



Euro-Med Monitor  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
الأورومتوسطي لحقوق الإنسان

# Gaza .. 100 thousand hours of isolation

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## **Introduction**

Since 2008, Israel has launched three military offenses against the Gaza Strip, causing irreversible damage of the fragile infrastructure and exacerbating an already existing humanitarian crisis. Adding to this devastation, the Gaza Strip remains under a suffocating blockade strangling Palestinians for more than eleven years.

The blockade affects the daily lives of more than 2 million citizens, including **1.3** million refugees in their direct livelihoods. Illegal under international law and frequently condemned by international bodies, this blockade leaves the coastal enclave in constant shortage of medicine, water, fuel, and food. Moreover, the restrictions of movement of goods continue to prevent the reconstruction of thousands of homes, schools, hospitals, power plants and water networks destroyed during Israel's Protective Edge offensive in 2014. Additionally, Israel's strict control of trade has contributed to depleting the resources of a collapsing economy. With an unemployment rate reaching over **43.2 percent** of the population, an increasing number of Gazan families are falling further into poverty. Dependence on aid becomes more severe while access to humanitarian aid remains retrained.

## **An Isolated Strip**

Israel has a long history of isolating the Gaza Strip, with many closures since the 1990s. However, the blockade imposed in 2006 is an unprecedented form of collective punishment in its severity and length.

In September 2007, Israel declared Gaza a “hostile entity” and ruled that, “Additional sanctions will be placed on the Hamas regime in order to restrict the passage of various goods to the Gaza Strip and reduce the supply of fuel and electricity. Restrictions will also be placed on the movement of people to and from the Gaza Strip.” Under international humanitarian law, Israel remains an occupying power despite its removal of 8,000 “settlers” from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

Israel continues to control entry and exit into Gaza from its territory, as well as the Strip’s airspace and sea. Likewise, it controls Gaza’s population registry, telecommunication networks and many other aspects of its daily life and infrastructure—making it nearly impossible for residents to support themselves and build a productive future. Israel thus is violating the absolute prohibition on collective punishment in international humanitarian law, penalizing the entire population of Gaza for the acts of a few.

In addition, since 2008, the state of Israel has launched three military offensives against the Gaza Strip, devastating its already-fragile infrastructure and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis created by a strangling blockade imposed for eleven years.

## Israeli military operations

- **Operation Cast Lead** (December 2008- January 2009): **1,436** Palestinians killed and more than **5,400** wounded.
- **Operation Pillar of Cloud** (November 14, 2012- November 21, 2012): **162** Palestinians killed and more than **1,300** wounded.
- **Operation Protective Edge** (July 8 2014-26 July / August 2014): Nearly 2,147 Palestinians killed and more than 10,741 wounded.
- During the three military operations launched on the densely populated Gaza, Israel used more than **24,000** tons of explosives.
- **10,741** Palestinians were injured, including **3,303** children.
- One third of the injured children will suffer long-term disabilities.
- Consistently, Israeli forces failed to take sufficient measures to protect noncombatants.
- The attacks caused unprecedented damage to infrastructure resulting in a dire economic situation. (nearly **58,000** homes were completely or partially destroyed)

The Gaza strip is regarded to be one of the most densely populated areas on earth while being hermetically sealed off on its both borders. The Israeli military operation, conducted between 2008–2014, claimed the lives of **3,745** Palestinians and wounded **17,441**.

Israel did not only fail to take the necessary measures to spare the civilian population but also targeted densely populated sites, causing a large number of civilian casualties.

Operation Protective Edge, the third eruption of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed factions in the Gaza Strip in less than six years, caused unprecedented damage to infrastructure resulting in a dire economic situation with nearly half of the population unemployed.

