

Report

Gendered Impact of the Genocide in Gaza and Violence in the West Bank on Women and Children



Painting: Imad Abu Shtayyah

March 8, 2024

By: Ganiyat Sadiq

JusticeForAllCanada.org

Info@JusticeForAllCanada.org

Table of Contents

- 3 Executive Summary
- 4 Gendered Impacts of the Crisis in Palestine
- 6 How Canada's Decision to Cut Funding to UNRWA Deepens the Plight of Palestinians
- 9 Policy Recommendations
- 10 Endnotes



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Justice for All (JFA) has been actively engaged in advocating for women's rights across the globe, including addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) faced by religious minority women in India and the vulnerable populations of Rohingya, Uyghur, Kashmiri, and Palestinian communities. The ongoing killing in Gaza, now deemed to be a plausible genocide by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as well as escalating violence in the West Bank, presents a dire humanitarian crisis with devastating consequences for Palestinian women and children. More than three-quarters of Gaza's population, totalling 2.2 million people, are internally displaced, enduring cramped conditions and severe deprivation. The Israeli government's five-month aerial bombing campaign of Gaza and escalating violence in the West Bank have devastated homes, destroyed livelihoods, and led to widespread disease. Hunger and malnutrition are rising sharply, especially among pregnant and breastfeeding women.

The systematic decimation of Gaza's healthcare system has made access to essential medical care absent at a time of critical need. On average, a child is killed every 15 minutes in Gaza. 17,000 children, or 1% of the 1.7 million displaced population in the Gaza Strip, are unaccompanied or separated, and many children are facing severe mental health issues. Israel continues to arbitrarily detain and dehumanize Palestinians, with reports of torture and sexual assault from those who manage to survive. Canada's decision to cut funding to UNRWA at a time of dire need contravenes its Feminist International Assistance Policy.

Canada is urged to take decisive action on three fronts regarding the gendered violence against Palestinian women and girls in Gaza and the West Bank. Firstly, Canada must acknowledge and condemn the atrocities, specifically attributing responsibility to Israeli forces. Secondly, it should lead efforts to halt the persecution, leveraging diplomatic means for a permanent ceasefire following the ICJ order against Israel's genocidal acts. Lastly, Canada must adhere to its Feminist International Assistance Policy by restoring funding to UNRWA, emphasizing its vital role in providing essential services and ensuring unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza to benefit women, girls and children.



GENDERED IMPACTS OF THE CRISIS IN PALESTINE

Impact on Women

The ramifications of the government of Israel's relentless attack on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are stark and harrowing. Palestinian women face unique and disproportionate challenges amidst the ongoing genocide.

According to the United Nations:

- Over 8,620 women have been killed, and indiscriminate Israeli airstrikes have maimed countless others, exacerbating both physical and psychological trauma.
- The breakdown of essential healthcare services has put more than 50,000 pregnant women in extreme danger, with over 180 women forced to give birth daily under chaotic conditions. The absence of adequate medical care and routine checkups presents grave risks, especially for those in their final trimester, heightening vulnerability for both mothers and their newborns.
- Pregnant and lactating women, constituting an estimated 155,000 individuals, confront compounded hardships due to acute shortages in nutritious diets and essential hygiene supplies, exacerbating the dire circumstances they endure.
- An estimated 700,000 women are experiencing menstrual cycles without access to essential hygiene products, resorting to menstruation-delaying pills (now those are not even available), and mothers undergoing cesarean operations without anesthetic.

The forced displacement of families has disproportionately burdened women, who often find themselves thrust into the role of sole caregivers and providers for their households. Elderly women, deprived of vital medications and enduring brutal conditions without adequate shelter or clothing, face heightened vulnerability. Additionally, the arbitrary detention of hundreds of Palestinian women and girls, including human rights defenders and journalists, is a chilling indictment of the Israeli government's rampant



violations of fundamental human rights. A recent UN report expressing concerns with shocking violence against Palestinian women in Gaza and the West Bank by Israeli forces, including field executions, torture, inhumane treatment, the denial of necessities, and sexual violence (including rape), underscores the depths of depravity the Israeli military continues to perpetuate against Palestinian women.

Childhood Under Siege:

Gaza is “a graveyard for children,” with over 14,350 children murdered since the beginning of the Israeli’ government’s genocide in the Gaza Strip. The children of Gaza are enduring unimaginable suffering. Many have been killed, lost limbs, or been orphaned, with countless others witnessing the horrors of war firsthand. Likewise, in the West Bank, Palestinian children have been increasingly arbitrarily detained in the West Bank, with Israel standing as the sole country globally that prosecutes children under military law, a deeply troubling violation of international human rights law. Palestinian children’s innocence has been cruelly stripped away, replaced by the constant fear and trauma inflicted by relentless bombings and violence.

