



Date: 24/03/2024

## **Webinar- Combatting Genocide and Famine in Gaza: A Call to Humanitarian Action**

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) organised a webinar on Thursday, March 21, 2024, entitled [“Combatting Genocide and Famine in Gaza: A Call to Humanitarian Action.”](#) This webinar highlighted the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza. This is especially crucial for Rafah, as it has become the last refuge for displaced people.

The webinar, moderated by journalist Safia Amri, featured a distinguished panel of speakers: Chris Nineham, a founding member and vice-chair of the Stop the War Coalition, Dr. Noa Shaindinger- Assistant Professor of Middle East History at the Department of History and Political Science at Worcester State University, Dr Lex Takkenberg- Former Director of UNRWA Operations, Paul Murphy- Member of the Irish Parliament, Hani Al-Madhoun – Founder of Gaza Soup Kitchen, Sue Willman- Senior Lecturer King’s College London, Legal Clinic, Senior Consultant Deighton Pierce Glynn Solicitors, Michele Piras – Former MP at the Italian Parliament, Naomi Barasa- Kenyan Social Justice Activist, Prof Dan Kovalik- American Professor and Human Rights Lawyer, Edward Ahmed Mitchell- National Deputy Executive Director of CAIR, and Haroon Raza- Dutch lawyer and member of The 30 March Movement,.

In a compelling speech during the webinar, Chris Nineham, a founding member and vice-chair of the Stop the War Coalition, highlighted the profound and devastating impacts of what he described as an unprecedented assault on Gaza by Israel. His



critique extended beyond the immediate horrors of the war, delving into its significant ramifications for international institutions and the legitimacy of Western governments.

Nineham emphasised the catastrophic level of destruction and loss of life resulting from the Israeli military operations, stating that the severity of this assault was unparalleled in the region's history, even surpassing the tragedy of the Nakba. He noted that the current situation in Gaza, documented extensively in terms of human toll and infrastructure damage, represents a new nadir in the long history of conflict in the area.

Central to Nineham's address was the assertion that the global response—or lack thereof—to the crisis in Gaza has precipitated political and institutional crises worldwide. He argued that the international community, especially populations in Western countries, is witnessing this genocide in real-time, thanks largely to social media platforms that circumvent mainstream media's inadequate coverage.

He pointed out the unprecedented nature of the current Israeli government's actions, which, according to Nineham, defy not only the wishes of the US establishment but also challenge the expectations of cautious engagement held by other Western powers. This defiance, he suggested, is a response to a perceived weakening of US influence both in the region and globally.

Nineham highlighted the growing isolation of the United States and its closest allies, particularly the UK, on the global stage concerning their positions on Israel and Palestine. This isolation is not only geopolitical, as evidenced by United Nations votes, but also social, with significant portions of domestic populations, including the Jewish community in the US, expressing unease and opposition to the ongoing assault on Gaza.



Furthermore, he underscored the potential for leveraging global public opinion against the actions of Israel, pointing to rumoured moves by the US to draft a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire. Although Nineham regarded such efforts as likely insufficient, he saw them as indicative of the changing dynamics and the weakening position of traditional Western powers on the world stage.

In conclusion, Chris Nineham's speech painted a grim picture of the situation in Gaza, framed as a crisis exacerbated by the actions of Israel and the complicity or inability of Western powers to effectively respond. The consequences of this crisis, he argued, extend far beyond the immediate humanitarian disaster, challenging the very legitimacy of Western nations that have long dominated international politics.

In his contribution, Prof. Dan Kovalik, a noted American professor and human rights lawyer, addressed the severe crisis in Gaza, emphasising the situation's direness beyond the reported numbers. Kovalik suggested that the death toll among Palestinians could be as high as 200,000, attributing this discrepancy to the lack of functioning health facilities for accurate fatality reporting.

Kovalik highlighted the effectiveness of pressure applied in the United States, particularly on Democratic leaders and the Biden administration, to reconsider their stance on the war. He detailed the weakening of support for Israeli policies by figures such as Charles Schumer and stressed the importance of continued activism, including direct actions and protests, to hold politicians accountable for their part in the genocide.

The necessity for immediate actions, including a ceasefire, full funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and the allowance of aid trucks into Gaza, was underscored. Kovalik criticised the delays and obstructions faced by humanitarian efforts, including attacks on aid recipients and the proposed creation of a "humanitarian port" as insufficient and too slow to address the urgent needs of the Gaza population facing famine and disease outbreaks.



