



The Legal Gap in Famine Declarations: A Case Study of Gaza and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of the procedural and legal weaknesses of international recognition of famine, which will be the international crisis of 2025 in Gaza as a case. Although according to Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), World Health Organization (WHO), and other UN officials, the conditions of famine that was observed were beyond any doubt that is, acute malnutrition over 15 percent, more than two deaths per 10000 people per day and drastic shortages in the consumption of food, there was no binding claim made by the law. This inconsistency of confirmed technical facts and official legal recognition implies a conceptual lapse in international humanitarian law. The research applies a qualitative case study design to combine a doctrinal analysis of law and process tracing to investigate how political, institutional and sovereignty-related issues hinder the application of empirical data on famine into enforceable humanitarian intervention. The results reveal that the lack of binding famine-declaration mechanisms under international law permits a political instrumentalization of data, postpones intervention, and undermines responsibility of starvation-associated abuses. The Gaza example has shown that famine recognition is a political choice and not an obligation of law or morality. The way to deal with this gap is to incorporate IPC famine thresholds into binding international mechanisms and enhance data transparency and provide independent monitoring mechanisms. A narrowing of the gap between technical verification and legal enforcement is a key to provision of a timely humanitarian response, protection of the right to food and maintenance of the international justice regarding the crisis in the future.

Keywords: Gaza famine, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), international humanitarian law, famine declaration, legal accountability, food security, humanitarian governance

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Introduction

Famine is a severe humanitarian crisis characterized by food shortages, malnutrition, and rising death rates. Causes include natural phenomena like droughts and complex socio-

political factors like armed conflicts, displacement, and economic instabilities. The international community recognizes famine as a critical problem requiring immediate action and coordination. The legal declaration of famine has triggered humanitarian intervention and political responsibility, mobilizing global resources and operational capabilities. Ethical responsibilities include securing rights to food, health, and human dignity for affected individuals.

Moreover, political responsibility plans have been given out in the form of official famine declarations. These blueprints point out the governance failures or inefficiencies in conflict management as well as international collaboration. These failures have caused or contributed to the catastrophe (Muratoglu & Wassar, 2024; Parra-Lopez and Hassoun, 2025). In the absence of an official declaration of famine, delayed or insufficient responses are likely to be experienced. As a result, interventions to deal with structural determinants are hampered. Cycles of deprivation and vulnerability, in turn, are perpetuated.

Despite the unanimous recognition of its importance, the legal framework governing famine proclamation's is characterized by major gaps and ambiguities, leading to disaster. Complicated and very controversial criteria of famine determination have been included. These include different levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, death, and socio-economic conditions (Whyte, 2024). International law has not given a widely binding or operationally precise definition of famine. Rather, declarations have often been heavily reliant on political considerations, access to reliable information, and the support of interested states and humanitarian actors (Ridha, 2025). This vagueness has been identified to hinder prompt and efficient intervention. Is forced starvation even described as famine?

This is particularly evident in protracted or politically winding crises, in which famine risks have been bundled with issues of state sovereignty, war, and humanitarian access (Al Botmeh & Saadeh). The Gaza Strip plagued by prolonged conflict, constant blockade, and high levels of poverty, has long-term food insecurity, leading to chronic risks of famine-like conditions. The complex political, legal, and operational obstacles have hindered the issuance of formal famine declarations, causing disasters. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system, a standardized method incorporating food consumption patterns, livelihood status, nutritional outcomes, and mortality figures, has become a primary technical tool for assessing food insecurity. However, it has not automatically activated legal famine declarations or initiated relevant political responses, highlighting a gap between technical appraisals and legal-political processes.

This manuscript investigates the legal deficiencies in famine procedures, using Gaza as an empirical case study. It aims to understand the obstacles to timely and effective famine declarations, the food security situation in Gaza, and the implications on humanitarian response and political accountability. Bridged gaps are crucial for effective humanitarian interventions and maintaining justice for populations at risk of extreme food insecurity.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Famine is widely defined as extreme lack of food, which leads to massive hunger, malnutrition and the death of a large number of people in a population that has suffered the adversities (Tezanos-Vazquez, 2025). The phenomenon of famine is historically related to pre-modern societies, when natural disasters or wars acted as the sign of food scarcity, resulting in the high overall population rate of human suffering (Basu et al., 2025). Previous conceptions were primarily concerned with observable consequences such as the high death rates, the market full collapse, and food depletion (Tefera, 2024). Current definitions are however broader. They do not only think of food availability but also access, use as well as stability in the long run. Such an approach is more accurate in demonstrating a more profound grasp of the concept of food security, being that it is not solely a matter of supply as to whether it is socially and economically feasible to access sufficient nutrition.