## **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Gaza reconstruction plan**

### **Key facts**

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- A THE INTERNATIONAL MECHANISM FAILED TO ENTER THE BUILDING MATERIALS (GRM) AS BEING TOO SLOW IN THE RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS, WHERE THE AMOUNT OF CEMENT THAT ENTERED THE SECTOR REPRESENT 33% OF THE NEEDED FOR RECONSTRUCTION.
- THE ATTACKS RENDERED APPROXIMATELY 65,000 PERSONS HOMELESS.
- ONLY 46% OF DONOR FUNDS (ONE BILLION AND 596 MILLION DOLLARS) WERE CHANNLED TO THE RECONSTRUCTION SECTOR OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS

During its 50-day attack in 2014, Israel conducted an estimated **60,664** raids by air, land and sea; thereby destroying or severely damaging **18,000** housing units that require repair and construction material unavailable in the local market.

Only **46%** of donor funds (one billion and 596 million dollars) were channeled to the reconstruction sector over the last two years of the

total amount allocated during the Gaza Reconstruction Conference, 3 billion and 507 million dollars.

With densely populated areas being indiscriminately attacked, more than **485,000** people were displaced at the peak of the offensive. The number decreased gradually during and after the offensive.

To ease the plight of displaced persons living in shelters following the destruction wrought by the 50-day attack, a donor conference on the reconstruction of Gaza was held in Cairo in October 2014, where the international community pledged \$5.4 billion (approximately \$300 million were received to date) half of which was earmarked for rebuilding the coastal enclave.

The conference was held following the establishment of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) in September 2014 as the UN reported the need to build **89,000** new homes and **26** new schools in addition to massive repairs to infrastructure. GRM was designed by the UN special envoy Robert Serry to allow the entry of construction materials into the Strip, including monitoring the distribution use of concrete in order to ensure that reconstruction is done without allowing Palestinian armed factions to use the materials received for military.

In September 2016, the World Bank office director in the West Bank and Gaza, Marina Louis, stated, "More than seventy thousand people in Gaza have been suffering from internal displacement for a long time; the situation in Gaza is a source of deep concern, and the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth are not yet available."

Two years into the adoption of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM), it has been a failure on the ground since the total amount of cement entered to Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing for reconstruction purposes was only **1,166,684** tons. Such an amount is obviously indicative of the very slow rate at which the GRM operates. Thus far, only 33 % of the needs of the Gaza Strip have been met.

About 2 other million tons of cement are still needed.

What have been rebuilt so far are only **2,167** housing units out of **11,000** ones that were completely destroyed. This is only 19.7% of the actual need. Besides, the number of housing units under ongoing construction is **3,002**. Only **1,839** of these have available funding for completion. **3,992** other residential units remain in need for funding for commencement of construction.

## **Movement through Erez crossing**

### **Key facts**

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- THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES HAVE CANCELED 1,900 COMMERCIAL PERMITS OUT OF 3,700 PERMITS.
- DURING OCTOBER 2016, 52% OF THE PERMITS REQUESTED BY UN WORKERS IN GAZA WERE REJECTED, COMPARED TO 3% IN JANUARY OF THE SAME YEAR.
- THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES CANCELED NEARLY 280 OUT OF 350 PERMITS ISSUED TO BUSINESSMEN, INCLUDING THE CANCELLATION OF TWO OUT OF FOUR PERMITS FOR WOMEN.
- AT THE END OF 2016, LESS THAN 50% OF THE REQUESTS TO EXIT THROUGH EREZ FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT ABROAD WERE APPROVED. THIS WAS A LOW PERCENTAGE COMPARED TO THAT IN 2012, WHEN 92.5% OF REQUESTS WERE APPROVED.



Freedom of movement in the Gaza Strip remains a major problem facing every Palestinian wishing to leave the Strip or to come back home. With Egypt continuing to close Rafah crossing most of the time, Erez has become the single other alternative for people in Gaza.

Following Protective Edge Operation in 2014, people entering and existing through Erez increased in number; however, this increase is utterly insufficient to meet the needs of the population in the Gaza Strip. In fact, the number of these passengers is only about **2%** of the total number in 2000.

The practices of the Israeli authorities have worse affected the movement of Gaza Strip residents. In 2016, thousands of people were blocked from travel, a frequent practice for which Israel provides unclear justifications mostly on security claims, if any. In addition, more and more passengers are subject to interrogation and even to denial of permission while trying cross through Erez. In 2016, only **46%** of applications for crossing permit were approved by Israel, marking a decrease from the percentage in 2013, **80%**.

