

Middle East

In Gaza, March has begun just like February has ended – with death and destruction

by Karin Leukefeld*



Karin Leukefeld
(Photo ma)

CH-S) Karin Leukefeld – one of the few independent Western journalists in the region – describes the inhumane situation in Gaza in precise words. She repeatedly gives the floor to directly affected civilians whom she knows personally. Her report from the beginning of March is stirring and extremely informative.

On the morning of 1 March, the media is abuzz with the “flour massacre”, during which more than 100 people attempting to receive relief supplies and flour were killed the night before. The Israeli military opened fire. They claim to have fired only a few shots. The people trampled each other to death.

On 2 March, missiles fired by an Israeli drone destroyed a tent shelter not far from the *Emirati Hospital* in Rafah. Eleven people who had sought refuge in the tents were killed. Video footage shows the dead and seriously injured lying on the street. Blood can be seen everywhere. A boy who recognized one of the victims and runs towards the dead man is hugged by another man and taken away. The hospital glass broke after a powerful explosion, says an eyewitness into a camera. Fire had broken out. Hundreds of people have taken refuge in the Emirati hospital.

The following night on 3 March, Israeli air strikes were carried out on residential buildings

in Rafah. In the house of the Abu Anza family, 14 people were killed. 6 children and 4 women were among the dead, according to Dr. *Marwan al-Hams* from a nearby hospital. That night, *Rania Abu Anza* lost her husband and her twins, who were only four months old. The couple had waited ten years in vain for a child. The birth of the twins – *Naeim*, the boy, and *Wissam*, the girl – had only become possible after the couple had opted for artificial in-vitro fertilisation. “What have these babies done?” asks the mother to the cameras recording her suffering. “Answer me, people, answer me! You feel nothing for us. What are you doing here? Watching us?”

A short time later, the footage shows an angry man standing next to the dead wrapped in shrouds. “On Judgement Day, these children will be your enemies,” he shouts. “That goes for everyone, you Arab leaders, they will be your enemies. May God avenge us on you.”

In mid-February, after a long interruption, the father of the family wrote again from Gaza. His letter was dated Monday, 12 February, 6:20 in the morning.

The night was very restless. The whole time we heard the sounds of IL. Attacks and explosions. (When he writes IL, he means “Israeli”, kl). So, most of us hardly slept ... and then we heard on the news what was going on. Rafah was bombed and two IL hostages were freed as part of an IL operation in Rafah. Many Palestinian civilians were killed ... Mostly women and children ... Are we just collateral damage? Are we as human beings worth less than the people next door or than the Ukrainians!!!! Is our blood so tasty that the vampires always want to drink it ... Is our blood addictive? I always get a stomachache and then the tears run down my face ... When I see the pictures of injured or murdered children ... My soul is not doing well at all ... I am depressed and melancholy ... I am angry, upset, disappointed, sad, and very angry ... and I keep asking myself WHY?

Is there a comprehensible justification or reason? Or to put it another way, can such events be justified? According to international figures, 81 journalists have been killed in the war against Gaza so far. The highest number in a war in such a short time. Why? How come? What for? Who is responsible for this?

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I am against what happened on 7 October 2023. It should not have happened!!! But does it give the neighboring country the right to treat us like this? To call us terrorists, or animals? Can everything that IL has done to date be called the right to self-defense? What does international law say about this? Our religious beliefs teach us that we must die one day, and no one knows when his/her time will come. But there is a difference in how you die. Attack, hunger and thirst, accident, natural death etc? Of course, this does not mean that I put myself in danger and say that this is my fate ...

My 11-year-old daughter asked me why this is happening? Why are government leaders standing by and not forcing a stop to this insane "injustice"? I am stumped for an answer as I really don't know what I should/can/may/must say to her?

Another thought. The IL Minister of War talks about the future of IL, that it is his right and also his duty to wage this war. But what about my future and the future of my family? Why does he want to, why can he make this decision for us? Why? On what grounds? Why is IL allowed to do all this? The path of peace is the shortest path, but it is full of hurdles. That is what it is worth fighting."

