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Webinar Report- Gaza's Humanitarian Breakdown: Death, Displacement, and International Failure

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) held a [webinar to shed light on the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip](#), amid ongoing Israeli attacks, mass displacement, and the systematic destruction of civilian life. The webinar focused on the collapse of healthcare, the denial of basic means of survival, and the wider political and legal context driving the humanitarian disaster, while examining the failure of the international community to uphold its responsibilities toward the civilian population in Gaza.

The webinar featured contributions from a range of political figures, academics, medical professionals, and human rights advocates, including Malik Ben Achour, Former Member of the Belgian Parliament; Professor Stephen Zunes, Professor of International Security and Foreign Policy at the University of San Francisco; Chris Gunness, former Chief Spokesperson for UNRWA; Dr Zouhair Lahna, a French obstetrician and gynecologist who worked in Gaza; Declan Kearney, National Chairman of Sinn Féin and Member of the Irish Parliament; Dr Nour Sharaf, a US emergency medicine physician currently working in Gaza; and Jeff Halper, Head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD).

The webinar started with first-hand testimony from Gaza, delivered by Dr Nour Sharaf, a US emergency medicine physician currently working at Al-Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza. She described the stark differences between her current presence in Gaza and her previous visit six months earlier, when emergency departments were overwhelmed by mass casualties resulting from intensive bombardment. At that time, she said, hundreds of trauma patients were arriving simultaneously. She explained, hospitals



are still receiving hundreds of patients every day, but many of the cases are no longer the direct result of airstrikes.

Dr Sharaf said the current wave of patients is largely driven by untreated chronic illnesses and rapidly spreading infectious diseases, aggravated by overcrowding, the collapse of sanitation systems, and the lack of basic resources. She stressed that the health system is facing catastrophic strain, noting that Al-Shifa Hospital alone sees an average of around 850 patients per day, compared to 100 to 120 patients per day in a busy emergency department in the United States. She explained that patients in Gaza did not begin suffering only with the current war, but as a result of years of the Israeli blockade, which deprived them of access to medical care, adding that hospitals are now completely unable to meet their treatment needs.

She highlighted the severe shortage of medical resources, stating that doctors lack antibiotics for many illnesses, basic diagnostic equipment, and even essential laboratory tools. In the entire city of Gaza, she said, there are only three CT scanners—two of which are on the brink of collapse—and no MRI machines at all. Dr Sharaf warned that the destruction of hospitals has had a devastating impact on mortality and life expectancy, noting that life expectancy in Gaza has dropped from the upper 60s before October 2023 to the 30s today.

Dr Sharaf concluded her intervention by reminding the audience of the human cost borne by medical workers in Gaza, drawing attention to doctors who continue to work under siege, bombardment, and deprivation, as well as to Palestinian doctors held as prisoners, including Dr Hussam Abu Safiya. She called for practical international solidarity with Gaza's medical staff and for urgent action to protect healthcare workers and patients amid the ongoing collapse of the health system.

Belgian Politician Malik Ben Achour said that the situation in Gaza is unacceptable and revolting, stressing that winter conditions have made the living situation for the Palestinian population clearly inhuman. He warned that Palestinian suffering, and consequently Israeli crimes, have been pushed out of media coverage and public attention, despite the fact that Israel's grip on Gaza remains total. He added that



expectations of change under the Trump administration are misplaced and that there is no indication of a shift in the reality on the ground.

He said that the so-called ceasefire must be respected and accompanied by an immediate, massive, and sustained increase in humanitarian aid across the Gaza Strip. Citing the World Health Organization, he stated that more than 18,000 people are waiting to be medically evacuated from Gaza, 22 percent of whom are children. He also referred to Ministry of Health records showing that more than 1,000 patients died while awaiting medical evacuation between July and November, describing this as further evidence of the catastrophic consequences of restricted access.

Ben Achour warned that more than half of Gaza remains uninhabitable and inaccessible to civilians and humanitarian aid, noting that the territory is effectively divided by a line implemented by Israeli forces under the ceasefire agreement. He explained that this “yellow line” is deliberately vague and has been gradually moving westward, shrinking the space available to residents, blocking access to healthcare, and triggering forced displacement when homes and shelters suddenly fall on the other side of the line.

