

Gaza—the Hell

Gaza had never been a paradise for the Palestinians. But it was not a hell either. Today it is literally passing through a hellish nightmare because of Israel's blockade policy. Israel looks determined to wipe out the population of Gaza completely. The way they are planning to create a human catastrophe in the Gaza strip is unparalleled in history.

In the third week of January, suddenly the only power plant of Gaza ran out of fuel and shut down, plunging the entire region into darkness.

The closure of the Gaza power plant, in addition to Israel's continued, tightened siege on the Gaza Strip, will have a catastrophic effect on the 1.5 million residents of Gaza, who are already suffering chronic shortages of fuel, medicine and some basic food stuffs.

Israel is manufacturing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip that is seriously deteriorating every aspect of civilian life. To date, 45 patients have died as a direct result of Israeli Occupying Force (IOF) closure and siege of the Gaza Strip. According to the Director of al-Shifa Hospital Dr Hassan Khalaf, patients' lives continue to be at stake, including the lives of 30 premature babies in al-Shifa Hospital, who will die immediately if there is a power cut at the hospital. Gaza's second major hospital, the European Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, has now suspended all major surgical operations.

Meanwhile, all crossings from Gaza to the outside world remain sealed to Palestinians.

The Gaza Strip requires 230-250 megawatts of electricity a day to operate at full capacity. On Friday, 18 January, and again on Sunday, 20 January, the IOF prevented a vital daily delivery of fuel from passing through the Nahal Oz Crossing, including industrial diesel used to fuel the power plant. The power plant is now completely closed.

In addition to the dangerous shortage of electricity that threatens the lives of critically ill patients in all of Gaza's hospitals, chronic shortages of petrol and diesel and gas for domestic use have led to panic buying before gas stations in Gaza are forced to close completely. Civilians are also suffering widespread shortages of bread, due to lack of electricity to power the ovens at bakeries across Gaza.

The catastrophic humanitarian crisis is being manufactured by the IOF as collective punishment to the entire population of the Gaza Strip. Surprisingly the international community is yet to act upon their legal and moral responsibilities to ensure the basic human rights of the citizens of the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian civilians are protected from collective punishment under international human rights law, and international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. But who is listening?

The conspiracy of silence practised by the international community definitely has encouraged Israel to act as if it is above the law and encourages Israel to violate international human rights and humanitarian law.

**Much depends on human rights bodies to expose Israel's barbarism and save
Palestinian civilians from economic blockade. □□□**