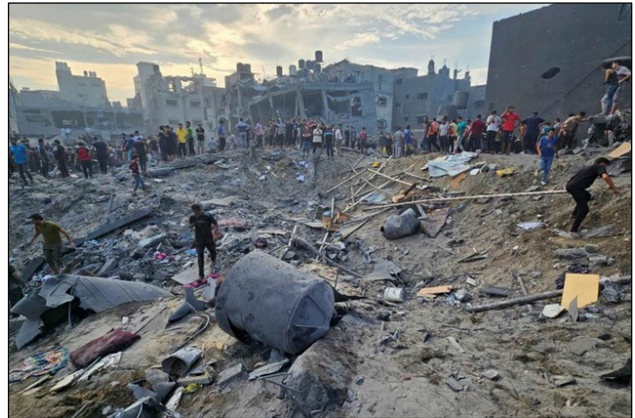
And another letter

On 22 February, the father of the family got in touch again. His letter begins with the words "Salam, Shalom – Peace".

"It was a very bad night, it was/is very dramatic. We almost had to leave our emergency shelters again. Many left their tents during the night and walked towards the UNRWA schools, a distance of 3 km. It is really, really, really bad, terrible, catastrophic, unbelievable, unbelievable what has been and is being done to us. And the (UN) Security Council has become a pawn of the USA. They always use their veto power, again and again. Yesterday, 13 countries were in favour of ending the war. Great Britain abstained and the USA? They say no, put a veto. The super-power USA is involved in the targeted murder of our innocent civilians, they are complicit in all the deaths. Every second we live with the fear of being hit. I will NEVER what these forget heads of government did. This is what makes me angry, desperate, sad, disappointed, and hopeless. Being at the mercy of others, helpless and defenseless. That's what finishes me off. Because the 2.5 million people here in the Gaza Strip don't deserve this. What are we to blame?"

Hunger as a weapon

The family father from Gaza writes about how often the USA uses its veto in the UN *Security Council*. In fact, the US abuses its veto in the UN



*Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza. Bombed twice in 24 hours.
(Picture NBC News, 31 October 2023)*

Security Council to give Israel a free hand in Gaza. Anyone who continues to support Israel in this war becomes complicit in Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians, says *Craig Mokhiber*, former director of the New York office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He resigned from his post in protest at the end of October. (*Globalbridge.ch* has reported extensively on Craig Mokhiber.¹ Ed.)

The long-standing UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Professor Emeritus of International Law (Princeton University), *Richard Falk*, says: "In Gaza, the West is enabling the most transparent genocide in human history."²

When my country commits genocide

On the morning of 25 February 25-year-old *Aron Bushnell*, an active-duty member of the U.S. Air Force, posted a video link to his *Facebook* page. "Many of us ask ourselves, what would I do if I had lived during the time of slavery? Or in the South during the time of Jim Crow (laws)? Or during apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?" The answer, according to Aaron Bushnell, is "You are doing it. Right now."

He sent a copy of his last will and testament to a friend and asked that his cat be given to a neighbour to take care of. At about 1 in the afternoon, Bushnell walked up to the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. Wearing his Air Force uniform, he turned on the livestream on his cell phone and introduced himself: "I am an active member of the United States Air Force and I no longer want to be involved in genocide. I'm going to do an extreme form of protest, but compared to what the people of Palestine are experiencing at the hands of their colonizers, it's not extreme at all."

Shortly afterwards, Bushnell stood in front of the gate of the Israeli embassy, poured petrol over himself and set himself alight. “Free Palestine” he shouted as he burned. “Free Palestine” until he fell to the ground. He died a few hours later in hospital.

