

Egypt presidency forced Al-Azhar to delete statement condemning Israel's starvation of Gaza

Sources close to Al-Azhar and the presidency confirm statement by Ahmed al-Tayeb was removed because it denounced states' complicity in 'Israel's fully fledged genocide'

[Egypt's](#) presidency pressured Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, the world's foremost Islamic institution, to withdraw a statement condemning [Israel's](#) "genocidal starvation" of Gaza, sources told Middle East Eye.

The Cairo-based Al-Azhar said on Wednesday that it had deleted a strongly worded call to action over the starvation of [Palestinians](#) in Gaza, citing its potential impact on ceasefire negotiations.

In a [statement](#), the institution said it "took the initiative to withdraw its statement with courage and responsibility before God when it realised that this statement could impact the ongoing negotiations regarding a humanitarian truce in Gaza to save innocent lives".

"Al-Azhar has prioritised the interests of preventing the daily bloodshed in Gaza, hoping that the negotiations will lead to an immediate halt to the bloodshed and provide the most basic necessities of life, of which the oppressed Palestinian people have been deprived," the statement said.

But two sources close to Al-Azhar and the Egyptian presidency confirmed to Middle East Eye that the statement was removed shortly after it was published on Tuesday following a request from President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi's office. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the press.

The reason for the withdrawal was that the statement referred to the complicity of third states in what Al-Azhar described as "fully fledged genocide" in Gaza.

'Anyone who supplies this entity with weapons, or who emboldens it through complicit resolutions or hypocritical words, is a partner in this act of genocide'

- Deleted Al-Azhar statement

"Al-Azhar strongly affirms that the deliberate and lethal starvation imposed by this abhorrent occupation upon the peaceful people of Gaza, people desperately seeking mere crumbs of bread or a cup of water, while simultaneously targeting shelters for displaced persons and humanitarian aid distribution centres with live ammunition, constitutes a fully fledged crime of genocide," the deleted statement read.

"Moreover, anyone who supplies this entity with weapons, or who emboldens it through complicit resolutions or hypocritical words, is a partner in this act of genocide.

"They shall be held to account by the Just Judge, the Almighty Avenger, on the Day when neither wealth nor children shall be of benefit.

"Al-Azhar declares before God its absolute disavowal of the world's shameful and suspicious silence, of the international community's disgraceful failure to stand by this defenceless people, and of any call for the displacement of the people of Gaza from their land," the statement added.

Egypt is a key mediator between Israel and Hamas, and the government has often tried to tamp down frustrations within the country over its role in what critics describe as maintaining the siege on Gaza, given it shares the Rafah crossing with the enclave.

Al-Azhar has rarely issued statements on Israel, and has been particularly measured since Israel launched its onslaught on the enclave.

Ali al-Qaradaghi, the head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, denounced the deletion of the statement as unjustified.

"Why are voices being silenced?" he wrote on X. "The deletion of Al-Azhar's statement, which cried out to consciences to save Gaza, is an unjustified act ... and a desperate attempt to suppress the voice of human and religious conscience in a time of silence and complicity."

The move comes as activists in the [Netherlands](#) chained shut the gates of the [Egyptian](#) embassy in protest at the country's closure of its border with Gaza.

Egyptian activist Anas Habib [filmed](#) himself going to the embassy building in The Hague on Monday, denouncing the "vile, treacherous regime" of Sisi.

Israel's siege on Gaza since 2 March has blocked the entry of humanitarian supplies by the UN and its partner organisations to the enclave, bringing the 2.1 million population to the brink of [famine](#).

At least 115 [Palestinians](#), including 80 children, have died of starvation since March, including 15 who [died](#) of malnutrition on Monday, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

What did the statement say?

Below is the full text of the deleted Al-Azhar statement, as obtained and translated by MEE:

"Al-Azhar raises its sorrowful cry and its anguished global appeal, calling upon all people of conscience, those free, wise, honourable individuals across the world who still feel the sting of a troubled conscience, who believe in the sanctity of human responsibility and in the rights of the oppressed and the powerless to equality with their fellow human beings, to a life of safety and dignity. Al-Azhar urges them to act swiftly and decisively to save the people of Gaza from the deadly famine being inflicted upon them by the occupation with a brutality, force, and indifference unprecedented in recorded history, one which, we fear, will remain unmatched in the days to come.

"Al-Azhar declares that the human conscience today stands at a critical juncture, as it bears witness to thousands of children and innocent civilians being killed in cold blood. Those who escape death by violence are dying from hunger, thirst, dehydration, the exhaustion of medical supplies, and the collapse of medical centres that can no longer rescue them from certain death.