Prof. Kovalik concluded by affirming the critical role of protest and direct action in both the U.S. and at the United Nations to compel a change in policy and support for Gaza, expressing a personal commitment to leveraging his position in the U.S. to advocate for these changes.

In her speech, Dr. Noa Shaindinger, an Assistant Professor of Middle East History, shared her deep scepticism regarding the potential for political leaders and governments, including those of Egypt, the United States, and other U.S. allies, to contribute positively to the crisis in Gaza. Highlighting Egypt's historical pivot away from Palestinian support post-Nasser and its enforcement of the siege on Gaza, Shaindinger expressed her disillusionment, particularly with the Sisi government, despite acknowledging the supportive stance of the Egyptian populace.

Her distrust extends to the U.S., referencing a lack of faith in the Biden administration due to historical precedents of unfulfilled promises and inaction, notably drawing on the Obama administration's response to Assad's chemical attacks as an example of leadership failures, with Biden as part of that administration.

While expressing scepticism about immediate and effective solutions from established political leaders and international bodies like the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Shaindinger sees a glimmer of hope in actions by countries such as Canada, which has halted arms supplies to Israel, and potential legal actions against individuals committing war crimes, referencing a specific case in the French parliament.

Dr. Lex Takkenberg, the former Director of UNRWA Operations, offered a grave assessment of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, characterising it as an integral part of Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip. He pointed out the deliberate use of hunger and starvation as warfare tactics, underscoring this strategy as a clear violation of the Genocide Convention and the rulings of the International Court of Justice.



Takkenberg highlighted the global legal repercussions for Israel and its supporters, referencing upcoming hearings in The Hague concerning the complicity of state parties to the Genocide Convention in the ongoing genocide. He noted emerging scepticism among Western leaders regarding their continued support for Israel, suggesting that the harrowing images from Gaza are causing a reassessment of their positions and roles in the biggest genocide of the 21st century.

His speech extended to the broader conflict between Western elite support for Israel and global civil society's opposition, marked by a "tsunami" of demonstrations and legal actions across the world. Takkenberg emphasised the nervousness this has instigated among Israeli authorities, as evidenced by the formation of a substantial legal defence team in anticipation of numerous war crimes challenges.

In conclusion, Takkenberg reflected on the pivotal moment and potential shifts in international stance toward the crisis, particularly highlighting U.S. President Biden's involvement in ceasefire negotiations as indicative of these changes. His commentary painted a picture of a critical juncture in addressing the humanitarian and legal challenges stemming from the situation in Gaza, underscoring the urgency of the crisis despite the delayed global response.

Sue Willman, a Senior Lecturer at King's College London and Senior Consultant at Deighton Pierce Glynn Solicitors, discussed the challenges of utilising legal mechanisms to address the actions and crimes of Israel, particularly in the context of the ongoing crisis in Gaza. She expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of court orders in compelling Israel to alter its behaviour, given its history of disregarding the International Court of Justice (ICJ) judgments.

Willman highlighted the potential of political pressure and media coverage as more viable means of influencing the situation. She delved into legal remedies available,



particularly in the UK, to hold those complicit in the Israeli crimes accountable. She detailed the use of global human rights sanctions regimes, such as Magnitsky sanctions, as a method to impose financial and travel restrictions on individuals responsible for human rights violations. Willman noted attempts by the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) to request sanctions against Israeli officials, underscoring the challenges of garnering media attention for such efforts.

Further, she discussed the possibility of pursuing prosecutions for war crimes in the UK, referencing efforts by the International Centre for Justice for Palestine to initiate investigations into individuals participating in the Israeli Defense Forces and British ministers for their roles in the war crimes.

Willman also described procedural approaches to increase transparency and accountability, such as parliamentary inquiries into the UK's military and non-military assistance to Israel. She mentioned legal efforts to challenge the UK Foreign Office over its human rights assessments related to security assistance provided to Israel.

Lastly, Willman touched on legal actions against arms exports to Israel, lamenting the difficulty of making judicial progress but emphasising the importance of continuing to explore creative legal avenues to bring the situation in Gaza to the public's attention. She concluded by affirming the value of collaborative efforts and the exchange of ideas to devise strategies aimed at alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Edward Ahmed Mitchell, National Deputy Executive Director of CAIR, outlined the American Muslim community's response to the crisis in Palestine, emphasising the limitations of humanitarian aid under current conditions. Mitchell noted that despite significant donations from the American Muslim community and others, the real issue lies in the delivery of aid, obstructed by blocked land routes and insufficient airdrops, which fail to alleviate the famines in Palestine.



