attention to the escalating crisis.

The two officials toured one of four aid distribution sites operated by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) in Rafah, a southern city currently under Israeli military control. The sites have become hotspots of unrest, where desperate civilians crowd for limited resources. According to the GHF, while their private security has used pepper spray and fired warning shots to manage the crowds, several hundred people have died due to stampedes or crossfire. The Israeli military has maintained that it only fires warning shots to deter approaching civilians.

Witkoff's trip follows a breakdown in ceasefire negotiations in Qatar, where U.S. representatives accused Hamas of stalling progress. President Donald Trump, speaking on social media, stated that surrender and the release of Israeli hostages by Hamas would be the fastest route to ending the crisis. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt explained that Witkoff's mission is to formulate a strategy for expanding humanitarian access to Gaza, with a focus on increasing food and medical deliveries.

Despite the recent resumption of aid via land and air, distribution remains severely limited. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), an international group monitoring food emergencies, warned that famine conditions are already unfolding in parts of Gaza due to a 2.5-month blockade and a collapse in internal security. Aid is often looted or sold on the black market, leaving many without access to necessities.

On Friday, Human Rights Watch criticized what it described as a "flawed, militarized aid distribution system," calling it a primary cause of civilian casualties. The Israel Defense Forces and the Israeli prime minister's office have not commented on the report.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published video footage of recent deliveries showing trucks being surrounded by large crowds as gunfire echoed nearby. Olga Cherevko, a staff member with OCHA, reported that "tens of thousands of hungry and desperate people directly offloaded everything from the backs of our trucks."

The war between Israel and Hamas began on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched an attack on southern Israel, killing approximately 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages. Around 50 hostages remain in captivity, with about 20 believed to still be alive. In response, Israel's military campaign has led to over 60,000 reported Palestinian deaths, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which operates under the Hamas-run government. While the

ministry's figures are regularly cited by international agencies, it does not distinguish between civilian and militant casualties.