In the German media, the protest against the US genocide in Gaza was barely worth a news item. The US broadcaster *Democracy Now* spoke about Aaron Bushnell with a friend of his and with *Ann Wright*, a retired U.S. Army colonel who is now active in Veterans for Peace and “Code Pink”.³

USA grants Israel a “license to kill”

The US blockade in the UN Security Council allows Israel to continue its slaughter in the Gaza Strip. Washington has vetoed draft resolutions for an immediate ceasefire three times and continues to supply weapons and ammunition to the Israeli armed forces unchecked. As does Germany.

Most recently, Washington presented a draft resolution calling for a “ceasefire as soon as possible” on the condition that the Israeli hostages in Gaza are released. Washington is giving Israel a “license to kill Palestinian civilians”, said Russian UN Ambassador *Vasily Nebenzya*, criticizing the draft resolution. According to Nebenzya, Washington wanted to turn the UN Security Council into a “protective umbrella” over the Israeli (military) operation in the coastal strip. He called on the other UN Security Council members not to support this “destructive approach”.

The debate in the UN Security Council took place on 27 February. Staff from the *World Food Programme* (WFP), the *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (OCHA) and the *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* (FAO) were invited to report to the Security Council on the extent of the impending famine in the Gaza Strip. They reported on destroyed bakeries and farms and on children having to eat grass and animal feed because their parents could not find any other food for them. All three UN employees called for an immediate ceasefire.

If nothing changes, there is a risk of famine in the northern Gaza Strip, warned the deputy director of the World Food Program (WFP). At least 576,000 people in the coastal strip are affected by “catastrophic deprivation and hunger”, added the Deputy Director of the UN Humanitarian Aid



14 March 2024. Israeli army bombs house in Al Bureij refugee camp, Gaza Deir al Balah. At least nine members of a family are killed, including five children. (Picture www.aljazeera.com)

Agency (OCHA). The FAO Deputy Director stated that the cessation of hostilities was the most important step towards eliminating the risk of famine. The “humanitarian space” must be restored so that life-saving aid and the restoration of basic supplies of water and electricity can be guaranteed.

Israel’s UN ambassador accused the UN of being responsible for the misery. Israel approves most requests for aid deliveries and there is “no limit” to the amount of aid for the population in Gaza, said the Israeli representative. “These are the facts, no one can say otherwise.” In Gaza, 20 bakeries were currently producing more than 2 million pita breads a day. Anyone claiming otherwise would be spreading Hamas’ lies and distracting attention from their own inability to distribute aid effectively. Israel is not stopping any trucks at the border, said the Israeli ambassador. The delays were the fault of the UN.

The Tunisian representative accused Israel of not allowing the trucks with aid to pass. Algeria’s representative accused Israel of using “hunger as a weapon of war”.

The committee broke up without reaching a decision.⁴

Attack on starving people

On the night of 28/29 February, a convoy under Israeli control was announced for a location southwest of Gaza City. Many people rushed to be there when the aid packages were distributed. But when the trucks arrived, the Israeli soldiers opened fire, as eyewitnesses who were treated in hospitals the next morning reported, being able to speak to journalists on the ground. “We were trying to get some flour, the Israeli army shot at us. There are so many dead, until

now we are still trying to get them out of there. There is no first aid."

"It was a crime," a man told the Palestinian news channel *Quds*. He had been waiting since the evening. When the trucks arrived at around 4.30 in the morning, the people ran towards them. Then Israeli tanks and warplanes fired on the people, the man said: "It was a trap."⁵

The Israeli army claimed to have fired "few shots". The soldiers had felt "threatened" by the people. Many had been "trampled to death" in the panic, others had been run over by the trucks, explained the spokesman for the Israeli armed forces, *Daniel Hagari*.⁶ Whatever happened exactly, 104 people were killed and had gunshot wounds, according to doctors in the surrounding hospitals.

Bombs and food rations

There was great international outrage and Israel must initiate a "comprehensive investigation" to clarify what happened, according to the German Foreign Minister *Annalena Baerbock*. She called for a humanitarian ceasefire. The US army announced that it would – like Jordan and Egypt – airdrop aid packages for the people. Humanitarian aid workers agreed that this aid would not help. Only aid convoys could bring the help that the people needed. However, this would require a ceasefire.

