



EXPLAINED: ISRAEL'S DEREGISTRATION OF INTERNATIONAL NGOS AND THE BROADER HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GAZA

Larry Garber, Policy Fellow

Liam Hamama, Policy Assistant

January 22, 2026

Overview: The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has improved significantly since the October ceasefire, but challenges remain. The massive destruction of critical infrastructure and agricultural production, alongside two years of limited access to food, water, and medicine, will affect Gaza's population for years to come. Among the notable humanitarian challenges facing Gaza's civilians are the following:

- The denial of registration to international NGOs that provide life-saving services inside Gaza,
- Restrictions on the import of goods necessary for adequate shelter, and
- Additional operational restrictions that have been imposed on UNRWA, the largest provider of services to the population.

Why is Israel deregistering international NGOs in Gaza?

In March 2025, Israel introduced [new registration requirements](#) for international NGOs (INGOs) and transferred authority over the registration process to the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, which has taken a hardline stance towards INGOs. The new rules require INGOs to provide sensitive personal data on Palestinian staff to the Israeli government, including names, ID numbers, and, in some cases, residential addresses. Israel [argues](#) this information is necessary to ensure aid organizations are not infiltrated by Hamas or other militant groups. The requirements also authorize the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs to deny registration to any INGO deemed to be "delegitimizing" the state of Israel – referring to [ideological criticisms](#) of Israel, such as the accusation of genocide or deliberate use of siege tactics, or expressions of support for legal proceedings against Israelis in foreign or international courts.

In late December 2025, the Israeli government began enforcing the new requirements, [approving](#) the registration of 24 INGOs, mostly faith-based organizations, while [informing](#) 37 non-compliant INGOs – including such major humanitarian actors as Doctors Without Borders, International Rescue Committee, and Mercy Corps – that their authorization to operate in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem had expired, and that they must cease their operations by March 1, 2026 unless they comply with the new terms. Several other organizations, including [Save the Children](#), had their applications formally rejected but continue to operate in Gaza.

According to the Israeli government, the 37 non-compliant INGOs failed to complete their applications by refusing to submit complete lists of their Palestinian employees. Most INGOs have objected to this requirement, noting several key objections:

- **Israel has not articulated the specific purposes for which the staff lists will be used.** In a conflict in which [over 500](#) humanitarian workers have been killed, the INGOs believe that handing over their staff lists without agreed-upon parameters for their use would **violate their duty of care to their local staff**. The INGOs propose that Israel

commit to notifying them of any adverse information regarding an employee, which would allow the INGO to dismiss the employee, rather than using the information to target the individual or members of their family.

- **Out of thousands of INGO employees in Gaza, Israel has accused only a handful of militant ties – for example, [just two](#) out of Doctors Without Borders' 1,000 Gaza staff** – and has not substantiated claims of systematic infiltration that would compromise humanitarian operations. In fact, the INGOs assert that due to the humanitarian principle of neutrality, if militants ever tried to infiltrate or co-opt their operations, they would be immediately dismissed.
- **Many of the large international NGOs already have their own extensive vetting processes**, as they appreciate the operational and reputational consequences of hiring individuals affiliated with militant groups.
- **The requirement to provide lists of Palestinian employees is not being uniformly applied**, as several approved INGOs were only asked to provide information about senior Palestinian employees.

Some international organizations have sought to work out compromises with the Israeli authorities, seeking to limit the number of employees for whom personal information is provided and to outline an explicitly defined vetting process, or to rely on third-party vetting and the establishment of donor-audited compliance mechanisms. To date, the Israeli government has declined to engage in substantive discussions that would alter the requirements.

What will be the impact of deregistering these INGOs?

The [Israeli government](#) is refusing to make any adjustments to its requirements and is seeking to minimize the negative consequences of the deregistration by propagating two myths:

Myth #1: The services provided by INGOs are [negligible](#), as they only bring one percent of aid into Gaza, and so their ceasing to operate will not have a significant impact on the ground.

Reality: INGOs deliver and provide a [substantial](#) share of life-saving aid *inside* Gaza, including:

- The delivery of more than half of food aid
- Supporting 60 percent of field hospitals
- Providing nearly 75 percent of shelter assistance
- Providing all treatment for children with severe acute malnutrition.

Once an aid truck enters Gaza, the contents need to be delivered to a warehouse or distribution point, and humanitarian services themselves must be provided to the most vulnerable populations. The delivery and provision of humanitarian aid requires specialized and technical personnel, as well as deep community trust and integration, which INGOs and their personnel have built up over many years. For example, [Doctors Without Borders](#) is the second largest medical provider in the Strip, running or supporting over 20 percent of the remaining hospital beds in Gaza, and delivering one in three childbirths. Forcing these organizations to cease their operations, therefore, will worsen the humanitarian crisis in Gaza severely.

Myth #2: The services provided by the INGOs can be [readily replaced](#) by private contractors.

