

### **Caritas partners report Gaza's children now sleep among rats and disease**

Caritas Australia has received grave updates from its partners in Gaza, regarding the impact of rodent infestations and subsequent disease on children, who make up around half of Gaza's population. The report from Caritas Jerusalem reads as follows:

*The nightmare in Gaza has sunk to a level many believed humanity would never witness. Families who have already lost their homes, their loved ones, their safety, and their dignity are now fighting a new enemy in the darkness of overcrowded tent camps: rats and parasites.*

*Children are waking up screaming in the middle of the night as rodents bite their fingers and toes while they sleep beside piles of garbage and sewage. Mothers clutch what little they have left only to discover rats have chewed through blankets, clothing, and the few treasured possessions they managed to carry through months of displacement.*

*And as horrifying as this sounds, medical experts warn that this may only be the beginning.*

*According to our medical consultant in Gaza, the total collapse of solid waste management since October 7, 2023, has pushed the Strip into a catastrophic public health disaster. Mountains of uncollected waste and rubble now blanket entire neighbourhoods, creating ideal breeding grounds for insects, rats, and disease.*

*Flies swarm through tents carrying hepatitis A and severe diarrheal diseases. Rats and mice spread deadly infections through bites, urine, saliva, fleas, and droppings. Doctors fear outbreaks of Hantavirus, Leptospirosis, Salmonellosis, Rat-bite fever, and even Plague — illnesses capable of causing respiratory failure, kidney damage, severe gastrointestinal disease, and death.*

*"Our medical teams are treating rodent-related incidents every single day," one doctor reported. "And summer has not even arrived yet."*

*The crisis has become so extreme that humanitarian workers say even food distribution is under threat. Our head of the social program explained that aid organizations can no longer safely store large quantities of food because rodents destroy supplies before they can reach starving families.*

*"Everything is being eaten or contaminated," she said. "Even trying to help people survive has become harder than imaginable."*

*While Israel generally restricts materials considered to have possible dual civilian and military use, including pest control products such as rat poison, COGAT announced that in recent weeks it facilitated the transfer of approximately 90 tons of pest control materials and more than 1,000 mousetraps into Gaza as part of efforts to address the sanitation crisis.*

*But for families trapped inside collapsing tent camps, the reality on the ground remains unbearable.*

*How much worse can it get when children are no longer afraid only of bombs, but of what crawls over them while they sleep? And yet, somehow, in Gaza, it keeps getting worse.*

Caritas Australia continues to stand in solidarity with its partners in the Holy Land with **Kirsten Sayers CEO of Caritas Australia** saying, "As conflict rises across the world and attention turns away from Gaza, this is a sobering reminder of the horrors that persist for those trapped among the rubble. No person, let alone any child, should have to suffer the indignity of sleeping under a tarp exposed to attacks from rodents, and all the disease and trauma that brings. We urge the world to turn its eyes and hearts back to Gaza, where human suffering continues to reach new depths."

To support Caritas Australia's Gaza Crisis Appeal, visit [www.caritas.org.au/gaza](http://www.caritas.org.au/gaza) or call 1800 024 413 toll free.

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