

War Crimes: Israeli government documents show deliberate policy to keep Gazans at near-starvation levels

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Documents whose existence were denied by the Israeli government for over a year have been released after a legal battle led by Israeli human rights group Gisha. The documents reveal a deliberate policy by the Israeli government in which the dietary needs for the population of Gaza are chillingly calculated, and the amounts of food let in by the Israeli government measured to remain just enough to keep the population alive at a near-starvation level. This documents the statement made by a number of Israeli officials that they are “putting the people of Gaza on a diet”.



Calculation sheet from newly-released documents (image from Gisha)

In 2007, when Israel began its full siege on Gaza, Dov Weisglass, adviser to then Prime-Minister Ehud Olmert, stated clearly, “The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger.” The documents now released contain equations used by the Israeli government to calculate the exact amounts of food, fuel and other necessities needed to do exactly that.

The documents are even more disturbing, say human rights activists, when one considers the fact that close to half of the people of Gaza are children under the age of eighteen. This means that Israel has deliberately forced the undernourishment of hundreds of thousands of children in direct violation of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

This release of documents also severely undermines Israel’s oft-made claim that the siege is “for security reasons”, as it documents a deliberate and systematic policy of collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza.

Gisha’s director said, in relation to the release of documents, “Israel banned glucose for biscuits and the fuel needed for regular supply of electricity – paralyzing normal life in Gaza and impairing the moral character of the State of Israel. I am sorry to say that major elements of this policy are still in place.”

In its statement accompanying the release of the documents, Gisha wrote:

The documents reveal that the state approved “a policy of deliberate reduction” for basic goods in the Gaza Strip (section h.4, page 5*). Thus, for example, Israel restricted the supply

of fuel needed for the power plant, disrupting the supply of electricity and water. The state set a “lower warning line” (section g.2, page 5) to give advance warning of expected shortages in a particular item, but at the same time approved ignoring that warning, if the good in question was subject to a policy of “deliberate reduction”. Moreover, the state set an “upper red line” above which even basic humanitarian items could be blocked, even if they were in demand (section g.1, page 5). The state claimed in a cover letter to Gisha that in practice, it had not authorized reduction of “basic goods” below the “lower warning line”, but it did not define what these “basic goods” were.

Commentator Richard Silverstein wrote: “In reviewing the list of permitted items for import, you come to realize that these are the only items allowed. In other words, if an item is not on the list, it’s prohibited. So, for example, here is the list of permitted spices: Black pepper, soup powder, hyssop, sesame. cinnamon, anise, babuna (chamomile), sage. Sorry, cumin, basil, bay leaf, allspice, caraway, cardamon, chiles, chives, cilantro, cloves, garlic, sesame, tamarind, thyme, oregano, cayenne. Not on the list. You’re not a spice Palestinians need according to some IDF dunderhead. And tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, toys, glassware, paint, and shoes? You can forget about them too. Luxuries all, or else security threats.”

Despite the disturbing nature of the documents, which show a calculated policy of deliberate undernourishment of an entire population, no major media organizations have reported the story.

The full text of the released documents, and the original Freedom of Information Act request filed by Gisha, can be found on Gisha’s website. See below for the Gisha Report

Due to Gisha’s Petition: Israel Reveals Documents related to the Gaza Closure Policy

Legal Center for Freedom of Movement

<http://www.gisha.org/index.php?intLanguage=2&intItemId=1904&intSiteSN=113>

Thursday, October 21, 2010: After one and a half years in which Israel at first denied their existence and then claimed that revealing them would harm “state security”, the State of Israel released three documents that outline its policy for permitting transfer of goods into the Gaza Strip prior to the May 31 flotilla incident. The documents were released due to a Freedom of Information Act petition submitted by Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement in the Tel Aviv District Court, in which Gisha demanded transparency regarding the Gaza closure policy. Israel still refuses to release the current documents governing the closure policy as amended after the flotilla incident.

“Policy of Deliberate Reduction” The documents reveal that the state approved “a policy of deliberate reduction” for basic goods in the Gaza Strip (section h.4, page 5*). Thus, for example, Israel restricted the supply of fuel needed for the power plant, disrupting the supply of electricity and water. The state set a “lower warning line” (section g.2, page 5) to give advance warning of expected shortages in a particular item, but at the same time approved ignoring that warning, if the good in question was subject to a policy of “deliberate reduction”. Moreover, the state set an “upper red line” above which even basic humanitarian items could be blocked, even if they were in demand (section g.1, page 5).

The state claimed in a cover letter to Gisha that in practice, it had not authorized reduction of “basic goods” below the “lower warning line”, but it did not define what these “basic goods” were (page 2).

“Luxuries” denied for Gaza Strip residents In violation of international law, which allows Israel to restrict the passage of goods only for concrete security reasons, the decision whether to permit or prohibit an item was also based on “the good’s public perception” and “whether it is viewed as a luxury” (section c.b, page 16). In other words, items characterized as “luxury” items would be banned – even if they posed no security threat, and even if they were needed. Thus, items such as chocolate and paper were not on the “permitted” list. In addition, officials were to consider “sensitivity to the needs of the international community”.

Ban on Reconstructing Gaza Although government officials have claimed that they will permit the rehabilitation of Gaza, the documents reveal that Israel treated rehabilitation and development of the Gaza Strip as a negative factor in determining whether to allow an item to enter; goods “of a rehabilitative character” required special permission (section g, page 16). Thus, international organizations and Western governments did not receive permits to transfer building materials into Gaza for schools and homes.

Secret List of Goods The procedures determine that the list of permitted goods “will not be released to those not specified!!” (emphasis in original) (section j, page 17), ignoring the fact that without transparency, merchants in Gaza could not know what they were permitted to purchase. The list itemized permitted goods only. Items not on the list – cumin, for example – would require a special procedure for approval, irrespective of any security consideration, at the end of which it would be decided whether to let it in or not.

Calculation of product inventory The documents contain a series of formulas created by the Defense Ministry to compute product inventory (pages 8-10). The calculations are presumed to allow COGAT to measure what is called the “length of breath” (section i, page 8). The formula states that if you divide the inventory in the Strip by the daily consumption needs of residents, you will get the number of days it will take for residents of Gaza to run out of that basic product, or in other words, until their “length of breath” will run out.

According to Gisha Director Sari Bashi: “Instead of considering security concerns, on the one hand, and the rights and needs of civilians living in Gaza, on the other, Israel banned glucose for biscuits and the fuel needed for regular supply of electricity – paralyzing normal life in Gaza and impairing the moral character of the State of Israel. I am sorry to say that major elements of this policy are still in place”.

*Pagination is counted in the order the documents were received by the Ministry of Defense.

For translated excerpts of the state’s response initially refusing to reveal the documents for “security reasons”, click [here](#).

To view the documents revealed by the state (translated from the original Hebrew into English), click [here](#).

To view the FOIA petition submitted by Gisha (in Hebrew), click [here](#).

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