Permission denials for Palestinians, specifically businessmen, based on security claims traders began to rise dramatically at the end of 2015. Such denials prevented siblings from family visits, professionals from participation in professional development opportunities abroad and students from access to various educational programs around the globe, among many other categories.

Israeli practices also include putting Palestinians on deliberate, long delays while trying to cross Erez. Some of the few given reasons for this delay are interrogation and further permit processing before final denial.

## **Groups affected by the imposition of the security ban**

### **1. Traders and businessmen**

In 2016, many Palestinian traders and businessmen from the Gaza Strip had their permits to move through Erez crossing denied, sometimes based on security allegations. Gisha, Israel's Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, reports that **1,900** out of **3,700** trading permits issued to traders and businessmen in the Gaza Strip were canceled and a ban on their movement was enacted. The list of banned businessmen includes ones with long-term business relations inside Israel and the West Bank and ones looking to establish new business connections beyond. Some traders have reported that their ban is only for one year as a minimum. As a result, business growth and its contribution to the economy have dwindled with the continuous cancellation of crossing permits, thus affecting the lives of workers in various industrial sectors.

### **2. Patients seeking medical treatment**

The number of patients needing urgent medical treatment unavailable in the Gaza Strip has significantly increased. However, the number of crossing permits for such patients has decreased, causing more suffering that sometimes turned into deaths.

In 2016, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) reports the rise in the number of cancer patients who complained to the organization about Israel's denial of their request to travel to seek treatment abroad based on security allegations. In its report, PHR documented **43** such cases in

the first half of 2016, and it compared the number to **48** ones it served in the same period of time last year.

In 2015, **242** medical patients sought the help of PHR, and **150** of these had Israel's security ban lifted off them. In 2016, however, there was a sharp decline in Israel's responsiveness to PHR's advocacy; Israel granted permits only to about **25%** of patient applicants. According to a report by WHO in 2016, the percentage of the approved permits to let patients receive medical treatment outside the Gaza Strip dropped from **92.5%** in 2012 to **77.5%** in 2015. In October 2016, the percentage of the approved exit permits amounted to only **44%**.

### **3. Local staff of institutions and international bodies**

The Office of the UN Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that the rate of permit denial for international aid workers has recently risen to **49%**. In October 2016, the rate was **52%**, compared to **3%** in January of the same year.

In October of 2016, more than one hundred permit requests for visitors were rejected. These included requests of **40** workers affiliated with the UN and other international bodies, with some of them receiving a one-year long rejection and some others having their permits cancelled while in Erez. In 2016, at least **8** United Nations staff members and other international institutions reported cancellation of their permits by the Israeli security authorities. In 2015, only two such cancellations were reported.

# Economic Collapse

## Key facts

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- WHEN THE BLOCKADE WAS FIRST IMPOSED, GAZA ECONOMY WENT DOWN INTO A GENERAL STATE OF RECESSION.
  - THE RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT REACHED 43.2% BY THE END OF 2016.
  - THE RATE OF POVERTY ROSE TO 65% AND THAT OF FOOD INSECURITY TO 72%.
  - THE NUMBER OF PALESTINIANS IN GAZA WHO ARE LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE IS TWICE AND A HALF TWICE AS MANY AS THOSE LIVING IN THE WEST BANK.
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While Israel is restricting Gaza economy, its three attacks within less than a decade caused a complete economic paralysis by devastating the infrastructure already fragile before these attacks.

Israeli authorities continue to block the entry of several goods, industrial and medical machines, and equipment materials, including construction materials, entered in very small amounts according to GRM.

All commercial crossings into and out of the Strip are completely closed, except for Kerem Shalom crossing, whose closure rate exceeded **36%** of the days during 2016.

The rate of unemployment reached **43.2%** in the third quarter of 2016. In the West Bank, the rate is only **18.7%**, a little less than half of that in Gaza. The rate of poverty rose to **65%**, and that of abject poverty to **21%**. The number of Palestinians in Gaza living below the poverty line is twice and a half as many as that of Palestinians in the West Bank. Since restrictions on the Gaza Strip were put into place in 2007, the rate of poverty has grown by **20%**.