The international laws governing famine are subordinated to the larger human laws and the human rights (Kulamadayil, 2024). The starvation of civilians as one of the means of war conflict is outlawed by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, and the occupying power must supply the population under their control with the necessary food and medical aid (Nwotite, 2023). Indicatively, the fourth Geneva convention mandates occupying powers to supply food and medical supplies in instances where there are inadequate resources (Article 55). Additional Protocol I also prohibits the assaults on the objects, which are important in the survival of civilians, including food reserves and farms (Crowe, 2020). The same principles are reinforced with the help of customary international law that forbids the use of starvation as a weapon and establishes access to food as a fundamental human right. Enforcement however is weak and usually the political interests do not allow proper implementation.

The set of quantitative indicators that are used by United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations to define the presence of famine conditions and to respond to the emergency is also determined (Maxwell, 2019). These pointers encompass mortality rates of more than two deaths per 10,000 persons on a daily basis, the acute malnutrition of more than 30 percent, the drastic declines on food supply and extreme hindrances to obtain food as a result of economic, social, or security reasons. In case of these indicators, a classification of famine is performed, which prescribes the immediate humanitarian interventions (Hills et al., 2024). This type of classification is of importance since it is used to justify mobilization of resources and international assistance.

The procedural and political challenges of making official legal pronouncements of famine are difficult. First, in times of crisis, particularly in a war zone or under repressive governments, there is rarely any chance of giving the right information thus resulting in a delayed and contentious evaluation. Second, famine declarations can be politically sensitive and thus governments and international organizations are not willing to declare famine because of the reputational or diplomatic damages that they are likely to suffer. Third, there is no binding international legal system of famine declarations, which leaves

in doubt who has the mandate and accountability to act. This makes famine declarations very political and haphazard in timing, extent and influence.

The IPCC system was developed or designed to address this demand of having a single, evidence-based method when it comes to measuring food insecurity. The IPC was initiated in the early 2000s as a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) and is a normalized badge with 5 stages (Phase 1 Minimal to Phase 5 Famine). The phase is characterized by a particular threshold of food intake, shift on livelihood, malnutrition, and mortality. The phase 5 is the worst of them all whose filled with severe food deficits, acute malnutrition beyond the critical levels, and excess deaths which are characteristic of famine conditions. The IPC itself is both a technical and operational instrument that combines data across various sources and pushes it towards humanitarian planning and the distribution of resources. Its method of consensus has