Reality: Replacing humanitarian organizations with private contractors was the logic behind the failed effort of the [Gaza Humanitarian Foundation](#), which resulted in hundreds of Palestinian civilian casualties and was ultimately scrapped once the ceasefire went into effect. In a complex security environment such as Gaza, where the population so desperately needs humanitarian relief at scale across multiple sectors, providing aid requires technical expertise, local relationships based on trust and community acceptance, and a public perception of neutrality.

The 37 affected organizations are currently reviewing their legal options, seeking diplomatic support (including from the US), and developing contingency plans for maintaining operations to the extent possible after March 1, even without registration. However, such efforts would be complicated and perhaps impossible as the organizations would lose access to functions that are crucial for their services, including:

- Deconfliction channels with the Israelis that allow them to operate safely inside Gaza
- Transferring goods into Gaza through Israeli-controlled border crossings
- Obtaining visas for their foreign staff who seek to enter Gaza (or even the West Bank)
- Transferring funds to local staff for salary and to purchase goods in local markets (given Israel's ability to cut off bank transfers through Palestinian banks)

Is enough aid entering Gaza? If yes, then why are things still so bad?

Since the October 11, 2025, ceasefire, the quantity of goods entering the Gaza Strip has increased dramatically. According to the [United Nations monitoring mechanism](#), the average number of trucks entering Gaza has increased at least threefold compared to the period before the ceasefire. Food trucks account for two-thirds of the commodities transferred into Gaza during the post-ceasefire period, with trucks carrying shelter and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) accounting for most of the rest.

The January 2 [UN Gaza Humanitarian Response Report](#) states that for the first time since October 2023, food assistance has been meeting 100 percent of caloric needs for Gaza's population. As a result, concerns about widespread famine have diminished. Still, there are pockets of food insecurity in sections of the Strip, particularly for the most vulnerable. Notably, the consequences of the reduced food intake over an extended period of time will take months if not years to reverse.

Despite significant improvements in food security and the quantity of aid entering, there have been significant challenges in ensuring the entry of other forms of essential aid:

- **Fuel**, which is essential for electric power and to run major infrastructure installations (e.g., desalination and waste treatment plants), is in short supply and expensive.
- **Medicines** for the treatment of chronic diseases are also not readily available for those who need them on a regular basis.
- Most problematic is the **lack of adequate shelter**. Close to [two million people](#) remain displaced, living in tent cities across the Strip. Israeli [restrictions](#) on "dual-use" items

mean that the metal rods required to build tents that can withstand storm conditions are not allowed into the Strip. As a result, tents have [failed](#) to protect refugees from flooding on multiple occasions, resulting in at least 20 Palestinians dying from [drowning](#) and [extreme cold](#) since the ceasefire started.

What is the impact of the new anti-UNRWA legislation on Gaza and the West Bank?

Israel's continued assault on UNRWA's ability to operate in Gaza and the West Bank has included:

- [A ban](#) on UNRWA from operating in Israeli territory,
- [Prohibiting](#) Israeli authorities from having any contact with the agency, and
- [Legislation](#) prohibiting the provision of electricity or water to facilities owned by or operated on behalf of UNRWA.

Despite the existing legal obstacles, UNRWA continues to operate.

- It employs [more than 15,000](#) Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank,
- [Remains](#) the largest provider of health and education services in Gaza, and
- Maintains active programs throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

UNRWA believes that the legislation applies only to territory Israel defines as sovereign, so while it will most certainly impact its operations in East Jerusalem – already resulting in the [demolition](#) of its headquarters and the likely further closure of offices and schools – its impact in Gaza and the West Bank is less clear.

In December 2025, the United Nations renewed UNRWA's [mandate](#) for the next three years, with the overwhelming majority of member states voting in favor of the renewal. However, the organization is facing a severe financial crunch; on January 5, 2026, it [announced](#) the dismissal of 571 employees in Gaza, and additional cuts are anticipated.

What is going on with the Rafah crossing?

The Rafah crossing served as a transit point between Gaza and Egypt until October 2023. Following October 7, access through Rafah was highly restricted, and the Israeli military seized the crossing in May 2024. Since then, except for a short period during the early 2025 ceasefire, neither people nor goods have been able to cross through Rafah.

Nickolay Mladenov, the Board of Peace's High Representative for Gaza, has [announced](#) that the crossing will open next week, as per [Point 8](#) of the October ceasefire plan. This remains subject to approval by hardliners in Israel's security cabinet, and it remains unclear what the monitoring protocol will be for the crossing.

Still, opening the crossing is likely to allow for some relief, including:

- Allowing many Palestinians to leave Gaza, while also enabling some who have been stuck outside of Gaza since October 7 to return.

- The entry of UN and INGO international staff who are prohibited from entering through Israel.

Despite this relief, if Israel continues to insist that humanitarian goods enter only through Israeli crossings (primarily nearby Kerem Shalom), the opening of the crossing by itself will not dramatically transform the humanitarian situation.