

# The Gaza Blockade: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Humanitarian Crisis

---

## Author:

*Ayila Nisar, BS Student*

*Institute of International Peace Leaders*

## Abstract:

This article explains everything about the 21<sup>st</sup> century humanitarian crisis due to sanctions imposed by Israel on Gaza in 2007 to slowly shutting down the Gaza Strip. Based on recent Analysis, Data Researches and United Nations, WHO and Amnesty International Reports, the study shows how restrictions have contributed to widespread poverty, limited access to healthcare, and a deepening crisis in human rights. While officially justified as a security measure by Israel, the blockade's broad restrictions on goods, movement, and infrastructure have devastated Gaza's economy, eroded access to healthcare, and isolated nearly 2.3 million people from the outside world. This article further talks more about the current situation of crisis and how many people - *especially* children are being starved to death each day due to malnutrition. As the Famine increases the situation gets worse than before, more after the ceasefire violation by Israel in 2025. The research continues to argue that the blockade, while framed in national security terms, constitutes a form of collective punishment in breach of international humanitarian law. The study concludes by offering targeted recommendations including policy reform, the creation of humanitarian corridors, and increased international accountability.

## Introduction:

The Gaza Strip, a narrow piece of land along the Mediterranean Sea, home to over two million Palestinians. The blockade of the Gaza Strip began in **June 2007**, following the takeover of Gaza by Hamas after intense clashes with Fatah. In response, **Israel and Egypt** imposed a comprehensive **land, air, and sea blockade**, citing security concerns and the prevention of arms smuggling. This marked the

start of a prolonged siege that would severely restrict the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza.

Over the **past eighteen years**, life in Gaza has become more and more difficult. Alongside several wars and violent events, the blockade made it nearly impossible for people to get what they needed to survive. It wasn't just weapons that were blocked—important items like medicine, fuel, and building materials were also stopped from coming in, making it hard for hospitals, homes, and schools to function.

By **2022**, conditions were already very bad. But in **Oct 2023**, things got even worse after a large attack led to an even tighter blockade. Israel completely cut off food, water, fuel, and electricity, leaving people with nothing. It became one of the most severe humanitarian situations in recent history.

In **2024 and 2025**, the crisis reached a breaking point. Hunger, illness, and homelessness spread quickly. Aid was harder to get, and people had to travel long distances, often while bombs were falling, just to find basic things like food and medicine. By **mid-2025**, nearly everyone in Gaza depended on outside help just to survive. The economy had collapsed, hospitals were barely functioning, and daily life became a constant struggle.

This paper seeks to **critically examine the humanitarian impact** of the Gaza blockade from **2007 to 2025**, focusing on how restrictions imposed over nearly two decades have devastated healthcare, infrastructure, the economy, education, and social well-being in Gaza. It aims to provide a structured timeline of events while analyzing these impacts within the framework of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The research also examines legal arguments surrounding the blockade and evaluates international responses. Key questions include: What are the humanitarian impacts of the Gaza blockade? How the blockade constitutes a violation of international law? What roles have international actors played in either alleviating or exacerbating the crisis?

By answering these questions, this paper aims to help people better understand the real impact of the Gaza blockade on everyday life. It focuses not just on problems like lack of healthcare, education, and basic services, but also on the mental and social effects on the people living there. The goal is to provide clear information

that can guide future plans and actions to improve the situation and help other researchers study this important issue.

## **Literature Review:**

### **Historical Context of the Gaza Blockade**

The blockade of the Gaza Strip began in **June 2007**, shortly after Hamas took full control of the territory. In response, **Israel, with cooperation from Egypt**, implemented a comprehensive land, sea, and air blockade, citing the need to prevent arms smuggling and protect Israeli civilians from rocket attacks. However, the scope of the restrictions extended well beyond military goods and included essential civilian items such as food, fuel, and construction materials (UN OCHA, 2007).

From the outset, scholars and humanitarian organizations criticized the blockade's impact on civilians. According to **Roy (2012)**, the policy reflected a broader strategy of "de-development," systematically weakening Gaza's economy and infrastructure over decades.