The community's efforts have thus pivoted towards exerting pressure on the U.S. government, particularly President Biden and Congress, to cease supporting the genocide in Palestine. He reported a notable shift in the administration's attitude, attributing this change to the cumulative impact of lobbying, protests disrupting public events, and strategic voting behaviors during presidential primaries. These actions, he claimed, have placed considerable pressure on the president to alter his stance.

Mitchell criticized the Israeli government's overt conduct and highlighted the role of social media in revealing the dire consequences of the famine in Palestine, contrasting this with the previously biased coverage of major news channels. Despite some success in changing rhetoric, Mitchell expressed frustration over the lack of substantive policy change, emphasising the potential of the U.S. government to halt military and financial support to Israel as a means to allow aid into Gaza and end the bombing.

Speculating on future developments, Mitchell mentioned rumours of possible U.S. restrictions on aid to Israel should further atrocities occur, viewing this as an indication of potential policy shifts. He concluded by reaffirming the American Muslim community's commitment to pressuring the U.S. government to end its support for the actions in Palestine, underscoring the belief that without a change in U.S. policy, humanitarian aid efforts will remain ineffective.

In her speech, The Kenyan activist Naomi Barasa emphasised the changing tides in public and political pressure against the crimes of Israel, categorically stating, "It's not a conflict. It's the oppressed and the oppressors, the colonised and coloniser." This distinction underscores her rejection of the term "conflict" to describe the situation, insisting instead on recognition of it as colonisation, oppression, and aggression towards Palestinians.



Barasa highlighted the significant impact of worldwide protests and the pressure these actions have placed on leaders like President Biden, showcasing the efficacy of global solidarity. She called for continued political pressure, not just in international arenas like the UN Security Council but also through national foreign policies that prioritize human rights and humanity.

Further, she critiqued policies that purport to support human rights, such as the feminist foreign policies of Scandinavian countries, arguing that any policy causing harm cannot be genuinely feminist. Barasa praised efforts to expose and challenge such hypocrisies, including actions taken at international forums like the CSW against Israeli presentations.

Barasa also advocated for the intensification of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign as a means to apply economic and political pressure on Israel. She believes that a multifaceted approach, addressing economic, political, and ideological fronts, is essential for mounting sufficient pressure against Israel's actions.

Lastly, she pointed out the critical role of U.S. support in sustaining Israel's military efforts, stating, "If America was not supporting Israel, Israel would not have lasted sustained this war for like 3-4 weeks." This assertion calls for holding complicit governments accountable and underscores the importance of international support in the continuation of the crisis.

Lawyer Haroon Raza detailed the proactive initiatives of the March 30 Movement, particularly their focus on investigating individuals, notably Israeli Army soldiers with dual nationalities (such as those from the Netherlands, Belgium, and France), who have been actively participating in operations in Gaza. These investigations, spurred by the overt showcasing of activities by these soldiers on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, aim to hold them accountable under the Genocide Convention, the Rome Statute, and the local laws of the respective countries.





Raza mentioned that proceedings have already begun in the Netherlands, with complaints lodged with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Dutch Public Prosecutor's office. Similar actions are planned for Belgium and France. The goal is to initiate investigations that could lead to police actions and, eventually, convictions, particularly in Belgium where the laws are more conducive to such outcomes.

The March 30 Movement is not only legal in nature but also serves an educational purpose, raising awareness about the situation in Gaza and its historical context. Despite facing institutional pushback, particularly in the Netherlands, the abundance of evidence shared by the Israeli Army soldiers on social media has made the task of gathering proof more straightforward than in previous wars.

Raza expressed cautious optimism about overcoming the prosecutorial bias in European countries, which historically have been reluctant to investigate IDF soldiers for war crimes. The movement has plans to escalate their complaints to higher courts to compel further investigations and prosecutions.

He also highlighted a significant development in Dutch courts related to the F35 fighter jet parts case, where the High Court acknowledged the possibility of war crimes and human rights violations by Israel. This acknowledgement is seen as a hopeful sign of changing perspectives within the judiciary regarding Israel's actions.

Hani Al-Madhoun, the founder of the Gaza Soup Kitchen, shared his personal and deeply moving journey of responding to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, driven by a profound sense of frustration and the urgent need to help his family and the broader community in north Gaza. Despite living in the United States, Al-Madhoun's



connection to Gaza remains strong, with his family residing in the area, facing severe hardships due to the ongoing war.

