"It's like an idiotic version of the Hunger Games"

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(Site also contains a **video interview/illustration**, in English/Arabic/Swedish)

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Text and graphics: Emma Bouvin, Hiba Abbas and Maria Westholm

"The food distribution is just like a rat trap. It was an execution," says Mohammad Khalifa, whose brother was shot dead on June 3.

Israel was supposed to ensure that emergency aid reached the people in Gaza and not Hamas. Now people are being killed – on their way to the new aid centers.

"I'll never go there again," says Shehda Hijazi, 41, who saw people queuing next to him shot dead.

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31 killed. 8 killed. 27 killed. Hundreds injured.

Since June 1, daily death tolls have been coming from Gaza that differ from the previous regular reports of people killed and wounded in the war between Israel and Hamas. Suddenly people seem to be dying while trying to get food. All death tolls have in common that they are mentioned in connection with a new organization: Gaza humanitarian foundation, GHF.

The alarms don't stop. What is going on?

Since the war in Gaza began, Shehda Hijazi has lost 25 kilos. During the months when Israel blocked all emergency aid to Gaza, from early March to the end of May, the situation became critical, for him and his family as well as for hundreds of thousands of others.

When a new emergency aid center announced it would open, Shehda Hijazi headed there from Khan Yunis in the southern part of Gaza. Despite it being far, about a mile to walk on foot. Despite the road going through military areas.

Shehda Hijazi has been to the new emergency centers four times. All times except one he went home empty-handed. Photo: private

Even though he understood it could be dangerous, Shehda Hijazi couldn't have imagined how difficult the journey would be.

"The last two kilometers you have to crawl with your head down. If you lift your head, they shoot."

In connection with Israel banning the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, in autumn 2024, the Israeli government began talking about reforming the entire aid system for Gaza. At the end of May, a new aid organization was launched: Gaza humanitarian foundation, GHF.

It is an Israeli-American initiative whose financiers are shrouded in mystery and whose plan has been criticized by international aid organizations since day one. The organization is run by former military personnel and has advertised for security personnel on social media.

No established aid organization has wanted to cooperate with GHF. Expert after expert has condemned the initiative as not just bad – but actually dangerous.

But at the end of May, the first GHF center opened in Gaza.

GHF began by building four emergency centers in Gaza. All are located south of Gaza City, where the majority of Gazans are located. Photo: Eyad Baba/AFP

The chance of even getting a food package from GHF is small. Shehda Hijazi has tried four times, only once did he manage to get a box. Photo: Eyad Baba/AFP

If you're lucky enough to get a food package from a GHF center, you have to carry it home on foot. Many travel a long way to manage to find necessities. Photo: Eyad Baba/AFP

One who early predicted what would happen was Yaakov Garb, professor at Ben-Gurion University in Israel. He works with interdisciplinary environmental protection and is an expert on land issues. He has studied Palestinian landscapes for decades.

Yaakov Garb saw on his maps and satellite images that something was being prepared. Large machines were clearing enormous areas and walls and watchtowers were being built.

"I started seeing something strange in late April. Enormous clearings they were working hard on. I saw the same thing when they created the buffer zone, which I discovered six months before they announced it. That's when I learned to trust my eyes," says Yaakov Garb.

His family emigrated to Israel from South Africa when he was 13. Several of his ancestors were killed in the Holocaust.

"My parents didn't want to live in an apartheid regime. One might think that's ironic in hindsight. But for me, this war has been a very difficult personal journey, where I have re-evaluated this country. I hesitate to say 'the Israeli defense,'

because they're not defending anything anymore. It has overturned things I previously believed in," says Yaakov Garb.

Yaakov Garb, professor at Ben Gurion University. Photo: Tamir Kalifa

He began following developments on the ground via his maps early in the war. Or as he says: "when we all thought it would soon be over." Initially, he perceived the Israeli warnings about which areas would be evacuated and the calls to get to so-called humanitarian zones as a sign of Israel's attempt to follow international humanitarian law and exercise restraint.

"But that perception changed drastically as time went on. I discovered that the warning systems were completely inadequate in every way you can imagine and they didn't get better. The maps that the Israeli Defense Forces provided were of such low quality that I would have failed them if they had been submitted by a student in my basic course."