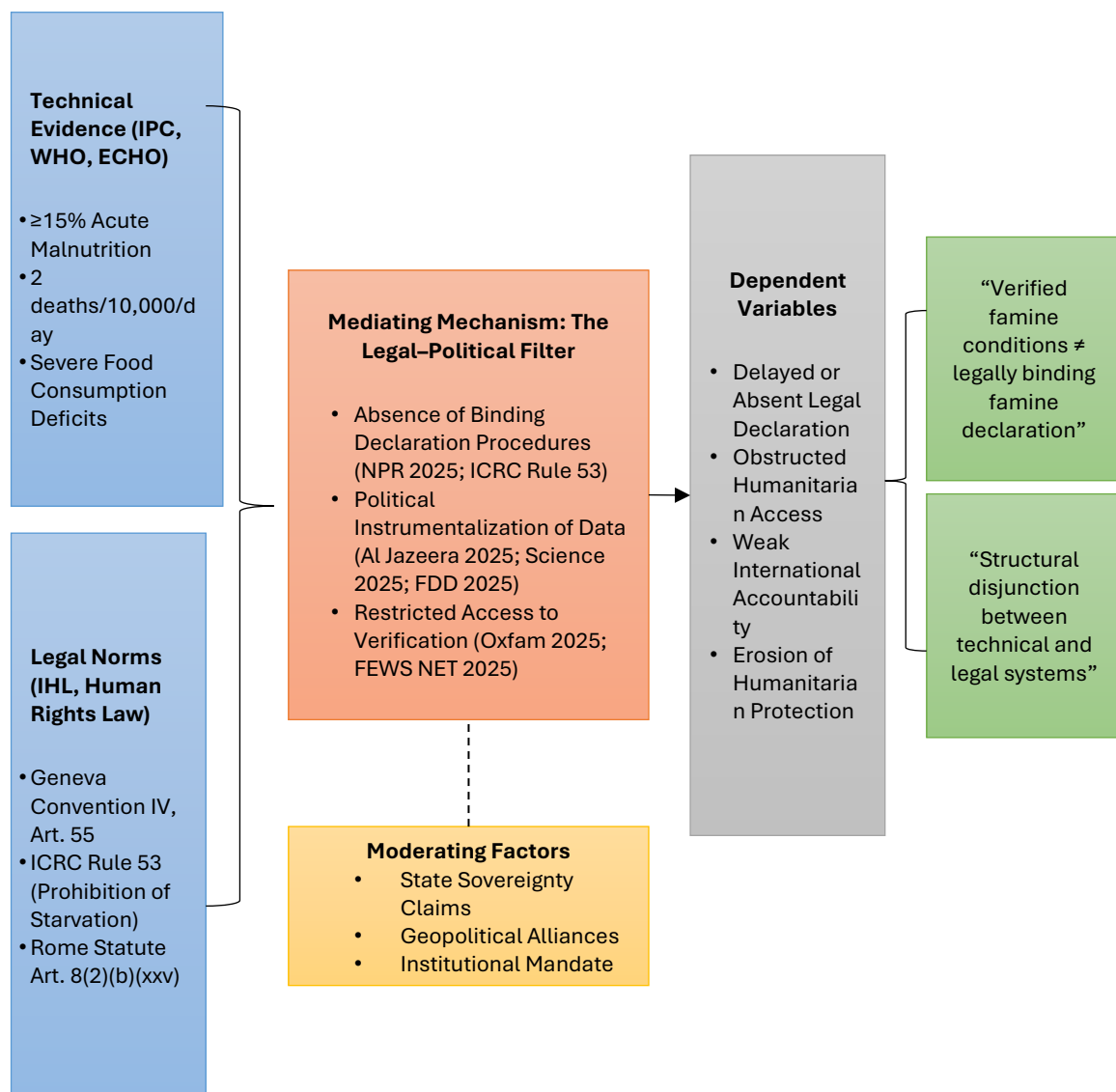


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

seen a lot of acceptance by governments, aid agencies and donors and has enhanced coordination efforts.

In spite of its rigor, IPC is still a technical system--it does not alter legal status and enforce political action. To convert an IPC classification into a legal and diplomatically triggered formal declaration of famine, one needs to individually decide on both legal and political grounds based on state interests and diplomatic pressures. Besides, though quite exhaustive, the IPC approach might not always be appropriate in revealing the complete political and social environment under which famines are ascribed and treated.

Analysis of the relation between famine declarations and IPCs has been done by scholars. They discovered that, despite the fact that the IPC offers a scientific framework to determine the existence of famine, its dimensions on the declarations by the authorities have not been consistent. There has been a lot of cases where IPC established the occurrence of famine which have not been officially recognized because of political influence. The current legal system does not have clear procedures on how famine declaration is followed hence there is a delay or poor response. This paper will seek to fill these gaps by examining the loopholes between the law, the system of humanitarian classification, and the political decisions. It further brings out the major obstacles and suggests on how to better famine identification and response with the view of better responsibility and overall effectiveness of humanitarian intervention.

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates how verified technical evidence of famine, such as data from the IPC and WHO, fails to translate into formal legal action. It brings together the main factors identified in the literature, technical indicators, international legal norms, and political filters, to explain why a gap exists between evidence and legal recognition. The framework shows how political influence, institutional limits, and the absence of binding legal procedures prevent famine declarations even when all criteria are met. This model helps visualize the relationship between data, law, and politics in understanding the 2025 Gaza famine.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore the legal and procedural gaps in famine declarations. The aim was to understand how verified famine evidence in Gaza failed to result in a formal legal declaration and how international law and politics shaped this process.

Research Design

The research was designed as a case study of the Gaza Strip, chosen because it represents a clear example of how famine can be technically confirmed but not legally recognized. Gaza provides a strong case to study the gap between scientific verification by the IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) and the absence of a legal declaration. This design helped to explain how international law, humanitarian systems, and politics interact in famine situations.

Data Collection

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

- **Primary sources** included official reports and alerts from the IPC, WHO, FAO, and UN agencies describing Gaza's food insecurity and malnutrition in 2025. These reports provided technical evidence about famine thresholds such as food consumption, malnutrition, and mortality rates.
- **Legal documents** were also used, including the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and relevant UN resolutions related to humanitarian duties.
- **Secondary sources** included academic books, peer-reviewed articles, and NGO reports discussing famine law, food rights, humanitarian response, and the politics of famine declaration. These helped to connect the Gaza case with wider debates about law and accountability.

Data Analysis

The analysis combined legal analysis and process tracing.

- The **legal analysis** identified the international laws and obligations that forbid starvation and require the delivery of humanitarian aid. It reviewed how these laws apply to Gaza and where enforcement failed.
- **Process tracing** was used to follow the sequence of events from the IPC's technical famine verification to the political and legal responses. This helped identify where the process broke down and why the famine declaration did not occur, even when all technical indicators were met.