He also condemned what he described as Israeli efforts to dismantle the network of NGOs supporting Palestinians, stating that NGOs are under direct attack and their staff are being targeted. He said Israel’s refusal to register many humanitarian organizations is a cynical attempt to block aid delivery in Gaza and the West Bank, in violation of international humanitarian law. He stressed that humanitarian access is not optional, conditional, or political, but a legal obligation, and warned that continued restrictions on food imports have created famine in Gaza and continue to do so, while insecurity, the ban on UNRWA, and the collapse of infrastructure have severely obstructed humanitarian assistance to the population.

Chris Gunness, former UNRWA spokesperson, started his intervention by addressing what he described as President Trump’s “Board of Peace,” arguing that it represents a central factor in the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the latest expression of the international community’s failure to confront Israeli crimes. He said the Board of Peace functions as a smokescreen for genocide against Palestinians, as



well as for ethnic cleansing, occupation, colonial erasure, apartheid, and crimes against humanity, including the deliberate use of starvation as a weapon of war. He stressed that these crimes are officially sanctioned by the Israeli government and supported by the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and others, adding that the European Union is complicit through its failure to impose meaningful sanctions.

Gunness described the Board of Peace as “genocide management masquerading as peacemaking,” stating that it is deliberately designed to deny Palestinians their right to self-determination and to their own state, and warning that it can only lead to further conflict. He said that on the ground, Israeli forces are transforming the so-called yellow line into a physical border, constructing earth mounds and military infrastructure to separate Palestinians confined to the unlivable western half of Gaza from Israeli forces occupying the east. He added that Israel is systematically destroying remaining Palestinian buildings, particularly in Rafah, which he said is being prepared as an internment camp under full military occupation with high-tech surveillance, including facial recognition systems.

He stated that these actions constitute ethnic cleansing under belligerent military occupation, in flagrant violation of international law and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which called for an end to Israel’s illegal occupation and urged UN member states to impose sanctions. Instead, he said, the occupation is expanding and deepening while states do nothing, intimidated by Trump. Gunness referred to what he described as the “Amalek genocide” call attributed to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he described as a wanted war criminal and a member of Trump’s Peace Board, saying the genocidal killing of defenseless Palestinians continues unrestrained, with nearly 500 people killed since the so-called ceasefire. He added ***“Israel does not want the world to know the inconvenient truths about the dark underbelly of Zionism.”***

Citing official figures, Gunness said Israel has wiped out every single member of 2,700 families, leaving more than 6,000 families with only one surviving member. He described this as demographic engineering in the service of genocide. He added that



at least 10 babies under the age of one have died from hypothermia and extreme cold this winter, bringing the total to more than 25 since October 2023, all of whom died while living in tents. He noted that nearly all Gaza residents are displaced, with around 1.5 million people living in tents or temporary shelters, many of which were destroyed by storms, while Israel continues to block caravans, temporary housing, and building materials from entering Gaza.

Gunness said the situation has been compounded by the tight restriction of the Rafah crossing, Gaza's main transshipment point, which he said has severely limited the flow of medical aid and equipment and worsened the collapse of Gaza's healthcare system. He warned that more than 22,000 patients, including over 5,200 children, are unable to travel for treatment, and linked the assault on Gaza to what he described as a parallel genocide in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. He cited UNRWA's Commissioner-General in saying the West Bank is facing its worst humanitarian crisis since 1967, pointing to settler violence backed by the Israeli army and plans for settlement infrastructure intended to bury the idea of a Palestinian state.

Responding to a question from the moderator about changes in international engagement with UNRWA, Gunness said donor states were consistently one step behind Israel, even after Knesset legislation effectively designated UNRWA a terrorist organization. He said the international community, particularly European donors, failed to act preventively through sanctions or political pressure, reacting only after UNRWA's headquarters in Jerusalem was demolished and burned. He added that political pressure intensified under the Trump administration, which openly supported Israel's onslaught against UNRWA, including legislation banning US funding. Gunness concluded that the attack on UNRWA is rooted in the belief that eliminating the agency would erase Palestinian refugees and their right of return, stressing that refugees are human beings with inalienable rights that cannot be legislated or destroyed, regardless of campaigns of vilification or defunding.

Gunness concluded by warning that the so-called Board of Peace does not address the root causes of the conflict, but instead represents a betrayal of Palestinians' individual and collective rights, foremost among them the right to self-determination.



He said it also betrays the long-established principle of land for peace and undermines the foundations of the international order itself. He stressed that attempts to erase Palestinian rights through political schemes, defunding UNRWA, or silencing witnesses will not succeed, adding that the price of this betrayal will not be paid by Palestinians alone, but by the international system as a whole.