On June 8, Israeli soldiers fired smoke grenades while thousands of Palestinians tried to reach a GHF center. Photo: Eyad Baba/AFP

The "buffer zone" that Yaakov Garb noted long before it became reality means areas where Israel has demolished houses and cleared land to cut off different parts of Gaza from each other and control people's freedom of movement. At the end of April, he initially didn't understand what he saw growing.

"I thought it might be facilities for prisoners or preparations for Israeli military bases, but when Israel started talking about a 'new system for emergency aid' I understood. It was emergency aid centers they were building."

On June 1, panic arose about eight kilometers from a GHF center. Thousands of Gazans had gathered in a roundabout on what GHF had declared as "the safe route" to the food distribution. The route wasn't safe, but it was the only one people could choose.

Shehda Hijazi has four children. Like many other children in Gaza, they have lost a large part of their body weight during the war, and like many other fathers, he was desperate.

"It was chaos, there were so many people. A guy who was next to me was shot. It could have been me," he tells during a video call from Khan Yunis.

The connection is poor, his voice disappears sometimes. Dull bangs are heard in the background and sometimes it flashes on the screen.

Despite the dangers, the food packages are sought after. They contain pasta, rice, oil, crackers, flour, sugar and sometimes a cake. But the chance of getting a package is small. Shehda Hijazi has tried four times, only once did he succeed.

"It's a great package – if you can get it. But it must happen with dignity. We are treated like animals," he says.

The packages last at most a few days, even if you're frugal. Then you have to go out again – make the same life-threatening journey again.

UNRWA has about 400 aid distribution sites in Gaza. Their model follows what all major aid organizations work with – that aid should be where people are, it should be easy to access and it should be a friendly and welcoming environment for people in need.

American security guards, employed by GHF, show the way for Palestinian refugees. Photo: Eyad Baba/AFP

GHF began by building four emergency centers in Gaza. One is located a bit south of Gaza City, the others are located near Rafah, the area's southernmost city.

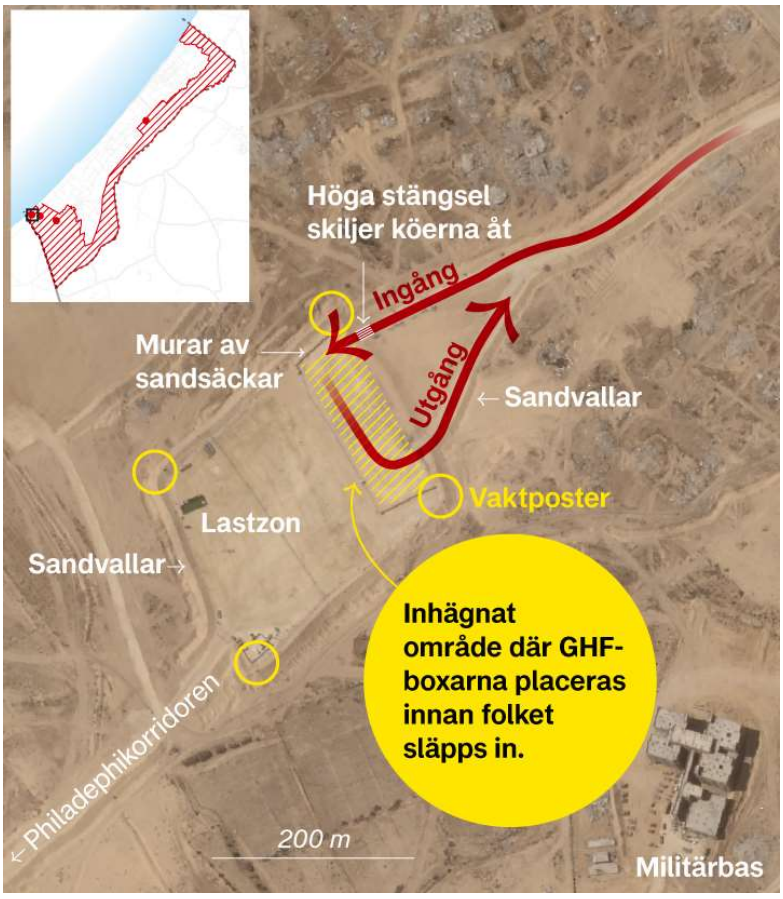
"The majority of the population simply cannot access these areas. A million people live in Gaza City and they would need to cross the super-militarized Netzarim corridor, which is impossible," says Yaakov Garb.