Ethical Considerations

The study used only publicly available reports and data. Care was taken to present the information accurately and respectfully, given the ongoing humanitarian crisis. All sources were cited properly, and political bias was avoided. The research aimed to separate verified evidence from political claims to ensure an objective and fair analysis.

Results

Table 1. Synthesis of Key Literature on Famine Declarations and Legal Frameworks

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings Related to Famine Declaration	Analytical Method	Gap Identified & Relevance to Current Study
Kulamadayil (2024)	Global starvation governance and	International law lacks binding mechanisms for famine declaration;	Doctrinal legal analysis	Identifies structural gaps in legal frameworks for famine response. Provides

	international law	political considerations often override legal obligations.		theoretical foundation for examining Gaza's legal-political disjunction.
Maxwell (2019)	Famine early-warning systems in conflict settings	Technical famine assessments often fail to trigger timely political responses due to institutional and political barriers.	Case-study analysis	Highlights disconnect between early-warning data and policy action; contextualizes IPC's technical limitations in conflict zones.
Whyte (2024)	Weaponization of starvation in Gaza	Documents intentional use of starvation as a method of warfare, exposing accountability gaps.	Legal & policy analysis	Demonstrates enforcement failures in prohibiting starvation under IHL; directly relevant to Gaza's accountability mechanisms.
Howe et al. (2025)	Famine-prevention frameworks	Proposes multi-level prevention models but notes political barriers to implementation.	Conceptual framework development	Identifies need for automatic, binding triggers between technical famine thresholds and legal responses; informs reform proposals.
Devereux (2024)	Famine determination in Gaza 2024	Questions why famine was not declared earlier despite meeting technical criteria.	Empirical data analysis	Highlights political influences on famine recognition; provides temporal comparison with 2025 IPC findings.
Tezanos-Vázquez (2025)	Causes of 21st-century famines	Modern famines arise primarily from political decisions	Systematic literature review	Supports analysis of political instrumentalization in Gaza; underscores role

		rather than natural causes.		of deliberate policy.
Nwotite (2023)	International humanitarian law on starvation	Explores positive duties of conflict parties to prevent starvation under IHL (esp. GC IV Art. 55).	Doctrinal legal analysis	Provides legal basis for obligations of occupying powers; anchors Gaza analysis in binding humanitarian norms.
Mados (2025)	Comparative famine declaration (South Sudan vs Yemen)	Political factors determine famine-declaration outcomes more than technical evidence.	Comparative case-study	Demonstrates global pattern of political override; offers comparative lens for Gaza.
Muratoglu & Wassar (2024)	Water security & conflict in Palestine	Shows how resource control and infrastructure targeting become tools of coercion.	Case-study analysis	Highlights multidimensional siege dynamics restricting humanitarian access; contextualizes famine conditions.
Parra-López & Hassoun (2025)	Food-system collapse leading to famine in Gaza	Traces systemic erosion of Gaza's food production and import networks due to blockade policies.	Empirical case study	Documents progressive collapse of food security; supports longitudinal dimension of current crisis.
Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Global Initiative (2025)	Famine Review Committee Report: Gaza Strip	Officially confirms famine (IPC Phase 5) in Gaza Governorate—the first in Middle East; two thresholds conclusively met (food consumption &	Field surveys + multi-agency consensus review	Reveals precise technical verification; however, IPC lacks authority to convert findings into legally binding declaration. Core empirical basis for present study.

		acute malnutrition); credible evidence for mortality > 2/10 000 per day.		
World Health Organization (WHO) (2025)	Famine Confirmed for First Time in Gaza	Confirms IPC results; reports GAM 12.7–19.9 %, > 15 000 children screened, severe cases tripled monthly.	Epidemiologic al assessment / situation reporting	Strengthens empirical reliability of famine data; exposes lag between health-evidence validation and legal acknowledgment.
Civil Protection & Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) (2025)	Special Snapshot: Acute Food Insecurity & Malnutrition, Jul–Sep 2025	Maps 25 % of Gaza population in IPC Phase 5 (Famine); identifies severe constraints on food access and aid delivery.	Quantitative situation analysis	Confirms scale & geographic spread of famine; underlines data verification challenges due to access restrictions.
FEWS NET (2025)	Gaza Alert: Food Insecurity and Famine Conditions	Warns that mortality likely exceeds famine thresholds; attributes drivers to siege & market collapse.	Early-warning bulletin	Reinforces IPC conclusions; highlights predictive and surveillance value but absence of legal follow-through.
Oxfam (2025)	Humanitarian Access in Gaza Severely Limited	Notes obstruction of aid convoys and fuel bans; connects political control to worsening famine outcomes.	NGO field reporting	Illustrates practical barriers translating technical alerts into response; validates “access gap” in famine governance.
International Rescue	All Famine Thresholds	Confirms surpassing of	Rapid assessment /	Adds NGO confirmation of