Professor Stephen Zunes said that despite not having first-hand experience from Gaza, the humanitarian situation there is clearly horrific, stressing that winter conditions have intensified the suffering of the population. He explained that even without freezing temperatures or snow, cold rain and single-digit temperatures pose a serious risk of hypothermia, particularly as Israel refuses—despite the ceasefire agreement and international humanitarian law—to allow the entry of mobile housing units and temporary shelters that could save lives. He added that periodic bombardment, sniper fire, and the continued shifting of the so-called yellow line persist in violation of the ceasefire.

Zunes said that the denial of adequate food, shelter, and humanitarian access, combined with the banning of UNRWA and dozens of other humanitarian organizations, is not merely an information blackout but constitutes a form of genocide in itself. He recalled that in several modern genocides, including Bangladesh in 1971 and East Timor, the majority of deaths resulted from starvation and preventable diseases rather than direct violence, stressing that genocide is not limited to killings by bombs or bullets. He emphasized that the restriction of media access remains central to this process, noting that global responses to humanitarian crises often depend on public exposure, a dynamic he referred to as the “CNN effect.”

He criticized American political discourse that seeks to discredit evidence of Israeli atrocities, referring to claims that younger Americans are misled by fabricated videos on social media. Zunes said such statements are disingenuous, pointing out that Israel continues to bar international journalists from entering Gaza. He added that American politicians from both major parties have played an active role in covering up the genocide, citing past efforts to cast doubt on casualty figures, which were later acknowledged by the Israeli government itself as accurate.



Zunes also condemned the decision to grant Trump's so-called Board of Peace authority to monitor the ceasefire, describing it as a travesty and a "bait and switch." He said the board functions as a personal political instrument of the US president, lacking credibility or impartiality, and argued that entrusting the United States with sole mediation has consistently failed. He explained that the US cannot act as a neutral arbiter while simultaneously serving as Israel's primary military, financial, and diplomatic backer, calling this a fundamental contradiction that has obstructed any genuine peace process.

Turning to the broader international context, Zunes warned against false comparisons used to deflect attention from Gaza, including claims that repression in Iran exceeds Israeli violence. He rejected assertions that supporters of Palestinian rights are silent on other human rights abuses, stressing that criticism of Iran has been widespread and ongoing. He said the core issue is not ideology, Zionism, or state formulas, but Israel's systematic violations of international humanitarian law, including the Genocide Convention and the imposition of apartheid, alongside the responsibility of Western governments—particularly the United States—to stop enabling these crimes.

Zunes further highlighted what he described as growing global repression against voices speaking out on Gaza, noting that this has been especially pronounced in the United States, including on university campuses. He said the suppression increasingly targets mainstream liberals who simply describe Israeli actions as war crimes, apartheid, and genocide, rather than only activists or explicitly anti-Zionist groups. He linked this crackdown to broader efforts to silence dissent against US-backed regimes, warning that such repression extends beyond Palestine and threatens fundamental freedoms.

He concluded by warning that allowing Israel to act with impunity sets a dangerous global precedent, stressing that if genocide and grave violations of international law go unpunished, other regimes will feel empowered to do the same. He said the stakes extend far beyond Gaza, as the credibility of international humanitarian law itself is now on trial.



Dr Zouhair Lahna said that what is happening in Gaza represents the step-by-step destruction of human life, beginning with bombardment and followed by the systematic destruction of homes, livelihoods, and the future itself. Drawing on his experience as an obstetrician and gynecologist who worked across Gaza—from Kamal Adwan and Al-Shifa to Nasser and Rafah—he said the assault is directly targeting the continuity of life and pushing people out of their land. He stressed that around 70 percent of Gaza's population are refugees who, before the war, relied on structured systems of healthcare and social support that have now been completely dismantled, leaving people outside any system of protection or assistance amid soaring prices and widespread poverty.

He focused in particular on the devastating impact on women and newborns, stating that pregnant women are suffering from widespread anemia, rising miscarriage rates, and severe shortages of essential medicines and nutrition. He cited figures showing a sharp decline in annual deliveries, alongside alarming numbers of premature births, congenital malformations, and infant deaths. He said hundreds of newborns have died, many due to extreme cold, as women are forced to leave hospitals hours after giving birth and return to tents without heating or adequate clothing. He added that babies are dying from hypothermia every few days, and that women are also dying from preventable complications such as infections and diabetes due to the lack of antibiotics and medical care.