"Al-Azhar strongly affirms that the deliberate and lethal starvation imposed by this abhorrent occupation upon the peaceful people of Gaza, people desperately seeking mere crumbs of bread or a cup of water, while simultaneously targeting shelters for displaced persons and humanitarian aid distribution centres with live ammunition, constitutes a fully fledged crime of genocide. Moreover, anyone who supplies this entity with weapons, or who emboldens it through complicit resolutions or hypocritical words, is a partner in this act of genocide. They shall be held to account by the Just Judge, the Almighty Avenger, on the Day when neither wealth nor children shall be of benefit. Let those who support such actions remember well the timeless wisdom: 'We were devoured the day the white bull was devoured.'

"And as Al-Azhar grapples with its sorrow and pain, it issues a heartfelt plea to all influential and powerful actors to do all that lies within their capacity to halt this brutal entity, to force it to cease its systematic killings, to ensure the immediate entry of humanitarian and relief aid, and to open all possible routes for the treatment of the sick and wounded, whose conditions have worsened due to the occupation's relentless targeting of hospitals and medical facilities, in flagrant violation of all divine laws and international conventions.

"In this regard, Al-Azhar declares before God its absolute disavowal of the world's shameful and suspicious silence, of the international community's disgraceful failure to stand by this defenceless people, and of any call for the displacement of the people of Gaza from their land. Al-Azhar also disavows all those who endorse or respond to such calls, holding every supporter of

this aggression fully accountable for the blood that is being shed, the souls that are being taken, and the stomachs that are writhing in hunger in wounded Gaza. 'The evildoers will find out what they will return to' [[Qur'an](#), 26:227].

"Furthermore, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif calls upon every Muslim to persist in supplication for the triumph of the oppressed, invoking the prophetic prayer through which our Prophet sought protection:

"O Allah, Revealer of the Book, Mover of the clouds, Defeater of the confederates, defeat them and grant us victory over them."

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-pressures-top-islamic-institution-withdraw-statement-condemning-israeli-siege-gaza>

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Al-Azhar's reversal on Gaza exposes a deeper moral crisis in the Muslim world

Usaama al-Azami

The Egyptian grand sheikh's retraction under state pressure dashed hopes for moral clarity amid genocide, revealing how Muslim religious authorities remain gripped by fear, silence

Nearly two years into a livestreamed [genocide](#), unprecedented in its visibility and impunity, there has still been no meaningful action by world leaders to halt it.

Israel's systematic mass murder of [Palestinians](#) through both direct and indirect means continues unabated. For weeks, Unrwa, the UN agency for [Palestinian](#) refugees, has been [reminding](#) anyone who would listen that it has three months' worth of food supplies stored just a few miles from Gaza, across the border in [Egypt](#).

Egypt - home to the millennium-old Al-Azhar Mosque and university - has, over the years, been instrumental in maintaining Israel's [blockade](#) on Gaza's southern border. Today, it is actively contributing to the genocide by [preventing](#) the flow of aid in accordance with the wishes of the Zionist regime to the north.

Egyptian President [Abdel Fattah el-Sisi](#) came to power in a 2013 coup openly [backed](#) by Washington and Tel Aviv, so it is hardly surprising that the sense of mutual commitment runs deep.

However, Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand sheikh of Al-Azhar, has in recent years shown a degree of independence from Sisi, even [voicing concern](#) for the people of Gaza in periodic public statements.

While lacking political power, he wields considerable symbolic authority as head of one of the world's oldest seats of Islamic religious learning. He thus has the potential to speak not only for the moral conscience of Egyptians, but for that of the entire Muslim umma - if he rises to the moment.

None of his statements have been enough to prevent the killing of [tens of thousands](#) of people, but for the past 22 months, Egypt's most important religious figure had at least withheld tacit approval of the state's complicity in the genocide.

That changed this week when al-Tayeb issued his strongest condemnation of the genocide to date - only to [reverse course](#) hours later under pressure from the Egyptian state.

Courage rescinded

On Tuesday evening, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar issued a powerful statement appealing to people of conscience around the world to take immediate action to bring an end to the "barbaric and brutal genocide" being perpetrated by the Israeli [occupation](#).

In a long statement that may be read in full [here](#), al-Tayeb was unrelenting in his condemnation not only of the brutality of Israel's "systematic genocide", but also of the silence of the powerful - of governments, and even of the Egyptian state - in allowing it to persist.