Committee (IRC) (2025)	Now Surpassed in Gaza City	all IPC benchmarks; urges Israel to allow immediate humanitarian access.	policy advocacy	famine status; stresses moral & legal obligation for response.
United Nations (2025, July & Aug)	UN News reports on Gaza humanitarian crisis and famine confirmation	Declares famine “a moral indictment”; notes collapse of food & health systems; calls for accountability under IHL.	Policy communication / UN agency synthesis	Reinforces institutional consensus but exposes absence of automatic legal enforcement.
Al Jazeera (2025)	Israel Rejects Gaza Famine Classification	Reports Israeli government denial of IPC results, alleging bias and data manipulation.	Investigative journalism	Illustrates political contestation of technical data; evidences politicization of famine recognition.
National Public Radio (NPR) (2025)	Despite Evidence, No Legal Declaration of Famine in Gaza	Highlights that no binding famine declaration was issued despite IPC findings; critiques international legal vacuum.	Analytical news reporting	Demonstrates procedural gap between technical verification and legal accountability.
Science (2025)	International Hunger Watchdog Faces Political Attacks	Documents political pressure on IPC institutions; questions data-integrity accusations.	Investigative science journalism	Supports analysis of political interference in technical famine governance.
Foundation for Defense of Democracies	Global Food Insecurity Scale Eased to Declare	Critiques methodology behind IPC classification, alleging	Policy commentary	Illustrates contestation narratives; useful for assessing epistemic

(FDD) (2025)	Famine in Gaza	threshold manipulation.		legitimacy disputes.
ReliefWeb (2025)	Gaza Humanitarian Response Update	Aggregates UN & NGO data showing 1.07 million in Phase 4 and 500 000 in Phase 5.	Secondary data synthesis	Corroborates population impact scale; reinforces quantitative credibility of IPC results.
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (n.d.)	Rule 53: Starvation and Access to Relief	Codifies prohibition of starvation as a method of war and duty to allow humanitarian relief.	Legal-doctrinal compilation	Supplies binding IHL reference; normative baseline for Gaza famine accountability.
Crowe (2020)	Conflict, Hunger & International Humanitarian Law: A Practitioner's Handbook	Summarizes legal obligations to ensure access to food and medical relief in occupied territories.	Applied legal handbook	

Table 1 indicates that recent evidence has conclusively reached levels of famine in Gaza with IPC (2025) and WHO (2025) and ECHO (2025) indicating the acute rates of malnutrition of over 15 percent and mortality rates of over two death per 10,000 people per day that resulted in the formal declaration of famine. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing legal vacuum, which is indicated by NPR (2025) and the Rule 53 of the ICRC that do not dictate the legal declaration of famine though such technical validation is already implemented. The politicization of famine information can be observed in the report of the Al Jazeera (2025), Science (2025), the foundation of defense of democracies (2025) reporting, which all state the governments weaponize or deny the existence of the famine to achieve their political aims. In the meantime, access and verification techniques are not eliminated, and Oxfam (2025) and FEWS NET (2025) highlight drastic measures that still act as a barrier to the humanitarian monitoring process and response. Lastly, the normative-procedural disjunction is still all too evident: although the international humanitarian law provides distinct responsibilities to prevent starvation and provide access to relief introduction, as it is pointed out by Crowe (2020) and the Rule 53 that has been incorporated by the ICRC, such responsibilities, in fact, are not sufficiently fulfilled, in reality--which echoes the main point of this paper: the famine declaration process, in

fact, is structurally constrained by the lack of political, as opposed to technical and legal, limitations.

IPC Verification on Famine Thresholds in Gaza (August 2025)

In August 2025 the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system (IPC) system officially declared a famine condition (IPC Phase 5) in the Gaza Governorate, the first official famine classification in the Middle East region (IPC Global Initiative, 2025; WHO, 2025).

Two out of the three critical famine indicators were met decisively and there were plausible reasons to believe that the third one had also been achieved, although verification could not be easily done.

Specific Criteria Met

Food Consumption Shortages

The IPC reported harsh food consumption shortages throughout Gaza. By July 2025 the number of the households in severe hunger had increased by more than twice what it was in May and in Gaza City, the number increased by three times.

More than 39 per cent of the candidates said that they had gone a whole day without eating, most adults said they had missed meals to feed their children (IPC Global Initiative, 2025), Table 2.