Shocking statistics reveal a grim reality:

- An average of over ten children each day have been horrifically injured, losing one or both legs since 7 October 2023. Before the Israeli government declared war against Palestinian civilians, over 50% of Palestinian children suffered from PTSD. Now, virtually all of Gaza's 1.2 million children are in dire need of mental health and psychosocial support, their young minds irreversibly scarred by the atrocities they have witnessed.
- Amidst soaring needs, particularly in northern Gaza, where one in six children is acutely malnourished, reports have emerged of families fleeing to seek sustenance in southern Gaza, only to face the looming threat of an expanded military incursion by Israeli forces. Such actions not only constitute grave violations of children's rights, as outlined in the UN Security Council's 1999 Resolution on Children in Armed Conflict, but also amount to collective punishment and flagrant breaches of international humanitarian law. Starvation as a method of warfare is



unequivocally prohibited under international law, constituting a reprehensible war crime with devastating consequences for Gaza's children.

Time is running out for the children of Gaza as reports surface of their tragic deaths due to malnutrition, a consequence of Israel's relentless restrictions on aid delivery, despite the ICJ's directive to ensure the provision of aid.

HOW CANADA'S DECISION TO CUT FUNDING TO UNRWA DEEPENS THE PLIGHT OF PALESTINIANS

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been a cornerstone in providing essential services to Palestinian refugees, including education, healthcare, and social services. UNRWA's establishment in 1949 began a dedicated effort to aid Palestinian refugees displaced by Israel. The agency's role extends beyond mere relief, offering a lifeline through education, healthcare, and social support. These services are particularly crucial for vulnerable populations, notably women and children, who face disproportionate ramifications of the Israeli government's perpetuation of violence. In places like Gaza, under brutal apartheid rule, UNRWA's services transcend sheer necessity; it represents a part of the fabric that is keeping Palestinians alive, especially women and children. The reduction or halt in funding critically undermines the quality and availability of UNRWA's services. This cutback directly affects the required humanitarian assistance and healthcare provisions essential for the well-being and development of Palestinian women and children.

Canada's decision to cut funding to UNRWA following allegations against its staff has significant implications. The timing and rationale behind Canada's decision to cut funding raise concerns, notably due to its synchronization with the ICJ's interim ruling on the allegations against Israel. The lack of evidence provided by Israel to substantiate its claims against UNRWA staff, as noted by





Canadian authorities, further casts doubt on the reasoning behind the funding cut. This decision not only deprives Palestinians, particularly women and children, of critical services but also reflects the iniquitous weaponization of aid based on geopolitical considerations rather than grounded in substantiated concerns.

Canada's attempt to mitigate the impact of its decision by offering \$40 million to other NGOs fails to compensate for the loss of UNRWA's support. UNRWA's decades of infrastructure development and deep understanding of the context and needs of Palestinian refugees cannot be easily replicated or replaced. Other NGOs, despite their best efforts, may not have the capacity or the nuanced approach required to address the specific needs of women and children affected by the genocide perpetrated by the Israeli government.

Canada's Actions Undermine Its Feminist Policy

Canada's unequivocal support for the Israeli government, despite its continuous violations of international humanitarian law, contradicts its own policies and obligations under international law. Specifically, the Canadian government's decision to cut funding to UNRWA starkly violates its professed commitment to a Feminist International Assistance Policy under its Action 2: Human Dignity policy. This policy explicitly commits to providing better support to those in need during humanitarian crises, with a particular focus on addressing the unique needs of women and girls.

By reducing support to UNRWA, Canada undermines its advocacy for humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. This action contradicts its pledge to spotlight and address women and girls' distinct challenges in humanitarian crises. At a time when the dire situation in Gaza, especially for women and children, screams for unfettered and safe access for humanitarian workers, Canada's funding cut hampers the very essence of what it vows to promote. The contradiction is glaring; while Canada aims to shine a light on the unique challenges faced by women and girls, its actions contribute to dimming the prospects for the very same group in Gaza.