In order to help the people in Gaza, the US army has launched a large-scale aid operation for Gaza and dropped aid packages. 38,000 "Ready to Eat" food rations were dropped, according to a press release. One such meal is enough for one person for one day.

For the people of Gaza, one horror follows another. No safe place, continuous attacks by the Israeli armed forces, people with white flags being shot as well as people trying to get hold of a bag of flour or a package of humanitarian aid. Aid deliveries are held up at the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border crossings in the south of the Gaza Strip by obscure controls by the Israeli authorities. In addition, radical settlers are blocking the Kerem Shalom border crossing and the port of Ashdod in order to stop aid deliveries "to Hamas".⁷

In a report by the US news channel CNN, employees of international aid organisations report on the actions of the Israeli control authorities. According to the report, COGAT, the Israeli authority that monitors deliveries to the Gaza Strip,



(Picture Mohammed Abed, AFP)

acts arbitrarily and according to criteria that partly contradict those of other Israeli authorities – customs, police.⁸ Employees of aid organisations, who all spoke anonymously, presented the broadcaster with lists of goods that are not allowed through by the Israelis. They included anaesthetic medication and inhalers, oxygen cylinders, ventilators, and water purification systems. Dates, sleeping bags, cancer medication, water purification tablets and packages for expectant mothers with equipment for newborns and hygiene articles were also stopped. The list also includes walking aids, solar panels, generators, and wheelchairs.

The Israeli authority COGAT complained after the CNN report was broadcast. The statements made in the report were "untrue" and the report should not have been broadcast.

More than 9000 women killed in Palestine

Shortly before International Women's Day (March 8), *Hala Hanina*, a women's activist from Gaza, draws attention to the situation of women. The UN organisation for women UNFEM has presented a report according to which at least 9,000 women have been killed in Israeli attacks since 7 October 2023.⁹ According to UNFEM, the figure is incomplete. Many women and girls killed are still buried under the rubble. According to the report, an average of 63 women are killed every day, including 37 mothers who leave their children and families behind.

The organisation "Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor" reports on Palestinian women who were subjected to sexual violence, torture, inhumane treatment, strip searches and threats of rape in Israeli military detention. The threats and beatings came from male and female soldiers,¹⁰ who photographed them with their cell phones during the torture, the women reported.

In a short video on an Instagram channel, *Hala Hanina*, the young woman from Gaza, talks

about the women of Gaza and asks the feminists of the world if they could name just one of the women who have been killed in Gaza since October.¹¹ A million women and girls are experiencing unbearable suffering and violence, pregnant women have to give birth to their children by Caesarean section without anaesthetic, endure amputations without anaesthetic, they have become widows, their children have been killed in front of their eyes. Did the feminists know nothing about this and if they did, why wouldn't they do anything about it? "How can you call yourselves feminists?" asks Hala Hanina.

None of them cried out when the UN published its report on the torture of Palestinian women. "Women are forcibly undressed, sexually coerced, forced to be photographed without their consent, kept in cages, insulted and beaten," says Hanina. The perpetrators are also Israeli female soldiers. "They look so adorable when they take selfies with duck lips in front of the ruins of our houses. And they are so cruel."

According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, the number of Palestinians killed since 7 October 2023 has risen to 30,228 (as of 1 March 2024). According to the same source, the number of injured Palestinians is 71,377. *Al Jazeera* has compiled the names and faces of more than 140 Palestinians who were killed on each day of the Israeli blockade on Gaza.¹²

Addendum from 1.30 p.m.: A new letter from the father of the family in Gaza

"Mon, 03/04/2024 It's 7 am.

Good morning, dear friends,

The IL. Attacks continue with all severity against life in the Gaza Strip...

It does not stop. No end in sight. These IL. Attacks are killing us. We all live every second with the fear that we will be hit. And for the outside world, for the heads of government and presidents of the whole world, our lives are worth nothing. Otherwise, they would have long since campaigned for an end to the war. On the one hand, IL is supported militarily by the USA (and other countries too) and the USA uses its veto power in the UN Security Council to protect IL. And then food parcels are dropped on us from the air by US planes. As if they were worried about us.