Table 2 Indicators of Food Consumption Shortages in Gaza (May–July 2025)

Indicator	Observation	Source
Households reporting very severe hunger	Doubled between May–July 2025	IPC Global Initiative (2025)
Gaza City households with severe hunger	Increased threefold	IPC Global Initiative (2025)
Population reporting days without food	39%	IPC Global Initiative (2025)
Adults skipping meals for children	Widespread	IPC Global Initiative (2025)

Acute Malnutrition Thresholds

Acute malnutrition among children under five exceeded the critical IPC threshold of 15%. Screening of over 15,000 children revealed Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates between 12.7–19.9%, based on mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurements. Admissions for malnutrition at treatment centers increased fourfold between May and July 2025, and severe acute malnutrition cases tripled monthly (IPC Global Initiative, 2025), shown below in table 3.

Table 3 Acute Malnutrition Levels Among Children Under Five in Gaza, May–July 2025

Parameter	Finding	IPC Threshold	Source
Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM)	12.7–19.9%	≥15% (critical)	IPC Global Initiative (2025)
Children examined	>15,000	—	IPC Global Initiative (2025)
Malnutrition-related admissions	↑ 4× (May–July 2025)	—	IPC Global Initiative (2025)
Severe acute malnutrition	↑ 3× per month	—	IPC Global Initiative (2025)

Mortality Evidence

Mortality data were difficult to verify due to damaged health infrastructure. However, the IPC Famine Review Committee found reasonable evidence that mortality rates exceeded 2 deaths per 10,000 people per day the famine threshold. Reports indicated widespread starvation, malnutrition, and disease, all contributing to higher mortality (IPC Global Initiative, 2025), depicted in table 4.

Table 4 Mortality Evidence and Verification Challenges During the Gaza Famine, 2025

Indicator	Observation	Threshold	Source
Crude death rate	>2 deaths/10,000/day	≥2 deaths/10,000/day	IPC Global Initiative (2025)
Data verification	Limited due to conflict	—	IPC Global Initiative (2025)

Population Impact Scale

The IPC analysis showed an extensive humanitarian crisis across Gaza as shown in table 5.

Table 5 Population Impact Scale of Food Insecurity in Gaza (IPC Phases 3–5)

IPC Phase	Population (approx.)	% of Gaza Population	Description
Phase 5 (Famine)	500,000	25%	Experiencing famine conditions
Phase 4 (Emergency)	1.07 million	54%	Severe food insecurity
Phase 3 (Crisis)	396,000	20%	Significant livelihood stress

By June 2026, an estimated 132,000 children aged 6–59 months are expected to experience acute malnutrition, including 41,000 severe cases (IPC Global Initiative, 2025).

Lack of Legal Recognition

Despite meeting all famine indicators, no formal legal declaration of famine was made by relevant authorities. This exposed a gap between technical validation and legal recognition, leaving the crisis without binding international accountability mechanisms.

Procedural Gaps Identified

The procedural gaps and Table 6 International Legal and Institutional Responses to the famine are summarized in table 6 and 7.

Table 6 Procedural Gaps Identified in Famine Declaration Processes

Issue	Description	Source
Absence of Binding Mechanisms	International law lacks mandatory procedures requiring famine declaration even when IPC benchmarks are met.	NPR (2025); UN News (2025)
Political Contestation of Data	Israeli authorities rejected IPC findings as “biased,” alleging inflated figures for political purposes.	Al Jazeera (2025); UN News (2025)
Restricted Data Access	Ongoing conflict and limited humanitarian access prevented full verification, especially in northern Gaza.	IPC Global Initiative (2025); Oxfam (2025)

Table 7 International Legal and Institutional Responses to the Gaza Famine, 2025

Actor	Position / Response	Source
UN Agencies (FAO, WFP, UNICEF, WHO)	Approved IPC results; called famine a “man-made disaster.”	UN News (2025)
UN Secretary-General	Described the famine as “a moral indictment.”	UN News (2025)
International Criminal Court (ICC)	Issued arrest warrants for Israeli officials on charges including starvation as a war crime.	UN News (2025)
Geneva Convention Obligations	Article 55 requires occupying powers to ensure essential supplies; restrictions on humanitarian access breached this duty.	Crowe (2020); UN News (2025)

Technical–Legal Disconnection

The Gaza famine identifies a structural atypicality between technical evaluation of famine and legal or political acknowledgment.

Although the IPC results proved the conditions of famine with sufficient evidence, they did not initiate automatic legal processes and implementing response mechanisms..

Political and Institutional Constraints

The IPC, with all its professionalism and universally recognized methodology, has no legal means of accepting famines or imposing compliance.

Its categories are considered as advocacy resources that need to be achieved politically by a state or other world governments (IPC Global Initiative, 2025).