Moreover, Canada's policy emphasizes the importance of supporting the full range of women and girls' sexual and reproductive health needs during humanitarian responses, acknowledging that these needs are often sidelined. The reduction in funding to UNRWA directly undermines Canada's commitment to ensuring that humanitarian funding includes provisions for supporting women and girls' sexual and reproductive health. As UNRWA struggles to meet the essential needs of the Palestinian population due to financial constraints, Canada's stance not only contradicts its policy but also contributes to the increased vulnerability of women to life-threatening complications. Canada has significantly deviated from its own Feminist International Assistance Policy to continue unequivocally supporting a nation that is committing a plausible genocide, according to the ICJ.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Acknowledge and Condemn

Canada must acknowledge and condemn the gendered violence committed against women and girls in both Gaza and the West Bank. Israeli forces should be mentioned as the perpetrators of these grave crimes.




2. Help Stop the Persecution of Palestinian Women and Girls


It has been over a month since the ICJ ordered Israel not to commit acts of genocide. Despite this fact, the killing and human rights violations continue. Canada must urgently take a leadership role in ending these injustices and utilize diplomatic pressure to secure a permanent and unconditional ceasefire.


3. Comply with the Feminist International Assistance Policy and Restore Funding

Canada must immediately restore funding to UNRWA, a critical humanitarian organization for Palestinians. Funding other humanitarian organizations or air-dropping aid are complementary measures but do not replace the critical services provided by UNRWA. Canada must ensure that unrestricted access to humanitarian aid can reach Gaza and provide essential support to women and girls.

 JusticeForAllCanada.org

   @JusticeForAllCanada

 @JusticeForAllCn

 Info@JusticeForAllCanada.org


justice
FOR ALL
CANADA



Endnotes

International Court of Justice, Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel), Provisional Order, January 26, 2024, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>.

"Occupied Palestinian Territory," UNFPA, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.unfpa.org/occupied-palestinian-territory>.

"Israel's War on Gaza: 10,000 Children Killed," Al Jazeera, 2024, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2024/israel-war-on-gaza-10000-children-killed/>

"UN Estimates 17,000 Gaza Children Left Unaccompanied Amid Israel's War," Al Jazeera, February 2, 2024, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/2/un-estimates-17000-gaza-children-left-unaccompanied-amid-israels-war>.

"50,000 Women Pregnant in Gaza Amid Decimation of Its Health System," Al Jazeera, December 24, 2023, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/24/50000-women-pregnant-in-gaza-amid-decimation-of-its-health-system>.

Hearst, Katherine. "War on Gaza: Women Cut Up Tents for Period Products." Middle East Eye, January 22, 2024. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-gaza-women-cut-tents-period-products-and-endure-c-sections-without-anaesthesia>.

"Israel/OPT: UN Experts Appalled by Reported Human Rights Violations Against," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), February 2024, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>.

"Gaza Has Become a Graveyard for Thousands of Children," UNICEF, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/gaza-has-become-graveyard-thousands-children>.

"Gaza: Time Running Out as Reports of Children Dying Due to Lack of Food," Save the Children, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-time-running-out-reports-emerging-children-dying-due-lack-food-save-children>.

Taha, Amira Mohamed, Cameron Sabet, Sarah A Nada, Samer Abuzerr, and Dang Nguyen. 2024. "Addressing the Mental Health Crisis Among Children in Gaza." *The Lancet Psychiatry*. February 9. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(24\)00036-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(24)00036-1).



"LIVE: ICJ to Issue Preliminary Ruling in South Africa Genocide Case Against I," Al Jazeera, January 26, 2024, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/1/26/live-icj-to-issue-preliminary-ruling-in-south-africa-genocide-case-against-i>.

"At Least 576,000 People in Gaza One Step Away from Famine, UN Says," Al Jazeera, February 28, 2024. Accessed February 28, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/28/at-least-576000-people-in-gaza-one-step-away-from-famine-un-says>.

"Six Grave Violations," United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Accessed February 28, 2024. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/>.

"Statement by Minister Hussen on Allegations Against Staff of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East," Global Affairs Canada, January 2024. Accessed February 28, 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2024/01/statement-by-minister-hussen-on-allegations-against-staff-of-united-nations-relief-and-works-agency-for-palestine-refugees-in-the-near-east.html>

"Canadian Officials Still Haven't Seen Intelligence Linking UN's Gaza Aid Agency with Hamas: Sources," CBC News, 2024. Accessed February 28, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/unrwa-hamas-gaza-canada-1.7107785>.

"Global Affairs Canada, 'Statement by Minister Hussen.'"

Global Affairs Canada, "Canada's International Development Policy," accessed February 28, 2024, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng#5.2.