A genuine economic collapse has also been a result of the blockade. 80% of the population of Gaza has grown highly dependent on relief and international aid provided by UNRWA and other international aid organizations. In addition, **72%** of Gaza families have become food-insecure.

Small and large companies were hugely affected during Operation Protective Edge in 2014. A total number of **5,153** of industrial settings were targeted. An estimate cost of **566** million dollars is needed for reconstruction of these, yet only **25** million dollars were actually secured for reconstruction, only **16.5%** of the total estimate cost.

The ongoing, outstanding fuel and power crisis has drastically impacted the provision of basic services to the population of Gaza: water and sanitation, sewage, healthcare, and education. Businesses are also affected by this crisis. The high cost of running a generator has forced some small businesses, especially start-ups, to close within a short period of time. Additionally, trade businesses, due to extreme restrictions on imports, exports and movement, have also closed. Also, **152** million dollars are needed to compensate businesses destroyed

during Israel's Operation Protective Edge. The failure to make this compensation has led to serious economic consequences including business closure. Hence, fewer and fewer job openings were announced while more and more posts were terminated.

According to the Palestinian Businessmen Association, the contributions of the private sector declined from **25%** prior to 2006-2007 to only **5%** in the present, as a direct result of the siege and the three offenses.

Due to Israel's restrictions, most of the companies are unable or unwilling to invest in capital goods, subject to devastation at any time. This led to a significant decline in the work productivity of the Gaza Strip, especially as compared to that of West Bank.

Fishing and agriculture are two other sectors of industry significantly affected by the blockade. Fishermen can only sail 3-6 nautical miles in the Mediterranean and will be subject to arrest or shooting if they sail further.

Farmers face similar problems with their farms at the constant threat of leveling and their own lives at risk posed by Israeli soldiers and snipers.

Should this blockade continue to restrict the economic lives of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, they will remain economically paralyzed and at a larger scale as time goes. Economic recession, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, dependence on international aid, and diminishing faith in economic investment will continue to dominate the reality in Gaza.

## Exports

In September 2005, Israel signed an agreement with the Palestinian Authority on the movement of goods through Israeli-controlled crossing points. By the terms of the agreement, **400** trucks may leave Gaza daily. However, the number of permitted trucks did not exceed **100**. Also, Israel exports Gazan products to other countries and does not allow their export to the markets of the West Bank. To date, only small quantities of fruits, vegetables and furniture are allowed to be exported from the Gaza Strip.

In 2016, the number of trucks exported to the markets of the West Bank, Israel and other countries was **2,129**, representing **42%** of the total number before the blockade was imposed.

## **Eleven years of blockade**

Prior to the blockade on the Gaza Strip, the movement of people and goods to and from the strip was through six crossings: Erez, Karni, Nahal Oz, Kerem Shalom and Sufa borders with Israel and Rafah border with Egypt.

Before 2007, the daily average of the number of trucks leaving the Strip was about **70** trucks and that of entering ones was nearly **583**. Most goods entered via the Karni crossing in northeastern Gaza. Fuel to Gaza's sole power plant entered through Nahal Oz crossing eastern Gaza.

Karni crossing was closed in 2007 and Sufa in September 2008. Most of the goods now enter through Kerem Shalom, which works only partially.

During the two years following the complete blockade imposed in 2007, the average number of trucks entering the Strip was about **112**, which represents nearly one-fifth of the number allowed before the blockade. Afterwards, exporting goods from the Strip was prevented except for a few kinds and in limited amounts.



## **Naval restrictions threaten fishermen's livelihoods**

Under the 1994 Oslo Accords, signed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel, Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip should be allowed access to 20 nautical miles, i.e. 37 Km into Palestinian territorial waters in the Mediterranean Sea. However, Palestinian fishermen have always been pushed back to fewer than 12 nautical miles.

