

Aid as a weapon: the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation

As conditions in Gaza grow increasingly dire, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) has stepped in to replace rights-based aid with a model of distribution that is privatised, militarised, and politicised.¹ The result for Palestinians is that finding food has become a life-threatening ordeal. GHF distribution centres are frequently described as death traps, characterised by gunfire, overcrowding, stampedes, and chaos, compounding the suffering of a population already burdened by protracted siege and displacement.²

First-hand testimonies, official reports, and investigative findings reveal a deeply layered humanitarian crisis across physical, psychological, and societal dimensions that has only worsened since GHF began operations.³ This crisis includes starvation, physiological collapse, psychological trauma, gender-based violence, the breakdown of identity, and psychic fragmentation.⁴

Rather than being a collateral consequence of war, this situation reflects a deliberate system of control for the purposes of forced displacement and collective punishment. The nature of GHF's distribution, which aid seekers have likened to the Hunger Games,⁵ evokes Michel Foucault's concept of public torture: performative violence inflicted upon an individual's body as a form of retribution and a display of state power.⁶ Except now the punishment is inflicted on an entire population.

Since May 27, 2025, 859 people have died and thousands more have been wounded while seeking food at GHF sites.⁷ Doctors treating people wounded at GHF sites have noted patterns in the gunshot wounds, focused on the head one day, the torso the next, then the genitals another day. According to one doctor, "It almost feels like there is a quota for the

number of people that need to be killed on a given day".⁸

Over 165 charities and non-governmental organisations have called for GHF to be closed,⁹ and a growing number of legal scholars and humanitarian experts have expressed concerns that GHF is complicit in deepening human suffering, undermining the core principles of impartiality and neutrality, and serving as a facade for military objectives rather than population needs.¹⁰ Indeed, GHF's actions might constitute violations of international humanitarian and criminal law—including complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹¹

These concerns compel us to reconsider the oversight and the very legitimacy of privatised aid regimes in conflict zones. They also highlight the plight of marginalised populations in an increasingly authoritarian world—including persecuted minorities, undocumented immigrants, and refugees—who are being punished, expelled, and dispossessed with little regard for their basic human rights.

GHF cannot become the new standard for aid delivery. We urge health professionals and academics to join the calls for accountability—both for GHF and for the privatised, politicised aid in general—and to advocate for more just and humane policies toward marginalised and oppressed people at home and abroad.

We declare no competing interests.

Editorial note: The Lancet Group takes a neutral position with respect to territorial claims in published text and institutional affiliations.

**Oqab Jabali, Saqer Jabali, Dwight Haase*
oqab.jabali@najah.edu

Faculty of Humanities (OJ) and Faculty of Law and Political Sciences (SJ), An-Najah National University, Nablus, West Bank, Palestine; Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Toledo, Toledo, OH, USA (DH)

1 Pietropaoli J, Razai S. Privatised food delivery in Gaza and violations of international humanitarian law. British Institute of International and Comparative Law. July 24, 2025. <https://www.biiil.org/blog/115/privatised-food-delivery-in-gaza-and-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law?cookieset=1&ts=1755624177> (accessed Aug 19, 2025).

- 2 Kaamil A, Gonzalez Paz AL, Swan L, et al. Eleven-minute race for food: how aid points in Gaza became 'death traps' - a visual story. July 22, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jul/22/food-aid-gaza-deaths-visual-story-ghf-israel> (accessed Aug 18, 2025).
- 3 Ferragamo M. Gaza's food crisis is worsening: what to know. July 27, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/article/gazas-food-crisis-worsening-what-know> (accessed Aug 19, 2025).
- 4 Harghandiwal B. Impact of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza on children's health: evidence and recommendations for mitigation. *Glob Public Health* 2025; 20: 2495326.
- 5 Ahmed A, Mahdi I. 'The hunger games': inside Israel's death traps for starving Gazans. June 20, 2025. <https://www.972mag.com/hunger-games-israel-gaza-food-aid/> (accessed Aug 19, 2025).
- 6 Foucault M (trans. Sheridan A). Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- 7 UN. Gaza: nearly 1,400 Palestinians killed while seeking food, as UN warns airdrops are no solution. Aug 1, 2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/08/1165552> (accessed Aug 19, 2025).
- 8 Aljazeera. Gaza doctor describes 'daily patterns' in Israeli maiming at GHF sites. Aug 13, 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/13/doctor-in-gaza-describes-daily-patterns-in-israeli-maiming-at-ghf-hubs> (accessed Aug 13, 2025).
- 9 Times of Israel. Over 165 major aid groups call for end to Gaza Humanitarian Foundation operations. July 1, 2025. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/over-165-major-aid-groups-call-for-end-to-gaza-humanitarian-fund-operations/ (accessed Aug 13, 2025).
- 10 TRIAL International. Human rights, legal organizations warn privatized 'humanitarian' operators in Gaza of the risk of legal liability for complicity in serious violations of international law. June 23, 2025. <https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/human-rights-legal-organizations-warn-privatized-humanitarian-operators-in-gaza-of-the-risk-of-legal-liability-for-complicity-in-serious-violations-of-international-law/> (accessed Aug 19, 2025).
- 11 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Aid must not be weaponized, warns Gaza humanitarian country team amid mounting crisis. May 28, 2025. <https://www.unocha.org/news/aid-must-not-be-weaponized-warns-gaza-humanitarian-country-team-amid-mounting-crisis> (accessed Aug 19, 2025).



Published Online
August 29, 2025
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)01693-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)01693-9)

Submissions should be made via our electronic submission system at <http://ees.elsevier.com/thelancet/>