

# These words are penned in hunger from northern Gaza. I have little energy to go on

Saturday 2 March 2024, by [MUSHTAHA Mahmoud](#) (Date first published: 29 March 2024).

**From the daily indignity of searching for food to the extreme dangers of doing journalistic work, life in this dark corner of the earth has become impossible.**

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*Palestinians walk through rubble of houses destroyed by Israeli airstrikes in the Jabalia area, northern Gaza Strip, October 11, 2023. (Atia Mohammed/Flash90)*

My life in northern Gaza since October 7 has been one unending nightmare. [Fear](#), [anxiety](#), [hunger](#), [thirst](#), and cold have become my daily companions. I am unable to comprehend the gravity of our situation, nor come to terms with [the losses](#). Our lives here cannot be understood or explained in any rational way.

Nearly 150 days of brutal war have deprived me of everything I had. Literally, I've lost it all — not only my home and belongings, but also my identity, my spirit, my mind, my dreams, [my aspirations](#). And it has forever changed me. It made me selfish, only thinking about my own family's survival. It made me resentful of the Arab and Muslim world, whose silence seems to signal obliviousness to our plight.

My thoughts are consumed by the question of [when the war will end](#). When will Israel stop committing war crimes, and decide to respect and uphold the most basic human rights? When will Israel and Hamas reach an agreement to end our suffering — which is not borne by Hamas' leaders abroad, but by all of us in Gaza? And why, I constantly wonder, am I enduring all this pain?

A few weeks ago, I managed to get in contact with my friend Ahmed, who lives in Ireland. For months, the internet here was too weak for me to be able to call him, but this time luck was on my side. "My brother, leave Gaza," Ahmed told me straight away. "Try to get out at any cost. Don't worry about what you might lose. Once you're out, you'll be safe and on the right path.

"And don't talk to me about your career; you'll be able to handle everything outside Gaza," he continued. "You are a highly skilled, professional, smart, and hardworking young man. You stood firm in the face of all the challenges in Gaza. But everything you built there has been destroyed. I strongly advise you to explore opportunities outside Gaza for the sake of your family's safety."

*Palestinians at the site of an Israeli airstrike in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, February 24, 2024. (Atia Mohammed/Flash90)*

That call, which ended in tears, had a profound impact on me. Exhausted by the hardships surrounding me, I can no longer bear it: I have decided to try to leave the Gaza Strip. I understood

that the only solution is to preserve your soul and escape this dark injustice. It doesn't matter how much you may lose or what you risk by leaving; what truly matters is the preservation of your inner self. There's nothing left to forfeit.

## **The struggle to survive**

Trapped in Shuja'iya, east of Gaza City, since fleeing my home in Tal el-Hawa, further west, when Israel launched its ground invasion in late October, I have come to grasp the essence of Gaza through the lens of this neighborhood. What weighs most heavily on me is the lack of concern and willingness of others to sacrifice for those of us in the besieged north. Sometimes, I find myself wishing I [hadn't stayed here](#).

I wish every day that I could go back home, but it's too dangerous: Israeli tanks are stationed in the area constantly, and my building was already badly damaged in a bombing attack. All I want is to grab a memento or retrieve a few personal items. I want my winter clothes, especially the jacket I bought with my friend Youssef Dawas, who was [tragically killed](#) in an Israeli airstrike on Oct. 14, just a few days after the war began.

The biggest indignity is the daily struggle to feed ourselves. It is impossible to describe our efforts to put food on the table in northern Gaza. I've lost 17 kilograms since the war started due to the scarcity of food.

*Palestinians wait for a hot meal prepared by volunteers in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, February 9, 2024. (Abed Rahim Khatib/Flash90)*

I experience oppression and humiliation each moment that I have to wait my turn to get a liter of water at an extortionate price from whoever has their own supply from a well. I despise myself every time I search for someone selling flour at a reasonable price and try to barter with deceitful merchants who have monopolized the supply.

Our main source of sustenance is dry barley bread, which neither nourishes our bodies nor satisfies our taste. We are forced to eat animal feed. But, as my grandfather always says, "Anything that enters the mouth is sustenance" — we have to eat whatever there is, regardless of our preferences. The paramount goal is to stay alive.

## **Writing through tears and tremors**

As a journalist, I grapple with dueling challenges. On the one hand, there is the weight of my personal responsibilities: the quest for sustenance and water; standing steadfast by my family's side; and striving to provide comfort and safety for my parents, my 4-year-old niece Sila, and 2-year-old nephew Wadie. At the same time, I bear the professional duty of reporting.

With no international reporters allowed into the Strip, our role is crucial in shedding light on the plight of northern Gaza. We have the duty to share stories of people's suffering — the heartbreaking cries of children and women. We work through our own hunger and thirst to interview children who are unable to find food, in order that the world might understand our plight.

Doubt lingers about my future as a journalist. Continuing to write means exposing myself and my family to peril: trekking vast distances in order to reach the sites of bombings, or to secure a high enough vantage point — in locations that are totally exposed to Israeli attacks — to enable internet access via eSIM cards. In essence, there's no respite for journalistic endeavors. Even the Journalists' Syndicate in Gaza offers no assistance with our work or with keeping us safe.

Since that fateful Saturday in October, I have witnessed the collapse of my life and my aspirations. The feeling of helplessness and oppression is beyond articulation; no words can adequately capture the emotions I experience as I write — a process of tears, tremors, and trying to come to terms with my circumstances. These words are penned in hunger, and the energy to endure further is dwindling.

Despite being ambitious and persistent by nature, I find myself in this dark corner of the earth where the pursuit of a secure future must take a backseat to the stark reality of life in the besieged Gaza Strip. The effort I went to in order to graduate from university two years ago and embark on a life worthy of my endeavors feels like wasted time. Political leaders speak of patience and endurance, but this war has shattered all of our dreams.

## **Mahmoud Mushtaha**

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### **P.S.**

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<https://www.972mag.com/northern-gaza-hunger-journalism/>

- Mahmoud Mushtaha is a Gaza-based freelance journalist and human rights activist.
- Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war – the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas' murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel's retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment – but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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