In 2002, Palestinians were allowed access up to **12** nautical miles before the limit was narrowed to **10** nautical miles in 2006, shortly after Hamas' victory in national elections. The limit was then again decreased to 6 nautical miles in October 2006 and to **3** nautical miles in 2009, after Operation Cast Lead. Following the ceasefire agreement ending Operation Pillar of the Cloud in November 2012, Palestinians were allowed access back to **3-4** nautical miles and it was agreed that this limit would be gradually increased to **6** and finally to **12** nautical miles.

Because of the restrictions imposed on fishermen, fishes dropped from **3,650** tons in 1999 to **1,938** tons in 2012, an annual loss of about **47%**. The number of fishermen between 2000 and 2016 dropped from approximately **10,000** to **4,000**, rendering nearly **95%** of them now dependent on international aid, as documented by UNOCHA.

## **Israeli buffer zone cuts off Palestinians from farmlands**

With restrictions on access to land imposed by Israel to address its security concerns in Gaza creating a **3** Km-deep buffer zone, approximately **35** percent of the agricultural lands have been swallowed, rendering investment in such areas nearly impossible since farmers are constantly at risk as a result of the methods of enforcement imposed by Israel, including the use of live ammunition, leveling the agricultural lands, and detention of farmers.

Over the past decade, farmers endured losses of their source of income and livelihoods, including destruction of green houses, damage to agricultural land, leveling of trees, and death of animals. Consequently,

## **Healthcare**

### **Key facts**

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- BY THE END OF DECEMBER 2016, APPROXIMATELY 35% OF NECESSARY DRUGS, 481 TYPES, BECAME COMPLETELY UNAVAILABLE IN GAZA STRIP.
  - 70% OF MEDICAL AID AND ALLOCATED FUEL FOR RUNNING HOSPITALS' GENERATORS WERE NOT ALLOWED ENTRY INTO GAZA.
  - IN GAZA'S HOSPITALS 300 DYSFUNCTIONAL MEDICAL DEVICES REQUIRE REPLACEMENT PARTS,

MAINTENANCE AND/OR ALTERATION DUE TO  
BLOCKING FROM ENTRY NEW EQUIPMENT.

- DURING 2016, EMPLOYMENT OF NEW MEDICAL STAFF WAS FROZEN, DESPITE THE SECTOR'S NEED FOR 800 WORKERS ON AN ANNUAL BASIS.
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Gaza's vulnerable health system has been deeply by Israeli restrictions imposed both on access to essential medical supplies and on patients' movement into and out of the Gaza Strip.

The public health system in Gaza has been greatly affected by the Israeli blockade and worse by the division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Severe shortages of essential drugs and medical equipment, constant instability of power supply, critical lack of fuel for generators, and inadequate maintenance capacity have advanced the deterioration in the quality of healthcare services.

The blockade poses several other difficulties on the health system including underdevelopment of medical specialists and virtually unavailable access to training. The Ministry of Health routinely needs to employ **800** workers in the health sector, yet many of these cannot travel for capacity-building opportunities because of Israel's restrictions on leave and re-entry permissions. Health workers employed after 2007 receive only **45%** of their basic salary, consequently leading qualified workers to seek turnover, sometimes even to immigrate.

By the end of December 2016, nearly **35%** (481 items) of essential medicines were at zero stock in the Central Drug Store in Gaza, and **40-45%** (50 items) were available only in small quantities.

Due to the power crisis in Gaza, the health sector needs, on a monthly basis, 420-450 thousand liters of diesel to run 87 generators around Gaza health facilities. When fuel is not allowed entry in sufficient amounts, therefore, catastrophic consequences follow, especially among patients needing ventilation.

In 2014, Operation Protective Edge left disastrous effects on the social and psychological situation of children, where nearly **551** children were killed and over **3,000** others injured. Moreover, 1 out of 4 children needs psychosocial support because of the trauma and losses experienced during violence, including physical injury, fear of bombing sounds and death of family members or friends.

Monthly, more than **1,000** patients need permits to seek treatment in hospitals outside the Gaza Strip, particularly in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel and Jordan, yet many of these are often denied an Israeli permit to leave. **50%** of requests for transfer of patients are rejected by Israel. **25%** of approved requests have been for cancer patients.