There is an Arabic proverb: "First he kills him, then he attends the funeral" as if he had done nothing, as if he was innocent, as if he knew nothing. What should I call that? That's very macabre. That's hypocrisy!



Amidst the devastation in the Tal al-Hawa quarter in Gaza, 15-year-old Karim looks at his destroyed neighbourhood and clutches his cat. "I wouldn't leave Karaz behind in the rubble. She is my only friend now and I will take good care of her", he said. (Picture © UNICEF/UNI453264/El Baba)

Famine is threatening several hundred thousand people in the north of the Gaza Strip, including my whole extended family. And the world community is watching. It does nothing about it. No, it continues to support the perpetrators, otherwise a ceasefire would have been reached long ago.

Does this save human lives? Is this how our dignity is made inviolable? Is this how human rights, which are universal values for all people, are preserved? Please wake up! Injustice has reached its limits. And everything is happening under the eyes and ears of the whole world. Yet nothing serious is being done to force a stop to this madness. No one can and must say that he/she did not know. They are all complicit and will become accomplices if they do nothing about it. Everyone can do a lot. But it looks as if we are of no concern to you, and that you don't care about us.

Write to the politicians, call them, and demand an immediate ceasefire!

The American officer (pilot) who burned himself to death in front of the IL embassy in the USA in protest against the war in the Gaza Strip, he lost his life. I'm so sorry and I'm actually against it; he shouldn't have done that!

On the other hand, what a remarkable person he is, what courage he has! He sacrificed his life so that the Americans, the world population, would wake up. But the war against the civilian population continues with all its ferocity. There is still no end in sight. More than 30,000 people have been killed and around 10,000 are believed to be under the rubble and are missing. Over 70,000 have been injured. The majority are children and women. The number of explosives dropped on the Gaza Strip is equivalent to several nuclear bombs.

The International Court of Justice has already made a decision, but IL is also above the court and does not follow its orders. How many more people need to be murdered for the war to finally end? What else has to happen for the con-

science of the heads of government and presidents to wake up and end this war?

How about trying something different. Perhaps to dare more peace, perhaps to strive for an end to the occupation. How about a new beginning on an equal footing. With mutual respect and acceptance of each other. So that real peace can take place and justice can prevail. And so that everyone wins? Wouldn't that be worth a try?

I think this is the only way to resolve the conflict. Thank you. Salam and Shalom."

Source: <https://globalbridge.ch/der-maerz-in-gaza-beginnt-wie-der-februar-geendet-hat-mit-tod-und-zerstoerung/>, 4 March 2024

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ <https://globalbridge.ch/herr-hochkommissar-wir-haben-erneut-versagt/>

² <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/6184/In-Gaza,-the-west-is-enabling-the-most-transparent-genocide-in-human-history>

³ https://www.democracynow.org/2024/2/28/aaron_bushnell_self_immolation_gaza_protest

⁴ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/02/1146997>

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/29/dozens-killed-injured-by-israeli-fire-in-gaza-while-collecting-food-aid#:~:text=More%20than%20100%20Palestinians%20have,faces%20an%20unprecedented%20hunger%20crisis>

⁶ <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/israeli-military-review-of-gaza-aid-convoy-deaths-finds-most-killed-in-stampede/73293461>

⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/extremist-jewish-settlers-persist-in-attempt-to-block-humanitarian-aid-to-gaza/3128635>

⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/01/middleeast/gaza-aid-israel-restrictions-investigation-intl-cmd/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2024/03/press-release-9000-women-have-been-killed-in-gaza-since-early-october>

¹⁰ <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/6188/In-testimonies-to-Euro-Med-Monitor,-women-from-Gaza-report-being-subjected-to-sexual-violence,-torture-by-Israeli-forces>

¹¹ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C322f39N-JE/>

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5dyG811hbE>