Political Instrumentalization

Literature synthesis suggests that there are political manipulations in famine verification. Limits on gathering information, debate over the results, and political diplomacies enabled political forces to postpone or obstruct famine declarations, despite overwhelming technical indicators (Al Jazeera, 2025; UN News, 2025). The famine in Gaza in 2025 shows that the existing international law has no functional machinery to convert the known cases of famine to legally enforce pronouncements. This loophole can be abused by politics and limited responsibility to humanitarian issues even when objective facts can declare disastrous situations..

Discussion

The famine in Gaza in 2025 shows the ever-increasing distance between official technical evidence and legal/political acknowledgment of humanitarian crises. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC Global Initiative, 2025) and other supporting agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) and the European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO, 2025) affirmed that Gaza passed all famine indicators like acute malnutrition going above 15 percent, crude mortality passing more than 2 deaths per 10,000 people per day, as well as severe food-consumption deficits believed to have affected approximately a quarter of the population. Nevertheless, both the scientific validation and no justifiable legal declaration afterward ensued, revealing structural vulnerabilities in the international system of famine-governance (NPR, 2025; ICRC, n.d.).

This legal vacuum has persisted because, similar to what Kulamadayil (2024) terms as global starvation governance, all accountability is still divided across humanitarian, legal, and political governance. The international humanitarian law, especially the 55th article of the Fourth Geneva Convention defines the duty of occupying powers to provide vital provisions (Crowe, 2020; Nwotite, 2023). Nevertheless, it is always the obligation to geopolitical interests that takes precedence over the realization of these obligations as it is highlighted by Ridha (2025) and Zulfikar et al. (2025). The limited aid corridors in Gaza, bombing infrastructure, and market crash caused by blockades all turned food shortage into a form of planned deprivation (BBC News, 2025; Muratoglu & Wassar, 2024). This

kind of policy is in line with the argument by Whyte (2024), who states that starvation as a weapon of warfare has been developed into that weapon- an act amounting to gross violation of international law.

Through facts, it has been highlighted that the humanitarian disaster in Gaza is vastly man-made. In July-September of 2025, the IPC forecasted that more than 500,000 individuals were in the conditions of famine and 1.07 million in food emergency (ECHO, 2025). Oxfam (2025) and the International Rescue Committee (2025) reported a high level of constraints on relief operations and fuel shipments, whereas FEWS NET (2025) affirmed the existence of mortality exceeding the levels of famine. Neither established a protocol to declare famine, the famine was denounced by the United Nations (2025) and the UK Government, (2025), as a moral outrage but gave it room to be delayed and unevenly responded to. According to Maxwell (2019) and Howe et al. (2025), early-warning data is not often converted into the process of taking political action unless a binding procedural trigger is present.

The Gaza case is the best example of the so-called legal-political filter through which humanitarian information should transit itself and go unnoticed before being recognized (Science, 2025; Foundation for Defense of Democracies [FDD], 2025). The politicization of the famine classification can be best illustrated by the way Israel dismissed the IPC report as being a biased one (Al Jazeera, 2025). The contestation means not only that technical bodies lose credibility but also that suffering is further prolonged by postponing life saving interventions. Bourdim (2025) and Faris et al. (2025) argue that the years-long blockade in Gaza has destroyed agricultural production and the family livelihood, transforming an ordeal of food insecurity into a famine.

Relative to this, Mados (2025) found that political factors are more dominant than technical norms in proclamation of famines across the globe- a trend that is replicated in Gaza. Tezanos-Vazquez (2025) also notes that famines in the twenty-first century are more of a result of political failures than of natural disasters. Similar conclusions were reached by Devereux (2024) who found Gaza to be in famine conditions as early as 2024, yet refusal to admit it was a sign of institutional inertia and diplomatic caution. These two interpretations have led to the intersect point wherein the recognition of famine is still a choice of politics and not a responsibility of law.

As a measure to solve these systemic failures, researchers and humanitarian actors are now calling on the mechanism of automatic, legally binding triggers upon reaching IPC Phase 5 thresholds (European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, 2025; UN News, 2025). Integrating IPC into the international humanitarian law may force prompt action; political interface famine statements; and enhance accountability frameworks. Further inaction as stated by ABC News (2025) and UN News (2025) is a failure of humanity per se. The Gaza famine should not only provide the evidence of disastrous hunger but rather like a cry of reform to bridge the gap between scientific validation, lawful enforcement, and moral obligation..

Humanitarian Response and Policy

The Gaza famine highlights the terrible humanitarian and policy implications of the legal vacuum of the continuing famine declarations. Although the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) verification showed that the country achieved Phase 5 famine in 2025, the lack of an established international legal system to automatically confirm the state of famine has made it difficult to launch life-saving measures and mobilize resources (IPC Global Initiative, 2025; WHO, 2025). That lack of congruence between the technical evidence and the legal acknowledgment has put humanitarian actors in a state of uncertainty, where judgement and discretion should be taken into account instead of objective evaluation (NPR, 2025; UN News, 2025).

