

B'Tselem Calls Gaza Assault "Genocide"—Why Now?



For nearly two years, Israel has been carrying out a genocide in the Gaza Strip, working methodically and deliberately to dismantle Palestinian society through mass killings, the infliction of severe physical and psychological harm, and the creation of catastrophic living conditions that render survival impossible. Two million people are being starved, while calls for ethnic cleansing are made openly, and the complete destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure—for both individuals and communities—is underway. This is genocide. It is our genocide. And it must be stopped.

With these stark words, B'Tselem, Israel's leading human rights organization, issued its most direct condemnation yet of the Netanyahu government, holding it responsible for the crime of genocide.

The report, released jointly with Physicians for Human Rights–Israel, dismantles Israeli government claims about humanitarian aid access. It asserts that the occupation is implementing a systematic campaign of genocide in Gaza through killing, starvation, and the total destruction of life-supporting infrastructure. It also clearly outlines Israel's intent to dismantle Palestinian society and forcibly displace its people by creating unbearable living conditions.

That B'Tselem now explicitly labels the Israeli government's actions as genocidal—22 months into the war—raises pressing questions: Why the delay? And why now, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government shows brazen disregard for all forms of condemnation, including from Arab, international, and even Israeli sources?

Documented Evidence of Genocide

B'Tselem, headquartered in Jerusalem, meticulously documents what it says amounts to genocide, offering extensive evidence and indicators of violations committed by Israeli forces against Gaza's civilian population over nearly two years.

The report opens by defining genocide in both academic and practical terms. It cites the Polish-Jewish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term "genocide," describing it as a "coordinated attack on the essential foundations of life of national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups, with the aim of annihilating the group itself."

The 80-page report, titled *Our Genocide*, asserts that Israel's assault has gone beyond control or suppression to become a full-scale campaign to dismantle Palestinian society and eliminate its existence in Gaza. This, it says, is accomplished through deliberate policies of mass killing, starvation, forced displacement, infrastructure destruction, and the erosion of social and cultural cohesion.

B'Tselem draws on statements from top Israeli officials—many of which contain explicit threats of annihilation and starvation. Some Knesset members even suggested using a nuclear bomb on Gaza, while others referred to Palestinians as “human animals.”

Key indicators leading the organization to classify Israel’s actions as genocide include: the erasure of entire cities; the systematic destruction of health and education infrastructure; the targeting of religious and cultural institutions; the forced displacement of over two million people; and widespread starvation and mass killings.

B'Tselem concludes that Israeli policy in Gaza meets the legal criteria for genocide as defined in the 1948 UN Convention. The crime, it argues, is not limited to direct killing but also encompasses large-scale destruction of conditions necessary for survival and the dismantling of every means of human continuity for Palestinians.

Gaza Is Not the Only Target

The report emphasizes that Israel’s occupation and apartheid regime has long aimed to reshape Palestinian existence—geographically and demographically—through policies of ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, and institutional violence. These strategies have manifested most clearly in Gaza through blockade, starvation, and destruction.

B'Tselem warns that the genocide underway in Gaza may spread to other territories under Israeli control—including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and even within Israel’s 1948 borders—where Palestinians face rising violence, displacement, collective punishment, and systematic human rights violations simply for being Palestinian.

The report states that Israeli military brutality is rooted in a long-standing ideological foundation of apartheid and racial discrimination—a structure that has existed since 1948 and has reached its most extreme form in the current war, which B'Tselem describes as the apex of a long colonial project.

B'Tselem also holds the international community—particularly the United States and Europe—directly responsible for enabling the genocide in Gaza. It cites political and military support, including weapons shipments and ongoing silence on documented atrocities. It accuses world powers and international organizations of not only failing to act but of normalizing the massacres through routine rhetoric that downplays or justifies them.

Ultimately, the organization concludes that recognizing the Israeli regime’s actions as genocide—and fearing its expansion—demands urgent, unequivocal

action from the international community and the Israeli public alike.

The report ends with a clear message: “The time has come to speak out and resist. It is time to use all tools available under international law to save what can still be saved—and to end the suffering of millions.”

Why Now—After 22 Months?

“An Israeli human rights organization says Israel is committing genocide. Why did it take 22 months?” Palestinian legal scholar Diana Buttu posed this question, highlighting the delayed release of a report many see as stating the obvious. From the war’s first month, abundant evidence and testimonies pointed to crimes of genocide—crimes that fit every legal definition and were carried out with unmatched brutality and dehumanization.

For months, various human rights groups described Gaza’s ordeal as genocide. The violence was so flagrant it required neither interpretation nor nuance. Yet B’Tselem and other Israeli left-wing organizations hesitated, opting for milder terms like “crimes against humanity”—a hesitation many interpreted as intentional obfuscation or outright denial.

But as international pressure mounted and the global narrative shifted, and as Gaza’s humanitarian catastrophe spiraled beyond the limits of denial, B’Tselem could no longer avoid the term. The facts had become too stark, and the reality too grave to obscure.

As Buttu points out, the report arrives so late that calling it “genocide” now feels redundant—it adds little to what’s already known, and instead underscores the political and moral hesitation that has long plagued critical voices in Israel.

Buttu also highlighted a disturbing credibility gap: for months, countless Palestinian voices and reports documented atrocities and genocide in Gaza, yet they were largely ignored. When the same accusation comes from an Israeli organization, however, it garners widespread attention—exposing a deep-rooted bias that refuses to grant Palestinians basic credibility. “No one believes Palestinians,” Buttu said, “until someone else screams on their behalf.”

One of the most troubling elements of B’Tselem’s report, Buttu argues, is its implicit attempt to shift partial blame onto the Palestinian resistance. By framing the October 7 operation as the trigger for genocide, the report suggests that Israel was merely responding to an existential threat—thus offering an implicit justification for the scale of the violence.

B’Tselem, which claims neutrality and independence, appears—according to Buttu—to be rationalizing one of the most horrific crimes of our time, treating it as a reaction rather than the continuation of decades-long policies of oppression

and dehumanization. The report ignores that what's happening in Gaza is not an anomaly, but the culmination of a structural regime built on starvation, domination, and ethnic cleansing.

It's no wonder, then, that many Israelis remain indifferent to the mass killings in Gaza—especially when the criticism comes from Arab or pro-Palestinian sources long derided or dismissed by mainstream discourse.

In conclusion, numerous other reports from globally recognized organizations—including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International—have already provided the basis for arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. The ICC found “reasonable grounds” to believe they committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Yet, Netanyahu and his government, backed by military leaders and emboldened by US political cover, continue their genocidal campaign, targeting women and children and committing wide-scale violations with impunity. His confidence rests on the unshakable support of the United States, which has effectively granted him *carte blanche* to proceed with whatever crimes he chooses—even threatening further invasions and land seizures in Gaza.