### **Humanitarian Impact and Escalation (2008–2015)**

The blockade intensified during **Operation Cast Lead (2008–2009)**, a three-week Israeli military operation that resulted in over 1,000 Palestinian deaths and major infrastructure damage. **B'Tselem (2009)** noted that reconstruction was severely hindered due to restrictions on construction materials labeled as "dual-use" items. In **2010**, the international community was shocked when Israeli forces killed nine activists aboard the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, which aimed to break the blockade. Following international backlash, Israel slightly eased commercial restrictions, but critical goods like cement, fuel, and machinery remained highly restricted (UNHRC, 2010).

Further escalations—including **Operation Pillar of Defense (2012)** and **Operation Protective Edge (2014)**—deepened the humanitarian crisis. The 2014 war resulted in over **2,200 Palestinian deaths**, tens of thousands of displaced families, and the destruction of homes, schools, and clinics (Amnesty International, 2015). Although donor conferences pledged billions for reconstruction, Israeli controls on material imports continued to delay progress (WHO, 2016).

### **Collapse of Infrastructure and Healthcare (2015–2021)**

Between **2015 and 2017**, living conditions in Gaza deteriorated sharply. Power outages extended up to 20 hours per day, limiting hospital operations, water pumping, and sanitation. The **World Health Organization (WHO, 2016)** reported that hospitals faced severe shortages in fuel, essential medicines, and clean water.

By **2018**, protests erupted during the **Great March of Return**, where demonstrators demanded the right to return to ancestral lands and an end to the blockade. Over **200 Palestinians were killed** and thousands wounded by Israeli forces using live ammunition (UNHRC, 2019). That same year, **97% of Gaza's water** was deemed unfit for human use due to pollution and saltwater intrusion (UN OCHA, 2018).

The **COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021)** exposed the fragile state of Gaza's healthcare system. The blockade severely limited the entry of vaccines, ventilators, and personal protective equipment. Hospitals lacked oxygen supplies, and basic hygiene infrastructure could not support large-scale infection control (Amnesty International, 2022).

## **Recent Developments and Crisis Deepening (2022–2025)**

By **2022**, UN agencies stated that conditions in Gaza were “beyond crisis,” with **80% of the population dependent on aid** and **youth unemployment surpassing 60%** (UN OCHA, 2023). Fuel shortages, power cuts, and import restrictions continued to hinder basic services. The blockade's long-term effects included widespread food insecurity, mental health challenges, and rising malnutrition rates.

On **October 7, 2023**, Hamas launched a coordinated attack into southern Israel, prompting an unprecedented Israeli response: a “**complete siege**” that cut off all food, fuel, water, electricity, and humanitarian aid (UN News, 2023). This marked the most extreme phase of the blockade since its inception. Human rights experts described the blockade as a form of collective punishment under **Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention** (B'Tselem, 2021).

In **2024–2025**, the situation became catastrophic. Humanitarian agencies—including the **World Food Program** and **Médecins Sans Frontières**—warned of potential genocide-level conditions. Israel reportedly repositioned aid drop-off points far from Gaza's population centers, forcing civilians to walk long distances through dangerous zones for access to food and water (El País, 2025). By **mid-2025**, no meaningful easing of the blockade had occurred. Gaza's healthcare, education, and sanitation systems remained near collapse.

## **Academic and Legal Perspectives**

Academics and legal experts continue to debate the legality of the blockade. While Israel maintains that the blockade is a lawful security measure, many scholars argue it constitutes **collective punishment**, violating **international humanitarian law**. Reports by **B'Tselem (2021)** and others emphasize that the blockade targets civilian's indiscriminately by restricting life-saving goods and access to basic human services.

**Media and academic outlets** also highlight the psychological toll, especially on children, many of whom have known nothing but war, deprivation, and blockade-induced trauma. The blockade's long duration has created a multigenerational mental health crisis (Save the Children, 2022).