It concluded with a "resounding appeal to all free and honourable people of the world to break their silence, take a strong and immediate stance, and pressure their governments and international organisations to open the Rafah crossing and all other possible crossings to allow the entry of humanitarian, medical, pharmaceutical, and food aid".

Given that the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing contains the [aid trucks](#) and storage facilities where UN supplies have been waiting for months, this could be seen as the sheikh's implicit criticism of the Egyptian state's complicity in Gaza's [starvation](#).

But if it was such a criticism, it was not to last.

Within minutes, the statement was [taken down](#), shocking and dismaying observers who had seen in it a rare moment of moral clarity. Many took to social media to express their outrage and disbelief.

Amid one of the lowest points of this genocide, when moral backbone from leaders is most needed, a glimmer of hope appeared from one of Egypt's few institutions that had shown even a modicum of independence - only to vanish moments later, without explanation.

Hours later, Al-Azhar's official media office issued a brief but defensive [alternative statement](#). With spin worthy of a White House press secretary, the post [described](#) the removal as an act done "courageously and responsibly before God", claiming it did not wish to undermine Egyptian efforts to negotiate a truce.

Moral imperative

[Reports](#) suggest that the withdrawal of the initial statement came under pressure from the Egyptian state. Of course, there is no evidence that the retraction brought the genocide any closer to an end, nor should any be expected.

Sisi has for years clashed with al-Tayeb over matters of religious and moral authority, but he has not had enough political capital to remove him.

The grand sheikh has carved out a domain in the spiritual realm that Sisi can complain about, but not control.

Yet in a case like Gaza, where politics, religion, and morality are inextricably linked, the religious and moral imperative to speak out in defence of fellow Muslims facing [extermination](#) should transcend the political machinations that have enabled this genocide.

The dissent from Al-Azhar marked a critical rupture in the region's complicity.

Al-Tayeb's retreat is especially stark in contrast to the unwavering stance of another prominent religious figure in the Arab world: the Mauritanian Sheikh Muhammad al-Hassan al-Dadow.

A defiant voice

On the same day that al-Tayeb issued his now-retracted condemnation of the genocide, al-Dadow posted a [five-minute video](#) (translated [here](#)) on his social media pages, calling on the world to do everything in its power to bring it to an end.

Al-Dadow is among the few senior scholars who have consistently denounced the region's power-brokers for facilitating what he has called a Zionist "final solution" against Palestinians.

Early on in the genocide, he delivered a [striking warning](#) that Muslim rulers and their armies, virtually in their entirety, will be held accountable before God for "every drop of blood that has fallen in Gaza" due to their abandonment of its people.

It is a message he has repeated since Israel launched its war on Gaza, at times citing the example of Egypt's only democratically elected president, [Mohamed Morsi](#), who helped end the 2012 Israeli assault through determined diplomatic intervention.

In a [speech](#) delivered in early 2024, al-Dadow argued that any Muslim head of state - whether in [Turkey](#), [Saudi Arabia](#) or elsewhere - could do the same, if they wished.

His comments are a direct rebuke of Muslim rulers, whose condemnations of the genocide have been as abundant as they are futile - empty rhetoric unaccompanied by any meaningful action against Israel.

As one social media user, Naks Bilal, [responding](#) to the Malaysian prime minister's recent condemnation video, put it:

To be utterly blunt, I'm - in fact I think we're - beyond this now. Heads of nations supporting Palestine with thoughts and prayers, but none willing to send humanitarian military intervention. Forty-eight Muslim-majority countries, 22 Arab states - all afraid of Nato and doing what's right.

All the collective firepower to rain absolute hell down on Israel, but they insist on calling this super meeting, and that ultra conference, meanwhile Palestinians are paying \$1,000 for flour and being massacred in queues waiting for aid.

Save these videos for the next life.

Al-Dadow's words also serve as a challenge to Muslim figures like Al-Azhar's grand sheikh, who must recognise his responsibility to speak for the voiceless Palestinians being killed with the complicity of the very government seeking to silence him.

There is nothing left for the political class to say - only actions left to take. And for religious authorities like al-Tayeb the time to stand up for Gaza is now.

His recent failure to stand up to a Muslim ruler complicit in the Gaza genocide is a sobering reminder that the roots of this crime lie deep within.

Genuine courage - not cowardice - is what is needed most to confront the demons of complicity that haunt the Muslim body politic.

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<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/egypt-al-azhar-reversal-gaza-exposes-deeper-moral-crisis-muslim-world>