In 2016, a sharp increase in the number of cancer patients was noticed in the Strip. It is estimated that the number has risen to **10,189**; in other words, **476.4** per **100,000** residents—**80** per month- are subject to suffering from cancer, an increase resulted mainly from Israel's use of chemical and other internationally prohibited weapons.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza is used to referring patients for treatment in hospitals in Israel or Egypt. Patients referred to Israel, particularly male ones aged between 18 and 45, are often blackmailed and required

to sit for security interviews, during which they have to answer questions concerning Palestinian armed factions.

### **Refugee Crisis: UNRWA is unable to provide basic needs**

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) runs aid programs, providing food and financial support for more than **1,340,000** refugees in Gaza. However, the majority of refugees are still food-insecure.

In 2014, a survey conducted by UNRWA showed that **46.7%** of Gazans, about **900,000** individuals, are suffering from food insecurity. Almost every refugee suffers from shortage of food, water, electricity, healthcare, education or shelter. Feelings of insecurity and anxiety continue to affect these refugees as a result of the repetitive attacks and the suffocating siege during the past decade.

The number of refugees is significantly increasing every single year. In 2000, there were nearly **800,000** refugees distributed around the various camps in the Gaza Strip. In 2016, the number of refugees jumped to **1.34** million and is expected to reach 1.6 million by 2020.

With the constant increase in the number and needs of refugees in the Gaza Strip, considering the financial crisis faced by UNRWA, access to aid remains limited to most of them. The number of refugees in need rose to **900,000** over the past few years.

**72%** of Gaza population falls under the poverty line. Before Operation Protective Edge in 2014, they were dependent mainly on food aid. However, this aid soon dwindled, leaving most of the refugees unable to provide for their basic needs.

The blockade continues to drastically impact refugees' humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, causing a collapse in the private sector and a huge increase of unemployment. As a result, these refugees' needs grow far beyond what UNRWA can actually provide.

Due to a budget deficit of 65%, following Operation Protective Edge, UNRWA announced a reduction in the number of recipients of its food aid and other services, and about 43,000 refugee families were dropped off from the list of aid recipients. In addition, UNRWA decided to limit the size of its material aid program, which used to provide about 40USD for 21,000 refugee families.

In its report in August 2016, UNRWA elaborated on the emergency situation in Gaza, stating that it was able to pay 4.4 million USD for temporary rental cost for refugees whose homes were demolished during the 2014 attacks.

The report documented that since the beginning of its urgent response to shelter needs in 2014, UNRWA distributed financial aid that exceeded 2,039 million USD, excluding programmatic support, to the families of Palestinian refugees whose homes were demolished or damaged during Operation Protective Edge. 6,113 families received cash payments to begin the reconstruction of their completely destroyed houses, the total cost of rebuilding which, however, is estimated at 3,155 million USD.

The main impediment to completion of reparations and reconstruction is the lack of funding, aggravating as UNRWA sustains a financial deficit of 81 million USD.

More than 60,160 refugee families, whose houses were lightly damaged, have not received any payments for reparation work, the total of which is \$ 67.9 million. 3,694 families, whose houses were seriously damaged, have not either received any financial assistance to begin reparation, a

total cost for which is estimated at 33.2 million USD. Also, 1,089 other families, whose houses were completely destroyed, have not received any support while seeking to rebuild their houses, the total estimated cost for which is 9.7 million USD.

In a speech on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip in 2016, UNRWA operations director in Gaza, Bo Schack stated: “Compared to the last 6 months, the humanitarian conditions have significantly deteriorated. Gaza is having a real rough time with the high unemployment rate, lack of water, damaged infrastructure, constant power blackouts and the restrictions imposed on individuals’ freedom of movement to and from Gaza.”

The most recent offensive in 2014 led to the exacerbation of water pollution and water shortage in the Strip, where about 1.3 million Palestinians have difficult access to water and sanitation services, especially as 80% of water wells are not valid for use.