## Gaps in Existing Literature

While much has been written on the legal and humanitarian dimensions of the blockade, there is limited **longitudinal research** tracking its evolving effects across sectors such as mental health, youth development, and local governance. In addition, **policy-focused literature** often lacks practical pathways for international intervention or blockade reform, focusing instead on political narratives without actionable solutions.

This paper seeks to fill some of these gaps by integrating humanitarian reports, legal interpretations, and socio-economic data to present a broader, multidisciplinary understanding of the blockade's long-term human cost.

## Results and Discussions:

### Humanitarian Conditions: Poverty, Food Insecurity, Infrastructure Collapse

Gaza's humanitarian conditions are among the worst globally. As of 2024, 96% of the population faces acute food insecurity, and over 50% are in IPC Phase 5 (famine conditions) (IPC, 2024). Around 80% of the population is displaced, with most living in overcrowded shelters without electricity or clean water (UN OCHA, 2024).

Basic infrastructure has collapsed—90% of health facilities and roads are damaged or destroyed (UNOPS, 2025). Continuous bombardment and restrictions on aid have left critical services non-functional.

## Impact on Healthcare

The blockade and repeated attacks have devastated Gaza's health system. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** documented over **670 attacks on healthcare** from October 2023 to June 2024, affecting **94 facilities and 79 ambulances** (WHO, 2024).

Major hospitals like Al-Shifa and Nasser were rendered non-functional, leaving thousands without surgery, intensive care, or maternal health services. Only **5 out of 36 hospitals** are partially operational, and most lack fuel, oxygen, and staff.

## Economic Collapse

Gaza's economy has nearly stopped functioning. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported an 80% GDP drop between Q3 and Q4 of 2023. Youth unemployment exceeds 62%, and 81.5% live below the poverty line (PCBS, 2024).

Basic goods are unaffordable. The price of flour, for example, has more than tripled. Markets are empty due to the blockade on commercial supplies.

## Food Insecurity

Food access has become critical. The World Food Program (WFP) states that Gaza needs at least 500 aid trucks per day, but in late 2024, only 100–120 trucks entered daily (WFP, 2024). In October alone, only 20% of necessary food was delivered.

Child malnutrition has tripled since 2023. A UN report in early 2025 said 25% of children under five suffer from acute malnutrition (UNICEF, 2025).

## International Response & Lack of Accountability

Despite global condemnation, accountability remains elusive. The United Nations, European Union, and NGOs have demanded ceasefires and humanitarian access, but there has been little enforcement. The U.S. has repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire (UN News, 2024).

Aid groups report systematic obstruction. For example, Israel's relocation of aid drop-off zones forced civilians to walk over 10 km through conflict zones (El País, 2025).

## **Legal Debate: Violation of International Humanitarian Law**

Legal experts increasingly describe the blockade as collective punishment, which is banned under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is reviewing South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide and unlawful blockade (ICJ, 2024).

Amnesty International and B'Tselem state that denying essential goods to an entire civilian population is a war crime under international law.

## **Psychological and Social Toll**

Mental health crises are widespread. A 2024 WHO survey found that 99% of displaced adults showed signs of depression and trauma. Children, in particular, have faced long-term psychological damage due to displacement, violence, and loss.

Education is also near collapse—schools have been turned into shelters, and few children receive regular instruction. Long-term impacts on development are expected.

## **Role of Regional and Global Actors**

- Israel enforces the blockade and controls border crossings. Military operations have further restricted aid, while bombing has damaged roads and aid routes.
- Egypt has limited the opening of the Rafah crossing and restricts access to Gaza.
- United States remains a key political and military ally of Israel and has blocked UN ceasefire resolutions.

- United Nations, WHO, UNICEF, and WFP have coordinated humanitarian responses but face constant access issues.
- EU and global NGOs have called for accountability, but few concrete actions have followed.

## **Summary**

The Gaza blockade has led to extreme poverty, food insecurity, and infrastructural collapse. The healthcare system is nearly non-functional, the economy has crashed, and mental health impacts are severe. Legal scholars argue that the blockade may constitute collective punishment, with increasing calls for international legal intervention. However, despite growing awareness, global accountability remains limited, and the humanitarian situation continues to worsen.