The situation in Gaza, as described by Al-Madhoun, is dire, with people resorting to grinding food meant for pigeons and rabbits due to the scarcity of human-consumable food. In response to the blockade that severely restricted the entry of aid and the basic necessities of life, Al-Madhoun and his family took the initiative to provide for their community through the establishment of a soup kitchen.

Initially, the effort was simple—using overgrown zucchinis to cook meals for friends and neighbours. However, the need quickly grew, and with it, the scope of the soup kitchen. Al-Madhoun's brother began cooking large quantities of food, eventually serving up to 500 families during Ramadan. Despite the support from the community and the tangible difference they were making, the challenges were immense, from sourcing ingredients to ensuring the safety of volunteers amid the dangers of the war.

Al-Madhoun highlighted the acute lack of basic food staples like rice and flour in Gaza, underscoring the severity of the crisis. The soup kitchen, while a beacon of hope and solidarity, faces the overwhelming scale of need in Gaza, where thousands of families remain without access to sufficient food. The efforts of the soup kitchen, although limited in their reach, represent a critical lifeline for those it can serve.

The tragedy of the situation is further sised by the dangers faced by those attempting to provide aid, including the risk of drone attacks and the desperation that can lead to violence even among those trying to help. Al-Madhoun's narrative is a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of grassroots initiatives in addressing the humanitarian fallout of war.



Paul Murphy, a member of the Irish Parliament with People Before Profit, conveyed a powerful message regarding the urgent need for a robust Palestine Solidarity movement globally. He accused Israel of committing war crimes and using famine as a weapon of war against the Palestinian people.

Murphy starkly criticised the Israeli political elite's decision to starve the people of Gaza, bringing hundreds of thousands to the brink of starvation while obstructing necessary aid. He highlighted the international community's, particularly the Western world's, complicity in these acts through their political, military, and economic support of Israel, facilitated notably by the US administration.

Addressing the response of global leaders and the public to the crisis, Murphy pointed out the disparity between the rhetoric of Western governments and their actions. While there have been movements and protests across the Western world, including significant disapproval shown in the US democratic primaries and large-scale demonstrations in Ireland and Europe, these have yet to result in substantial policy changes.

Murphy underscored the inadequacy of the Irish government's response, critiquing its refusal to use the term "genocide," its failure to impose sanctions on Israel, and its efforts to block legislation aimed at divesting from Israel or the occupied territories. He also noted the increase in military cargo through Ireland, presumed to support Israel's actions against the Palestinians, without sufficient inspection or opposition from the Irish government.

His speech concluded with a call to action, urging the continuation and intensification of protests and political pressure to force Western governments to take meaningful steps towards ending support for Israel's actions in Gaza. Murphy's emphasis on the need for a collective effort to halt the genocide and famine reflects a profound commitment to solidarity with the Palestinian people and a demand for immediate, impactful international intervention.



Michele Piras, a former MP at the Italian Parliament, offered a compelling critique of the international community's response to the ongoing crisis in Gaza during his speech during the webinar. Piras highlighted the catastrophic humanitarian situation that has unfolded since October 7th, emphasising the staggering death toll of over 30,000 civilians, many of whom are children, and the plight of more than 1.5 million displaced people facing hunger, illness, and desperation at the Rafah crossing.

Drawing attention to the glaring double standards in international responses, Piras contrasted the significant financial support directed towards Ukraine in its conflict with Russia to the tepid reaction to the ongoing genocide in Gaza. He questioned the rationale behind recognising one situation as an invasion while seemingly ignoring or minimising the gravity of another, critiquing the "unbearable double standard" applied to Palestinian rights and the struggle for independence.

Piras reported the shock and dismay of a delegation of Italian politicians and humanitarian workers who visited Gaza, reaffirming their democratic stance and rejecting any accusations of antisemitism, yet were profoundly affected by the evidence of the "ethnic cleansing" and the far-right Israeli government's actions.

He argued that calls for ceasefires are insufficient as they fail to acknowledge the full scope of the massacre of Palestinian people and the prolonged suffering under occupation. Piras asserted that the events in Gaza lay bare the intentions of the Israeli far-right and called for a paradigm shift in how the international community addresses the crisis.



Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK  
المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا

The former MP urged for decisive action to halt the massacre in Gaza. He underscored the need for the international community to prioritise the safety of all individuals involved, adhere to international law, and uphold human rights.

**Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK**