

A Grim Milestone in Gaza and Israel: One Year of Life Lost to Horror and Hunger

10 October 2024



Image source: Action Against Hunger / Hunger

“The situation in Gaza is getting worse day by day. What worries me and makes me alert [...] is fear for my family, whom I leave every day. Will I find them safe or not? I miss the feeling of security.”

Displaced resident, Deir al Balah, September 2024

This month the world reached a grim milestone. It is now a year since Hamas and affiliated militants killed over 1,000 Israeli and foreign nationals, including 22 health workers, and took over 250 people hostage.¹ In addition to the pain suffered by these individuals, their families and friends, the people of Gaza have endured an entire year of relentless violence, spiralling hunger and obstruction of the humanitarian and health systems designed to support them in times of crisis. Even if Palestinians have not died from disease or hunger or been killed or injured by violence directly linked to the conflict, a year of their lives - opportunities for personal, professional and educational enrichment - have been forever lost. In their place have come trauma, despair and often death.

The level of humanitarian catastrophe now faced by over 2.1 million civilians could have been avoided. Instead, its severity resulted from decisions by conflict parties to prioritize violence over enabling humanitarian operations and the protection of civilians. The violence has disrupted the entry of essential supplies—food, fuel, water and medical aid—into Gaza, including through the destruction of critical infrastructure for food production, processing, distribution and healthcare which is vital for the civilian population. In Gaza since 7 October 2023, Insecurity Insight has documented reports of at least:

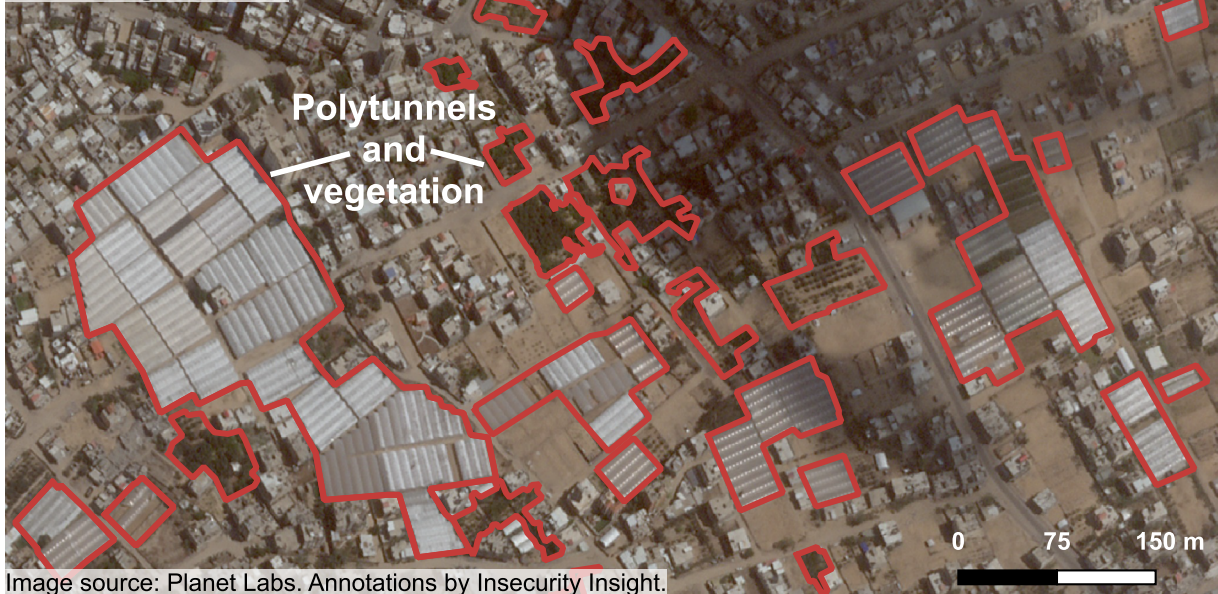
- **22 occasions on which bakeries or their vicinities have been struck by air-delivered explosive weapons, often resulting in severe damage or destruction and facilities being rendered inoperable;**
- **151 occasions on which agricultural land has been struck by explosive weapons; and**
- **24 occasions on which markets and market areas have been struck by explosive weapons.**²

The incidents have been recurrent throughout the past year. As recently as 16 September, a bakery in the Sumoud refugee camp was **reportedly** struck by plane-delivered explosive weapons launched by the Israeli armed forces. Since May, the degradation of agricultural land and destruction of greenhouses and polytunnels has accelerated in southern Gaza due to Israel’s ground-offensive on Rafah. As indicated in Figure 1, previously vibrant communities have become distraught “ghost towns.” The violence comes on top of the economic and physical access obstructions to food and a “complete siege” **imposed** by Israel on the entry of supplies of food, water and fuel on 9 October 2023.³

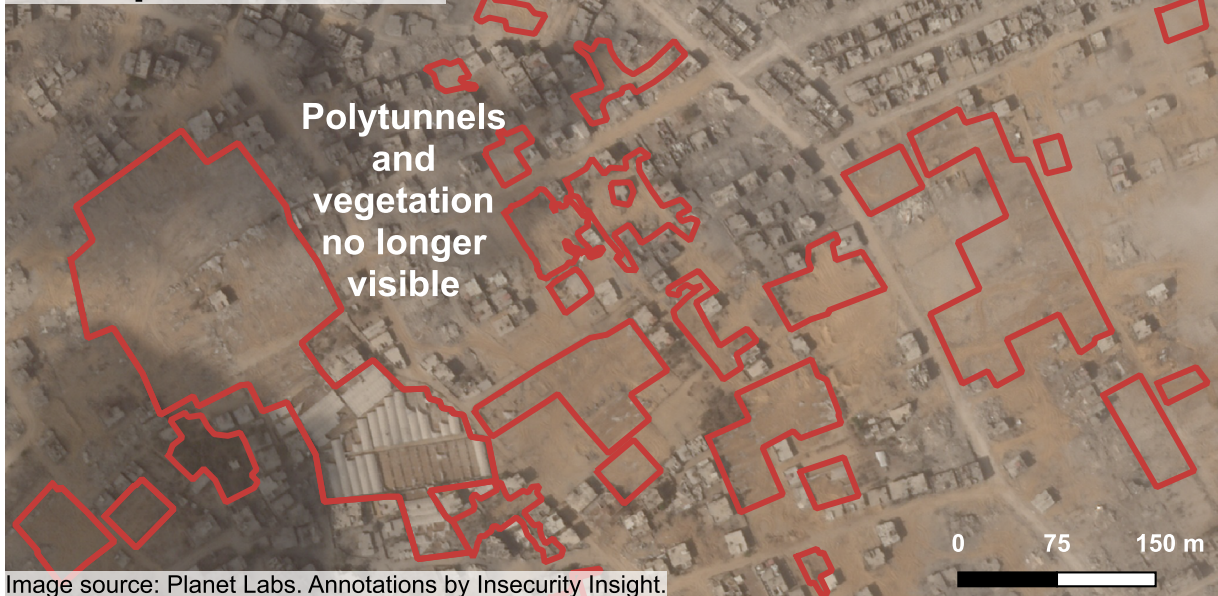
Figure 1: Satellite images showing the destruction of polytunnels and the degradation of vegetation in central Rafah, 15 May and 13 September 2024

Polytunnels are used in agriculture to create a controlled environment for growing plants.

15 May 2024



13 September 2024



The violence has caused a sharp and rapid decline in food security in Gaza. “Prior to October 7, 2023, Gaza's population generally had low levels of malnutrition”, one aid worker noted. The interruption of food supplies, coupled with widespread damage to vital infrastructure, has dramatically worsened the nutritional status of the population, heightening the risk of hunger, malnutrition, and other related health crises.

“Now, unfortunately, there is a concerning prevalence of wasting among children under five years old, a condition that did not exist in Gaza prior to October 2023.”

It is the combination of horrors amidst the collapse of Gaza’s food, water and health systems that have made the food insecurity in Gaza so life-threatening. In addition to limited access to food, Israeli displacement orders have worn down Palestinians as families have repeatedly been displaced from their homes and forced into cramped supposed “humanitarian zones” which have then often been **bombed** themselves. Amidst the despair and destruction, these areas have become unsanitary as **hundreds of thousands of tonnes of solid waste** has accumulated and infiltrated into Gaza’s water systems thereby creating conditions ripe for the spread of diseases. In August, the **first case of poliovirus** in humans was detected, a disease that had been eradicated from the region 25 years ago, sounding the alarm that additional vaccine-preventable diseases are likely to appear in the coming months.

And yet many of the hospitals which would normally treat diseases have been rendered inoperable. Insecurity Insight has documented **1,255 incidents** of violence against or obstruction of access to health care in Gaza since 7 October 2023 including 234 occasions in which health facilities were damaged and the killing of 469 health workers.⁴ According to the World Health Organisation **large areas of Gaza have had no functioning hospitals** for periods during the past year. Meanwhile, the immune systems of bodies which may in normal conditions have been capable of fighting off some diseases or recovering from injuries suffered from bullets and bombs have instead been left weak by insufficient nutritious and varied food.

“In my daily experiences in displacement camps, I’ve seen that recovering from malnutrition goes beyond providing nutritional supplements. It’s essential to ensure access to clean water and comprehensive health and food packages. Only then can we fully support the journey toward treatment and recovery.”

The only winners of this combination of horrors have been death and despair. Indeed, deaths from starvation rarely result from the deprivation of food alone. Rather, they tend to be caused by a variety of factors including “malnutrition, infection and exhaustion” which “combin[e] to kill individuals.”⁵ This dire situation has occurred in Gaza despite the obligations of all conflict parties under international humanitarian law to take all feasible precautions necessary to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.