## **Conclusion and Final Note:**

### **Emphasis on Humanitarian Implications:**

The humanitarian impact of the Gaza blockade extends far beyond limited access to goods—it has fundamentally eroded the rights and dignity of over two million people. Basic human necessities such as clean water, food, healthcare, education, and adequate shelter have become inaccessible or dangerously insufficient. The health sector, already under strain from repeated conflicts, is critically under-resourced. Hospitals operate under extreme conditions, facing constant fuel shortages, limited medical supplies, outdated equipment, and frequent power outages. Surgeries are delayed, cancer treatments are interrupted, and emergency services are often unavailable.

Beyond physical health, the blockade has deeply affected mental and emotional well-being. Children and adolescents—who make up a large portion of Gaza's population—have grown up under siege, surrounded by violence, displacement, and instability. Studies and field reports have recorded high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues among youth.



Many suffer from sleep disturbances, emotional withdrawal, and chronic stress, all of which hinder their development and long-term potential.

Education systems have also deteriorated, with overcrowded classrooms, damaged facilities, and frequent school closures due to conflict. This not only disrupts learning but also limits opportunities for future economic participation and social development.

Together, these conditions have created a generational crisis. The blockade has not only stripped away livelihoods but also hope. It has prevented individuals from living with autonomy, security, and purpose—rights that are fundamental to any humanitarian framework. The long-term psychological and social effects will continue to shape Gaza's future unless meaningful changes are made.

## **Recommendations:**

### **1. Immediate Humanitarian Relief Access**

All sides should allow food, medicine, fuel, and other essential supplies to enter Gaza without delay. Aid workers and organizations must be allowed to deliver help safely and without being stopped.

### **2. Establishment of Protected Humanitarian Corridors**

There should be protected routes—called humanitarian corridors—where aid can reach people and civilians can move safely, especially during times of fighting. These routes should be watched over by international groups to keep them secure.

### **3. Lifting of the Civilian Components of the Blockade**

Items needed for everyday life—like building materials, medical tools, and fuel—should not be blocked. While safety is important, restrictions should not harm ordinary people or stop them from living a normal life.

### **4. Reconstruction of Critical Infrastructure**

A coordinated international initiative should be launched to rebuild Gaza's destroyed infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, water systems, and power plants. Donor commitments must be followed by transparent delivery, and restrictions on importing necessary materials should be lifted to allow full-scale reconstruction.

## **5. Strengthening the Health Sector**

Gaza's health system requires urgent investment. This includes training medical personnel, supplying modern equipment, ensuring a stable electricity supply, and building mental health services—particularly for children and survivors of conflict-related trauma. Mental health must be integrated into all emergency and long-term healthcare planning.

## **6. Political Dialogue and Conflict Resolution**

Regional and international actors should work toward reviving a credible peace process that addresses the root causes of the blockade and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Long-term security and stability for both Israelis and Palestinians can only be achieved through political solutions, not prolonged sieges.

## **7. Support for Local Governance and Civil Society**

Donors and international organizations should support Gaza's local institutions, NGOs, and civil society groups that provide education, health, and social services. Strengthening local governance can help improve resilience and promote community-led recovery and accountability.

## **8. Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms**

An independent international mechanism should be established to monitor the humanitarian situation in Gaza regularly. Transparent data collection and reporting will help inform policy decisions, track violations, and maintain international attention on the crisis.

## **International Pressure and Accountability:**

## **1. Stronger UN Oversight**

The United Nations and other global organizations need to play a bigger role in watching what happens in Gaza. They should make sure that:

- Civilians are protected during fighting.
- Aid can safely reach people in need.
- Human rights and international laws are followed.

Independent UN teams should regularly visit Gaza and report to the world about the real situation on the ground.

## **2. Link Aid to Respect for Human Rights**

Countries that give money, weapons, or political support to those involved in the conflict should make sure their help does not cause more suffering. They should:

- Review how their aid is used.
- Stop giving support if human rights are being broken.
- Use financial and diplomatic tools to pressure leaders to change harmful policies.