All emergency aid centers are located next to military bases or Israeli soldier camps.

"This makes them a hyper-hostile environment for the civilian population. They are also surrounded by wasteland and ruins, and there are no functioning roads or fuel for vehicles, so everything must be done on foot."

Additionally, all centers are located inside the Israeli buffer zone.

How a GHF center is built up



Source: Garb, Yaakov, 2025, "The Israeli/American/GHF 'aid distribution' compounds in Gaza: Dataset and initial analysis of location, context, and internal structure. Graphics: Maria Westholm. Satellite image: Planet Labs (June 11, 2025).

"So people are supposed to go to a place where they are by definition not allowed to stay, do you understand? There was a pediatrician with nine children who was killed in a bomb attack recently and when the IDF was asked about it they answered 'yes but she was in the buffer zone. You're not allowed to be there.'"

Yaakov Garb has also been able to map how the centers are built – like military bases. There is only one entrance and exit. People are led "like cattle" through the area, which is surrounded by high walls, watchtowers and armed guards.

"There is no protection from the sun, no toilets, no water. Normal emergency aid distributions have special entrances for women, children and disabled people, this is missing. All the time you are monitored by mercenaries and filmed by surveillance cameras. This is not about emergency aid, this is about control."

Shehda Hijazi is employed by the Palestinian Authority governed by Fatah, but in practice there is neither job nor salary anymore. Before the war, he lived in Rafah, with a house and farmland. Now everything is gone. Now everything is about finding food for the day.

"My cousin was shot dead two days ago. It was a kilometer from the distribution."

There are some video clips showing shootings and panic in areas near GHF's centers. That there aren't particularly many is because, according to Shehda Hijazi, it's forbidden to film there. He himself didn't even bring his mobile phone on his attempts to get emergency aid, because the risk of theft is so great.

It is Israeli soldiers who open fire, he says. The American security guards, who are also present, don't shoot, but they let it happen. The Israeli Defense Forces state that soldiers in some cases have "fired warning shots" and in other cases shot at suspected persons who "moved toward troops."

"The food distribution happens quickly, it only lasts 45 minutes at a time. After that everything is interrupted. But no one shouts that it's over. They don't say it's finished. They just start shooting."

GHF states that they have distributed over 16 million "meals" during the past two weeks. They say in press releases that all food distributions have gone peacefully and that media are "spreading rumors." A man who works for a German aid organization with operations in Gaza tells DN that it's "nonsense."

"What is even a meal? They distribute dry goods. All serious organizations document everything they do, GHF has no statistics whatsoever. I also haven't been able to find a single person who got help from there. A friend has been there five times and never got anything. One of his friends was shot on the way," says the man, who wants to remain anonymous because it's currently "tough enough" to work with aid in Palestine.

The packages contain what DN learns are dry goods like rice, pasta, flour, sugar, oil, crackers and cakes. Photo: Abdel Kareem Hana

The man is also critical that GHF doesn't do any selection control of the recipients of the emergency aid. They don't check people off on any lists, don't note if someone takes ten boxes instead of one.

"That was the main reason they were supposed to get the assignment. It was of course nonsense from the beginning, but now they don't even do that. They put out boxes and say 'hey, take what you want,' that's what we hear from the ground. It's a fiasco, it's like an idiotic version of 'The Hunger Games.'"

The hunger is of course worst, but the shame is almost as bad. Coming home without food to his four children feels like such a failure, says Shehda Hijazi.

"I sacrifice myself to be able to feed my children. When I come back with empty hands, I'm ashamed," he says.

After seeing people die and losing close relatives on the way to the emergency aid centers, he has now decided not to make the dangerous journey again.

"I used to have many dreams, but now there's only one dream for the people in Gaza. To one day wake up to the war being over," says Shehda Hijazi before an enormous bang is heard in the background and the call is cut off.