Image source: Action Against Hunger

But advocacy and aid *have* saved lives

Although the reality is grim, the advocacy campaigns fought so tirelessly by civil society organisations over the past year have not been futile. In early April, **Israel agreed** to open the Erez border crossing for the first time since 7 October 2023 and to allow increased entries of aid into Gaza from Jordan via Israel. Aid entering Gaza subsequently increased to the **highest level** since 7 October. Israel's improved policy regarding humanitarian access came just days after seven World Central Kitchen aid workers were killed by three Israeli-launched drone strikes, sparking international outrage. **Dire warnings** regarding impending famine in northern Gaza and orders from the International Court of Justice for Israel to increase aid deliveries to Gaza also helped bring about changes on the ground. As noted by **Refugees International**, this “enabled a brief period of stabilising conditions in April that altered the rapidly worsening hunger trajectory seen in February and early March.” It “likely deferred an otherwise imminent descent into widespread famine.”

Tragically, the situation has since deteriorated again with the closure of the Rafah border crossing and Israel's ground-offensive on the area, in addition to recent **reports** that Israel is considering depopulating and laying siege to northern Gaza. Yet, the story is a needed reminder that advocacy and aid have made tangible differences to the lives of Palestinians. If the loss of a second year to horror and hunger is to be avoided in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, these advocacy efforts should be tirelessly continued.

Topline Recommendations:

1. All conflict parties should agree to an immediate and sustained humanitarian ceasefire and release all hostages and civilian detainees.
2. We recall that the parties to the conflict must actively protect humanitarian aid and health facilities and take all necessary precautions to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure in line with international humanitarian law.
3. Deconfliction protocols should be strictly adhered to by conflict parties to ensure the safe transit of aid within Gaza. Instances where deconfliction protocols may have been violated should be swiftly and impartially investigated by an independent authority.
4. Additional aid corridors should be established to ensure continued and increased supply of humanitarian aid and essential commercial supplies into Gaza, especially in preparation for winter rains and flooding.
5. Displacement orders and repeated forced evacuations should end, ensuring that there is no further deterioration of designated “humanitarian zones”. Previous displacement orders should be re-called, facilitating Palestinians' return to their homes once safe to do so.

For more granular recommendations, please see Insecurity Insight's most recent in-depth report: **Conflict-Induced Hunger in Gaza**. Insecurity Insight's data on reported incidents of food related violence is available on the **Humanitarian Data Exchange** (HDX).

Media contact

To be put in touch with aid teams operating in Gaza, interviews with experts and curated datasets, please contact Tim Bishop (**tim.bishop@insecurityinsight.org**) or Ana Mora Segura (**amsegura@accioncontraelhambre.org**)

1 The killing of the 22 health workers in Israel documented by Insecurity Insight occurred between 7-16 October 2023. shcc.pub/ISR2023

2 Data covers the period from 7 October 2023 to 27 September 2024. It is based on incidents identified from open sources such as news articles and partner contributions. The incidents have not been independently verified. The figures are likely to be affected by reporting barriers and may change if more information becomes available.

3 Water supply to Gaza was partially restored on 15 October 2023 and on 19 October 2023 an agreement was reached to allow some humanitarian aid into Gaza.

4 Insecurity Insight’s data regarding attacks on health care in Gaza covers the period of 7 October 2023 to 12 September 2024.

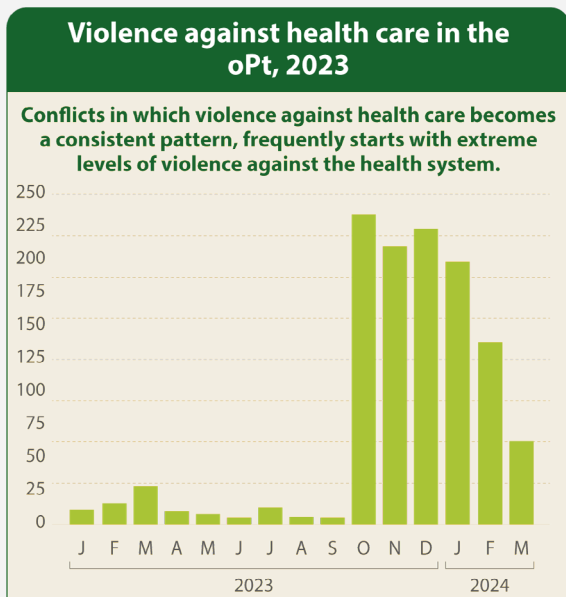
5 Alex de Waal, Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine (Cambridge, Polity Press: 2018), p. 23.

Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) 2023 Factsheet

The SHCC identified 761 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in the oPt in 2023. Hospitals and field hospitals were shelled by Israeli artillery and tank fire and subjected to Israeli air and missile strikes. The vicinity of hospitals and health facilities were hit multiple times by airstrikes destroying main roads and surrounding buildings and hindering medical crews ability to reach casualties and wounded Palestinians.

Ambulance drivers, doctors, dentists, gynaecologists, hospital staff, janitors, laboratory technicians, medical students, nurses, opticians, orthopedists, paramedics, pharmacists, psychologists, physiotherapists, surgeons, and volunteers from local humanitarian relief groups were killed, injured, and arrested.

In several cases, entire families that had multiple members who were medical professionals were killed in single attacks, usually while they were at home. Available in [Arabic](#) and [English](#).



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