According to the Palestinian Water Authority, about 95% of the water in Gaza does not meet the World Health Organization standards for potable water use. The blockade as well as the little, if allowed by Israel, intervention of international aid programs contributes to the aggravation of water problems in the Gaza Strip.

The critical water shortage is expected to grow beyond reparability if the status quo is not improved by 2020.

The consequences of power blackouts add to the severity of water problems in the Gaza Strip. With water services heavily dependent on availability of electricity, 30% of the population today does not have ready access to water while 80% has to buy drinking water for daily use instead of unavailable tap water.

On the other hand, UNRWA remains unable keep up with the growing educational needs of refugees in the Gaza Strip. With diminishing financial capacity, UNRWA can no longer provide efficient educational services to about 240,000 refugee students enrolled in its schools, making up to 55% of the total number of schools in the Gaza Strip.

With aforementioned challenges before the population of Gaza and UNRWA, schools continue to be unable to improve the quality of education. The blockade and repeated Israeli attacks on the Strip have remarkably declined the educational level since 2007. Often during attacks, teachers and students stop going to school in avoidance of risking their lives, resulting in frequent suspension of study sessions.

As more and more students are enrolled in UNRWA schools, the need to renovate old and damaged ones and to build new schools is critical. However, constant closure of crossings is leading to absence of basic construction materials necessary developing physical educational infrastructures. To cope with this, first, schools have to accommodate students in numbers so large that a single classroom may have 45 or even more students. The consequence of this classroom over crowdedness is easy to point to: less quality. Second, 90% of the 252 UNRWA schools in Gaza operate in two or, sometimes, three shifts to be able to keep up with the large number of students. However, this coping plan also has shortcomings. With each shift lasting too short, about 4 hours a day, students and teachers have less of an opportunity to respectively exhibit active learning and effective teaching.



## **People locked in**

Palestinians living in Gaza are still deprived of their right to freedom of movement. Whether their travel purpose is to work, study, visit family or receive medical treatment and whether their route is out from or back home to Gaza, they are subject to Israel's denial of their right.

Israeli authorities prevent Gazans from leaving to visit their family relatives living outside the Strip even though about 35% of the population of Gaza has relatives in Israel, East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) regard Israel's restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods between Gaza Strip and the West Bank as "part of the separation policy", the same policy denying Palestinians access to medical treatment, education or work in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Despite promises by Israel in 2010 to alleviate the restrictions and allow individuals to move more freely through facilitating procedures for obtaining entry and exit permits from the Strip for medical and humanitarian purposes, including for international aid work, it did not fulfill these promises. On the contrary, Israel tightened the restrictions and reduced the number of permits issued for humanitarian cases and relief workers affiliated with local and international organizations. Most of the exit permits for patients continue to be either rejected on an arbitrary basis or postponed for long periods.

## **Fuel Entry and Electricity Crisis**

At the end of July 2013, the Egyptian army destroyed the majority of the tunnels between Egypt and Gaza. In May 2015, Egypt announced its success in destroying about **80%** of the Strip's tunnels, which led to complete suspension of the entry of fuel through the tunnels. As a result, Palestinians have been suffering from severe restrictions on the entry of fuel and the consequent soaring of its price. And, the only power plant in Gaza has operated at only **46%** of its capacity. Frequently, it was forced to stop working completely during the past few years because of running out of fuel, and Palestinians in Gaza had to survive repetitive, long periods of blackout extending to **12-16** hours a day.

The real reasons behind the power crisis in Gaza Strip are the acute shortage of electricity, rapid growth of demand on power and accumulation of debts to the company. The debts reached 3.5 billion NIS in 2012. People cannot pay this great amount because of the deteriorating financial situation resulted from the blockade and the severely low incomes of most of the families. The already-high cost of electricity is made even higher by due taxes, e.g. the "blue-tax" imposed by the Palestinian government in the West Bank, which amounts to **30** million NIS a month.

