

“The War on aid organizations”, Prof. Liat Kozma, Hebrew University, 28.8.2025

Introduction

Hello everyone, and welcome to *Eyes on Gaza*, our daily gathering that combines protest and learning. Today marks the conclusion of the tenth week of *Eyes on Gaza*—our fiftieth lecture. This milestone gives us a moment to pause, reflect, and once again express our gratitude to all the experts, activists, lawyers, journalists, and, above all, those who have shared their personal stories with us. We also want to thank you, our audience, who consistently and persistently gather here in these challenging times, insisting on looking directly, refusing to ignore, and striving to find ways to bring an end to the crisis. Today, we are joined by Prof. Liat Kuzma from the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University, where she also holds the Harry Friedenwald Chair in the History of Medicine. Together with Dr. Li Mordechai, she publishes a series of articles in *Sikha Mekomit* [“Local Conversation”], which I highly recommend reading on the *Bearing Witness* website (<https://www.mekomit.co.il/>). Liat will speak for eight minutes, after which we will have time for a brief discussion. If anyone wishes to ask a question, please write it in the chat, and I will read it to Liat. Liat, thank you very much for joining us. The stage is yours.

Lecture

Thank you for the invitation. I want to focus on a very specific issue: the war Israel has waged against aid organizations, which reached a peak on March 10, and whose effects will become clear in the coming weeks. In just under two weeks, on September 9, the deadline for re-registration of organizations operating in the occupied territories will expire. Within a few weeks, an unknown number of these organizations will no longer be allowed to operate in Gaza and the West Bank and will be required to withdraw their international staff. Even before the deadline, some organizations have already received notifications in recent weeks, informing them that they are no longer permitted to operate here and must immediately remove their international staff.

What is this procedure? On March 10, 2025, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism introduced a new rule requiring all organizations working in the occupied territories to re-register. Existing registrations were canceled and made temporary for six months. Organizations must now re-register or lose the right to operate between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. Registration requires submitting a list of objectives, operational methods, donors, employees, and affiliated organizations. The published criteria—which can be checked on the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs website—stipulate that neither the organization, its employees, nor its donors may engage in delegitimizing Israel, including calls for a boycott, denying Israel’s status as a Jewish and democratic state, or providing information that could lead to legal actions against Israelis abroad or in international courts over IDF operations. In short, this rule prevents international organizations operating within international law from working in Israel if they report violations of international law.

Israel tested it first in fall 2024: after 99 doctors wrote to President Joe Biden describing the state of Gaza’s healthcare system, six organizations had their registrations canceled and were barred from sending doctors to Gaza. This ban was lifted after a few weeks. A larger second testing occurred later in 2024: UNRWA was declared illegal. This began as a delegitimization campaign at the start of the war, marked by unfounded suspicions, expulsion of international staff, and school closures in East Jerusalem, leaving children without solutions. Israel found that the international and domestic costs of these actions were minimal. This led to the current procedure. Organizations had already begun discussing the situation with Lee Mordechai and me, expressing serious concerns about their ability to operate.

The tragedy is that Israel is able to drive a wedge between different organizations. Instead of forming a unified front, tensions exist between UN-affiliated and independent organizations, large and small organizations, religious and secular groups, creating suspicion and prompting some to

fold. Essentially, Israel is sending a message: cooperate with our framework or you cannot feed people. It is a dilemma that is hard to blame on the organizations. Beyond the lack of internal solidarity, these organizations also lack the backing of their governments. Both their governments and the Israeli public remain largely indifferent.

The goal is to make the GHF, the Gaza Aid Fund, the sole entity distributing food in the Strip. Organizations willing to work with the GHF and transfer their assistance will continue to operate in Gaza. Those unwilling will be barred. The aim is to make all organizations collaborators of a body operating under Israeli sponsorship and security control. I will not detail the deadly costs for aid recipients, including hunger and exposure to live fire. Another goal is to eliminate external witnesses whose accounts reach international audiences. A third goal is to remove what effectively serves as a protective presence. We saw this with the recent attack on Nasser Hospital, which occurred just half an hour after international doctors left for training.

The consequences are grave. First, humanitarian principles in aid distribution—humanity without bias, independence, and neutrality—are undermined. Second, the ability to provide aid in the West Bank is compromised. This crisis is not limited to Gaza but extends to the unfolding disaster in the West Bank. Finally, the dismantling of the humanitarian framework built over the past century is being presented as a model for other parts of the world. Israel, the GHF, and the United States present it as an exportable model.