## **3. Sanctions for Violations**

Governments or military leaders who break international humanitarian laws should face serious consequences. This can include:

- Travel bans
- Asset freezes
- Legal action in international courts

These steps show that harming civilians will not be ignored.

## **4. Global Responsibility**

This is not just a local or regional issue—it's a global humanitarian crisis. All countries, especially powerful ones, must:

- Speak out against injustices
- Support peace efforts
- Provide funding for emergency aid and rebuilding efforts

No country should remain silent if innocent people are suffering.

## **5. Promote Legal Accountability**

International legal bodies like the International Criminal Court (ICC) should be allowed to investigate potential war crimes and hold those responsible accountable. Justice must be part of any solution.

These actions can help reduce the suffering of civilians in Gaza and create stronger pressure for an end to the blockade and the violence. The goal is to protect human life, uphold international law, and push for peace.

## **Future Research and Documentation:**

There is a need for continued interdisciplinary research on the long-term effects of the blockade. Areas needing more study include intergenerational trauma, educational disruptions, gender-specific impacts, and the long-term deterioration of public health. Such research can guide targeted interventions and policy development.

These simple recommendations focus on saving lives now, improving living conditions, and finding peaceful, long-term solutions to help the people of Gaza live in dignity and safety.

## **Conclusion:**

This paper has highlighted the profound and long-lasting humanitarian consequences of the blockade imposed on Gaza since 2007. What began as a security measure has evolved into a sustained restriction on civilian life, severely

limiting the movement of people and essential goods. Over nearly two decades, these constraints have weakened every aspect of Gaza's society—from healthcare and education to housing, employment, and clean water access.

Today, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is critical. A majority of residents rely on external aid for survival, while public services struggle to function amid constant shortages. Economic opportunities are scarce, food insecurity is widespread, and basic infrastructure is barely operational. The emotional and psychological toll, especially on children and youth who have grown up in this environment, adds another layer to the crisis—one that will have generational consequences. Without meaningful international intervention and a shift in policy, the blockade will continue to deepen suffering and undermine any prospects for recovery or peace.

## **Final Note:**

The blockade of Gaza represents one of the most prolonged and damaging humanitarian crises of the 21st century. It has turned daily survival into a struggle for millions and continues to deepen suffering across generations. Ending the blockade, protecting civilians, and enabling aid are not just urgent needs—they are moral and legal obligations.

The debate on how to end this all continues because, nothing could work until the world see how the ethnic cleansing and the murdering of civilians and innocent children's is justified and can't take a stand to stop this massacre.

## References:

- Save the Children. (2022). *Trapped: The impact of 15 years of blockade on Gaza's children*. <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/gaza-15-years-blockade-psychological-damage-children>
- UN News. (2023, October 7). *Gaza under complete siege following Hamas attack*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142577>
- **Al Jazeera**. (2023). *Gaza: Timeline of a 16-year blockade*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/gaza-under-siege-timeline-of-the-blockade>
- Amnesty International. (2022). *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians*. <https://www.amnesty.org>
- B'Tselem. (2009). *Operation Cast Lead*. <https://www.btselem.org>
- El País. (2025, May 30). *Israel obliges thousands of Gazans to walk for hours for aid*. <https://elpais.com>
- OCHA. (2007–2023). *Gaza Humanitarian Situation Reports*. <https://www.ochaopt.org>
- UNHRC. (2010, 2015, 2019). *Reports on Gaza conflict & protests*. <https://www.ohchr.org>
- UN News. (2023, October 13). *Israel orders complete siege on Gaza*. <https://news.un.org>
- WHO. (2016, 2020). *Health and COVID-19 response in Gaza*. <https://www.who.int>
- UN OCHA. (2018). *95% of water in Gaza unsafe to drink*. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/water-sanitation-crisis-gaza>
- World Health Organization. (2016). *Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/palestine-health-conditions>
- UN OCHA. (2023). *Humanitarian needs overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory 2023*. <https://www.unocha.org/oPt>
- World Bank. (2023). *Gaza economic update*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/publication/economic-update-april-2023>