

When Starvation Is a Weapon, the Harvest Is Shame

As Palestinians die of starvation under occupation, it brings grim echoes of another famine nearly two centuries ago in Ireland.

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In a work entitled "[Irish Famine 4](#)," Palestinian-American journalist and artist Sam Hussein combined grass and paint to commemorate a bitter time in Irish history when starving people died with their mouths stained green because, according to historian [Christine Kinealy](#), their last meal was grass.

Shamefully, British occupiers profited from [exporting](#) out of Ireland food crops so desperately needed.

Over a seven year period, beginning in 1845, [one million](#) Irish people died from starvation and related diseases. It was a conscious mass killing. One of the most horrific means of execution we can read about or imagine was employed. The result, an excruciating descent into despair, delirium and bodily immobility while one's attention, and character, is gradually reduced to extreme hunger and pain.

Now, in the occupied Gaza Strip, weapons dealers [benefit](#) from increasing military shipments to Israel. Palestinians, like the Irish, have resorted to eating mixtures of [grass and animal feed](#). The past five months of Israeli siege, bombing, and displacement have killed [more than](#) 31,000 people – mostly women and children. The onset of famine will [expand that number](#) exponentially, particularly among children.

Human Rights Watch [says](#) the Israeli government is starving civilians as a method of warfare in the Gaza Strip. Aiding and abetting this war crime, the U.S. government has approved [100 military sales](#) to Israel over the past five months. U.S. bullets, bombs and guns have helped prevent crucially needed aid from reaching millions of Palestinians. The bombs have [buried or destroyed](#) much of the food supplies which could have partially mitigated this

horror. Continued attacks have forced vast populations to flee, huddling in the occupation force's next target, [Rafah](#). The United States continues providing resources and support for this genocide.

On March 11, eight U.S. senators [signed](#) a letter to President Biden insisting that ongoing weapons shipments to Israel violate U.S. laws [forbidding](#) military aid to regimes obstructing U.S. humanitarian aid.

Additionally, 25 prominent humanitarian and human rights organizations [delivered](#) a letter to the President echoing the Senators' message.

Even as Israel [faces mounting pressure](#) from world leaders to stop attacking people in Gaza awaiting relief and stop impeding humanitarian relief shipments, Israel [turned back](#) another aid truck. The reason? The shipment included children's medical kits with scissors useful for applying bandages or cutting away clothing to reach shrapnel.

The Israelis forbid the scissors as a potential dual use weapon. Meanwhile the United States keeps sending Israel guns and bombs which present a far greater threat.

Each day brings new reports of Palestinians, [40 percent of them children](#), succumbing to disease and death because they are deprived of food, fuel, clean water, medicines, and shelter. Hellish conditions worsen as infectious contamination spreads from decomposing bodies and the chemical contaminants from the shell casings of thousands upon thousands of Israeli and western-supplied bombs dropped on Gaza.

In Northampton, Massachusetts, six activists are on day three of [occupying the office of Representative Jim McGovern](#). They are demanding he call on the president to immediately halt all weapons shipments to Israel, even if Israel allows humanitarian aid into Gaza. And they want Rep. McGovern to publicly call for the United States to stop vetoing U.N. cease-fire resolutions.



Leahy Fast for Palestine Committee. Occupiers in Rep. Jim McGovern's office

"These are desperate times," says one of the occupiers, Peter Kakos. "We must call for immediate action, and nothing less." He's particularly mindful of [17,000 Palestinian children](#) in Gaza who are estimated by UNICEF to be currently unaccompanied or separated from their parents.

[Save the Children's](#) March 12, 2024 report questions what five months of carnage, flight, starvation and disease, on top of nearly 17 years of apartheid blockade, will do to the children in Gaza who survive the brutality now afflicting them.

During a recent visit to Amman, Jordan, I witnessed the anguish and frustration felt by many Palestinians denied any means of relieving the suffering of loved ones.

They had this response to photo-ops taken of U.S. aid drops.

"Are you going to feed starving people so that they can then face genocide from the Israeli Army with a full stomach?" asked my host. "What's the logic in that? The only humanitarian thing to drop would be to drop all support for Israel's war on the people of Gaza."

In May of this year, an Irish NGO called AFRI (Action From Ireland) will hold an annual ["famine walk"](#) to commemorate when hundreds of desperate people trekked in cold and stormy weather to beg mercy from British officials designated to assess who would qualify for small portions of food or tickets to enter a workhouse.

“The weather was terrible,” notes [County Mayo’s official record](#), “with wind and hail beating down upon them. When they arrived in Delphi the Guardians refused them food or their tickets to the workhouse. Needless to say many of them perished on the return journey as fatigue and exhaustion from hunger took hold. Some of those that had energy to start the journey back to Louisburgh were swept into the lake by the heavy squalls.”

Each year, the organizers of AFRI’s famine walk focus on a place in the world afflicted by famine. “This year’s famine walk will focus on the unspeakable horrors being visited on the population of Gaza,” says AFRI’s coordinator, Joe Murray, “with ‘Irish’ President Biden forgetting his history and playing the part of a ‘Black and Tan’ in providing the means to obliterate an entire population.”

It’s heinous to ignore the plight of starving people as was done by the British relief officials in the spring of 1847. But how much crueler is it to bomb the people you are deliberately starving, forcing people to wonder if they will face a quick death or a long and tortuous one?

Yes, these are desperate times. People in the United States ought to occupy local offices of every elected official, denouncing all forms of violence, insisting on an immediate end to any support for Israel’s genocidal war against Gaza. It’s time to acknowledge the futility of war and call for a *collective* home to be shared by Muslims, Jews, Christians, Bahais, Druze and many others in a secular democratic state encompassing Israel and Palestine. Similarly, the elected representatives should occupy the Oval Office until the President takes action.

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Featured image: Sam Hussein. Irish Famine 4 (Source: [World BEYOND War](#))

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