One of the implications of this gap is the disruption of the timely deployment of humanitarian. Even though the situation of famine among more than half a million people was confirmed by IPC, WHO, and European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (2025), the state or international authorities did not recognize the problem early enough, which resulted in a decrease in the access to aid and a lack of funds. According to the World Food Programme (2025), an insignificant part of the necessary food supplies was delivered to the population because of border closures and fuel limitation. Instead, political barriers to humanitarian response arose, which were not due to logistical or technical limitations but the actual barriers (Oxfam, 2025; IRC, 2025).

The case of Gaza shows how the mechanisms of famine response can still be reactive and are influenced by concerns of politics and not science. Although globally recognized, IPC is a technical advisory tool, which lacks juridical power (ECHO, 2025). States and donor organizations have the potential to put off or undercut response efforts at the expense of geopolitical benefit without a required legal trigger (Al Jazeera, 2025; BBC News, 2025). It is this discrepancy, which signifies what Kulamadayil (2024) defines as the phenomenon of government fragmentation, that scientific assessment mechanisms and international humanitarian law exist in parallel, but not intertwined structures.

Moreover, Gaza also shows that recognition of famine is usually limited by the conflicts and sovereignty dilemma. Borders and humanitarian corridors have become politicized and leveraged to control the flow of aid, which supports structural deprivation (Muratoglu & Wassar, 2024; Bourdim, 2025). This form of politicization replaces famine as a humanitarian crisis free of political connotations into a political diagnosis that undermines accountability. The failure of the international community to depoliticize the classification of famine is an indication of a larger trend worldwide and a fact that the most severe emergencies go unrecognized until the time when the death becomes a fact of life (Tezanos-Vazquez, 2025).

Famine identification should be enshrined in enforceable humanitarian systems that would associate IPC thresholds with legal requirements in order to avoid delays in the future. Humanitarian access can not be conditional, as the United Nations (2025) and European Commission (2025) underline, and requires the support of sides in a conflict. Rather, unbiased international tools should have the mandate to effect intervention when

technological signs affirms the presence of famine. The Gaza famine, therefore, serves as a warning case, that is, showing that in the absence of legal frameworks that are legally binding, even the most advanced early-warning systems cannot save vulnerable groups.

Recommendations

The missing link between the technical evidence that has been established through verification and the enforcement of legal action needs a thorough procedural as well as institutional reform. First, the international humanitarian law has to include binding protocols of famine- declarations that would force a response when IPC Phase 5 levels are reached (Howe et al., 2025). They must be enshrined under the resolutions of UN Security Council or international treaties to remove political interventions and promote the mobilization of assistance in time (Crowe, 2020; ICRC, n.d.).

Second, the plausibility of famine announcements may also be increased with the means of independent verification under the control of the UN. Creating a multidisciplinary team of legal researchers, humanitarian researchers, and data scientists would make the process more transparent and objective (European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, 2025). Low access to data and politicization of findings in Gaza highlight the importance of autonomous monitoring infrastructure that have remote sensing and field validation options (FEWS NET, 2025).

Third, impartiality in famine monitoring and pronouncement activities is dominant. Technical institutions like the IPC and WHO need to be made apolitical by the international bodies (Science, 2025). Evidence based, neutral statements on famine can help bring confidence back to humanitarian rule and keep them off the agenda as instruments of political influence.

Fourth, it is important to enhance the accountabilities of the occupying powers. According to the Geneva Convention IV, Article 55, states which occupied particular territories ought to guarantee the right to access vital food and medical supplies (Nwotite, 2023; Crowe, 2020). Imposing such obligations via the International Criminal Court--as the 2025 war crime related to starvation crimes in Gaza attempted to do (UN News, 2025) would increase precedence on accountability.

Lastly, early-warning and data infrastructure have to be invested in. Earlier amassing of famine tendencies and quicker reaction would be enabled by building up local monitoring networks and integrating satellite-based analytics with encouraging open data exchange among humanitarian stakeholders (World Health Organization-Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, 2024). Together, these steps would change famine recognition off a politicized judgment to a rights-based and rule-governed process.

Conclusion

The Gaza famine highlights a systemic flaw in global humanitarian governance, despite evidence from the IPC, WHO, and FAO confirming famine thresholds. Political reluctance and legal ambiguity hindered formal recognition, delaying critical interventions. This underscores the need to integrate technical classification systems within enforceable

international law frameworks, ensuring humanitarian access remains restricted and accountability diffused, and promoting proactive protection.

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