

Human Rights Watch accuses Israel of “ethnic cleansing” in Gaza

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Human Rights Watch said Thursday that Israel was carrying out a “deliberate” policy of “ethnic cleansing” through the forcible and permanent displacement of virtually the entire population of Gaza.

Out of a pre-war population of 2.2 million, 1.9 million people have been forcibly displaced by Israel’s war of extermination, supported by the United States and other imperialist powers. The systematic and deliberate displacement of people has been accompanied by the systematic destruction of civilian homes in Gaza, with the aim of rendering the area uninhabitable.

In its 154-page report, titled “Hopeless, Starving, and Besieged: Israel’s Forced Displacement of Palestinians in Gaza,” Human Rights Watch documents the fact that the expulsion of the people of Palestine is based not on “military necessity” but the deliberate and publicly stated desire of Israeli authorities to displace the Arab population from Gaza in preparation for its annexation and settlement.

The report found that as “multiple acts of forced displacement were carried out with intent, it amounts to war crimes.” It revealed, “Statements by senior officials with command responsibility show that forced displacement is intentional and forms part of Israeli state policy and therefore amount to a crime against humanity.” It further concluded, “Israel’s actions appear to also meet the definition of ethnic cleansing.”

Summarizing the findings of the report, Human Rights Watch wrote:

From the first days of the hostilities, senior officials in the Israeli government and the war cabinet have declared their intent to displace the Palestinian population of Gaza, with

government ministers stating that its territory will decrease, that blowing up and flattening Gaza is “beautiful,” and that land will be handed to settlers. In November 2023, Israeli Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Avi Dichter said, “We are now rolling out the Gaza Nakba.”

The report was based on interviews with 39 displaced Palestinians in Gaza, together with an in-depth examination of 184 separate Israeli evacuation orders.

“The Israeli government cannot claim to be keeping Palestinians safe when it kills them along escape routes, bombs so-called safe zones, and cuts off food, water and sanitation,” said Nadia Hardman, refugee and migrant rights researcher at Human Rights Watch.

“Israel has blatantly violated its obligation to ensure Palestinians can return home, razing virtually everything in large areas,” she continued.

The report has demonstrated that not only has Israel displaced the vast majority of the population of Gaza, it has destroyed virtually the entire infrastructure capable of supporting civilized life and is seeking to starve those Palestinians left alive:

... Israel has damaged and destroyed resources vital for the realization of human rights, including hospitals, schools, water and energy infrastructure, bakeries, and agricultural land, and has permitted only limited humanitarian access, which remains utterly insufficient to meet the essential needs of the population. As a result, Gaza is experiencing a humanitarian crisis. Children have died from malnutrition and

dehydration, and as of October 2024, about 1.95 million out of Gaza's 2.2 million people were projected to suffer "catastrophic," "emergency," or "crisis" levels of food insecurity, according to The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (a tool for improving food security analysis and decision-making). The report further states that "the risk of famine between November 2024 and April 2025 persists as long as conflict continues, and humanitarian access is restricted."

The Human Rights Watch report systematically refutes the claims by the Netanyahu government that the population of Gaza has been repeatedly evacuated for their own safety and as a military necessity. The report demonstrated "that Israeli officials are instead committing the war crime of forcible transfer, a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and a crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)."

It concludes, "Demonstrably, Israel has not evacuated Palestinian civilians in Gaza for their security, as they have not been secure during evacuations or on arrival at designated safe zones." Indeed, "The Israeli military is also establishing what appear to be permanent buffer zones—securitized and emptied areas of land between the Israeli and Gaza border where Palestinians will likely not be allowed to enter."

Horrible as the report's allegations are, they are in fact out of date. Early last month, Israel launched a new offensive against northern Gaza whose aim is the total depopulation of the entire area. Under the so-called "Generals' Plan," Israeli officials have declared their intention to prevent food from entering the entirety of northern Gaza and to treat all of those who remain, now estimated at about 75,000 people, as enemy combatants.

This policy of forcible mass displacement is only set to intensify with the incoming Trump administration, which has promised to be even more aggressive in supporting the Netanyahu government than Biden. Trump has announced that he intends to appoint former Governor Mike Huckabee of Arkansas, an evangelical Christian Zionist, as ambassador to Israel, who has openly advocated the annexation of Palestinian

territory.

"There is no such thing as the West Bank—it's Judea and Samaria," Huckabee has said, using the biblical names for the territory. "There is no such thing as settlements—they're communities, they're neighborhoods, they're cities. There is no such thing as an occupation."

In a separate report released November 14, a UN committee concluded that "The policies and practices of Israel ... are consistent with the characteristics of genocide."



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