He concluded by saying that Gaza represents a collapse of humanity itself, questioning where human rights are—for women, children, civilians, and even animals—after witnessing scenes he said he had never encountered in other conflict zones including Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and parts of Africa. He warned that despite the availability of evidence, images, and statistics, the world has remained passive, even after the ceasefire, as tents and shelter remain blocked and winter conditions continue to kill civilians. He said the failure to uphold international law under occupation risks destroying any remaining faith in human rights and peace, adding that the world after Gaza may be fundamentally different from the one before it.



Irish Politician Declan Kearney said that the central responsibility of the international community in the current post-ceasefire context is the restoration of Palestinian political agency and voice, warning that the so-called Board of Peace, operating in direct collusion between the United States and the Israeli regime, has deliberately sidelined Palestinians and their representatives from shaping the future of Gaza. He stressed that excluding Palestinians from any substantive political role is a fundamental failure that undermines any claim of peacebuilding or stabilization.

He said that a second urgent priority is the reassertion of UNRWA's central role in humanitarian assistance and the restoration of multilateralism, which he described as having been displaced by the Board of Peace. While acknowledging the failures of the UN Security Council due to the use of vetoes, Kearney emphasized that the United Nations remains the custodian of international law and must be directly involved if international law is to retain any meaning. He warned that marginalizing UNRWA and multilateral institutions has created an untenable situation that directly harms civilians in Gaza.

Kearney also addressed the Rafah crossing, cautioning that promises of its imminent opening may prove false. He described Rafah as a humanitarian lifeline and said the international community must mobilize political, diplomatic, and legal pressure to ensure it is opened for free movement of people and unhindered humanitarian aid. He further criticized the European Union, accusing it of duplicity and hypocrisy in its selective application of international law, and argued that the EU's response to Gaza must match the political, legal, and sanctions-based approach it has adopted in response to the war in Ukraine.

He warned that since the declaration of the ceasefire and the launch of the Board of Peace, international media attention and global solidarity have declined, despite the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Kearney said Palestinians continue to be denied the basic means of life, while international focus has been diverted by other geopolitical developments and by the actions of the US administration globally. He stressed the need to re-energize global solidarity so that the people of Gaza are not abandoned and their suffering remains visible.



He concluded by calling for a global reset of solidarity and action, urging democratic and progressive forces in the West, the Arab and Islamic world, and the Global South and East to work collaboratively to intensify international engagement. He stressed that the protection of civilians, the delivery of aid, and the guarantee of Palestinian agency and political voice are collective responsibilities that must be upheld by global democracy across all regions.

Jeff Halper said that while maintaining focus on the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is essential, it is not sufficient to resolve the crisis, stressing that suffering, death, and destruction must be understood within a broader political context. He argued that appeals to international law, despite their moral and legal value, have repeatedly failed because they lack enforcement mechanisms. Halper said that humanitarian advocacy must therefore be linked to political action, as the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is not an accidental byproduct of war but the result of a deliberate political logic.

He argued that Israel is a settler-colonial project whose objective is the Judaization of Palestine, and that a central precondition for normalizing this project regionally and internationally is the pacification of all Palestinian resistance. Halper said the war on Gaza constitutes a pacification campaign aimed at breaking resistance entirely, explaining that when Israeli leaders speak of “total victory,” they mean the elimination of all forms of resistance. He described the scale and cruelty of the assault on Gaza as intentional, sending Palestinians a message of submission or death in order to enable normalization processes such as the Abraham Accords.

Halper said Gaza has been deliberately rendered uninhabitable, citing the destruction of infrastructure, pollution of groundwater and the sea, contamination from weapons, and the devastation of agriculture and soil. He argued that Israel does not seek Gaza but rather the West Bank, and therefore aims to thin Gaza’s population through killing and forced transfer. He said proposals to resettle Palestinians in other countries remain active and are supported by negotiations involving the United States, warning that forced displacement is a core component of what he described as a genocidal strategy.



He added that Israel seeks to retain military control over Gaza without governing it, preferring to hand administrative responsibility to external actors while ensuring Gaza remains politically disconnected from the West Bank and outside any viable Palestinian political framework. Halper said this explains Israel's opposition to any Palestinian Authority role in Gaza and its hostility toward alternative governance arrangements. He stressed that the humanitarian crisis cannot be addressed in isolation from the wider Palestinian question, warning that the West Bank is increasingly being "Gazafied."

He concluded by stressing that resolving Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe requires confronting its political causes, arguing that humanitarian action must be paired with a clear political strategy aimed at ending settler colonialism, forced displacement, and the fragmentation of Palestinian territory, rather than treating Gaza as a standalone emergency detached from the broader reality of occupation.

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