## **Legal ramifications**

The Israeli authorities have been enforcing a policy of closure and siege on the Gaza Strip continuously for twelve years. It maintains tight control of commercial and non-commercial land and naval crossings, preventing Gaza residents from traveling for various purposes, fishermen from sailing into agreed-upon areas, different kinds of goods from entering, and unavailable medicine and vital medical equipment from being transferred to hospitals. Not only does this policy contradict Israel's promises, but it also constitutes a flagrant violation of its obligations under international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to be responsible for the security and welfare of the citizens living in the territories it continues to occupy.

Even though Israel claims that Gaza is no longer an occupied territory as it disengaged from it in 2005, its claim blatantly contradicts the reality on ground. Israel continues to completely control Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters. Also, it maintains a population registry of Gazans, collects, on behalf of the PA, taxes on goods entering through its-controlled borders to Gaza and has the ability to exercise power over Gaza. In addition, fishermen are not allowed to fish freely or safely in their territorial Palestinian water on the Mediterranean, which is guaranteed for them under international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions.

Israel systematically limits or prevents the entry of food and medical supplies, a clear breach of international humanitarian law. According to Articles 55-56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, it is the duty of the occupier to provide food and medical supplies for the people it occupies.

According to Article 54 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (1977), the starvation of civilians is prohibited. It also amounts to a war crime, as classified by the Charter of the International Criminal Court: "intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions."

The consequences of Israel's breaches extend beyond starvation of food to devastation of civilian infrastructures. During Operation Protective Edge, Israeli forces deliberately destroyed a great number of civilian objects, namely industrial installations, communication and electricity networks, transportation facilities, and agricultural lands.

Notwithstanding its legal guilt, it continues to prevent the entry of construction materials needed to rebuild what it destroyed. Such deliberate acts are grave violations of the Geneva Conventions and its First Additional Protocol, Article (54) of which bans attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of civilians.

The blockade on the Gaza Strip remains an illegal form of collective punishment of an entire population. As such, it constitutes a violation of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, stating that "no protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited."

Israel's denial of Palestinians' right to freedom of movement inside and outside Gaza Strip is linked to violating other rights of equal importance, such as education and health for those who plan to travel to

receive education or for treatment. Israel persistently prevents Gazans from leaving for any reason, except in very few cases such as critical humanitarian cases and following exhausting coordination with concerned authorities. Adding to this restriction, Israel assigns a limited period of time for the duration of a Palestinian's departure and prevents returning after this period has ended. Lately, Israel began allowing a few traders to leave the Strip for business purposes, yet it has arrested a number of them while crossing through its controlled points.

The right to travel is a fundamental human right, not only under international humanitarian law but also according to Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) on the right of everyone to freedom of movement and choice of residence: "Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own," and "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country."

## **TAKE ACTION NOW**

### **CALL ON THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES TO LIFT ITS ILLIIGAL BLOCKADE ON GAZA**

The humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in the Gaza Strip is a disgrace to humanity, and to all those witnessing silently how poverty, and lack of resources.

As the occupying power, Israel has a duty under International Humanitarian Law to ensure the welfare of the population of Gaza without discrimination. Israel has failed to uphold the population's human rights including the rights to health, to education, to work and to an adequate standard of living, which includes the rights to food and adequate housing. Israel should be held accountable under international law for the collective punishment of an entire population.

**The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor therefore urgently demands the International Community to help alleviate immediately the blockade on the Gaza Strip.**

**First,** we demand the Israeli government to end the blockade.

**Second,** we call on the Israeli government to end the targeting of innocent citizens, a practice in violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention.

**Third,** we call on the Egyptian government to open the Rafah Crossing for passengers and goods, without any restrictions.

**Fourth,** we call on the international community to hold Israel accountable for its continuous human rights violations, and to

economically sanction Israel until it respects Palestinians' human rights. The international community should be able to separate between the collective punishment of the Palestinians by Israel and the political conflict between Palestine and Israel.

**Fifth,** we call on the International community, the EU and the US in particular, to initiate and support the need for a seaport in Gaza that guarantees the free import and export of goods and private international travel. Commitments for the seaport in Gaza not only address a priority and need of the Palestinians, but also serve as political support for their desire to gain independence.



Euro-Med Monitor  
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