

# The truth about Gaza

**E**very day from 27 December to 19 January this year Israel bombarded the Gaza Strip, home to 1.5 million Palestinians, from the land, sea and air. Nearly 1400 people were killed, 314 of them children, and thousands were wounded. Israel is seeking to justify its actions by broadcasting massive misinformation about the history of Gaza, its inhabitants and its leaders. Most of the media in the UK are either too ignorant or too intimidated to question these modern myths. So here is the truth, based on reports by the UN and other NGOs on the ground, including Israeli human rights groups.

**Myth: Israel is a law-abiding nation seeking to live in peace with its neighbours.**

**The truth:** In 1948, shortly after the embryonic UN gave 56% of Palestine to the largely immigrant, minority Jewish population, the Zionist forces drove out most of the indigenous Palestinians and took 78% of the land. They razed to the ground over 400 Palestinian villages, so that the refugees could not return. In 1967 they occupied the rest of Palestine, including Gaza, and began to settle their citizens in these areas, in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In 2002 they began the construction of the 400-mile long barrier, largely on Palestinian land, using it to take land and water resources from what is left of the West Bank.

The centres of population in the West Bank have been isolated into ghetto-like enclaves, surrounded by the Israeli army and illegal settlements. Many methods are being used to drive Palestinians out of their homes in East Jerusalem, which Israel has annexed, in contravention of international law.

Israel is in violation of over 60 UN Resolutions, which call for the return of refugees, withdrawal of the settlers, dismantling of the wall and a lifting of the siege on Gaza.

**Myth: Israel is threatened by its Arab neighbours**

**The truth:** Egypt and Jordan have diplomatic relations and trade agreements with Israel. Lebanon and Syria do not, as Israel still occupies part of their territory. Nevertheless, on several occasions the Arab League has offered Israel full normalisation in return for a viable Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza. Israel has refused.

**Myth: Israel withdrew its settlers and the army from Gaza in 2005, but the Palestinians rejected this peace offering and simply resorted to more violence.**

**The truth:** Israel did withdraw 8000 settlers from Gaza, after 38 years of occupation — but immediately sent 30,000 more to the illegal settlements in the West Bank (which now has over 450,000 settlers).

At the same time, it placed extremely tight restrictions



*Rafah, 28 December 2008. Photo: MaanImages*

on all entry points to the Gaza Strip, making it almost impossible for the local economy to function. From 2005–7 the Israeli army killed 1,290 Palestinians in Gaza, including 222 children. From 2005–2008, 11 Israelis were killed by rocket fire.

**Myth: Israel has for many years suffered terribly from thousands of missiles fired from N. Gaza.**

**The truth:** The first homemade Qassam missile was fired across the Israeli border in October 2001; the first fatality occurred in March 2007.

Up to November 2008 13 Israelis were killed by Qassam rockets. By contrast, between September 2000 and the end of November 2008 nearly 5000 Palestinians were killed, more than half of them in Gaza. The rockets have in the last year reached more distant targets, but in military terms they are ineffectual, compared to the fire-power of the US F-16s, Apache helicopter gunships, Merkava tanks and naval gunships with which Israel is equipped.

Hamas say the missiles are in retaliation not only for the many deaths Israel has caused both in Gaza and the West Bank, but also for the continued occupation and expropriation of land (see above). They say they hope to end the occupation in this way, much as Israel was forced to end the occupation of South Lebanon by Hizbollah.

**Myth: Hamas broke the recent ceasefire, prompting Israel's bombardment and invasion of Gaza.**

**The truth:** In November 2008, during the six-month ceasefire, the Israeli army killed 14 Palestinians and tightened the siege on Gaza even more. In retaliation, Qassam rockets were fired on the Negev, killing no-one.

Israeli spokesmen have freely admitted that the assaults on Gaza were planned eight months ago — before the ceasefire. They clearly went into the ceasefire agreement without the intention of respecting it.

**Myth: Hamas is an illegal terrorist organisation bent on Israel's destruction. There is no possibility of Israel negotiating with them.**

**The truth:** Hamas is a nationalist, Islamist organisation consisting of a political party, with a military wing, which for years was largely responsible for running hospitals and schools in Gaza, in a situation of military occupation. Even secular Palestinians saw them as efficient and non-corrupt.

When they came to power they offered Israel a ten-year truce, during which time negotiations could take place. Israel rejected this, and continued to quote earlier Hamas manifestos which called for the return of Palestinian land and property.

**Myth: Hamas took over Gaza in a coup in June 2007, ousting the rightful government headed by Mahmoud Abbas.**

**The truth:** Hamas won the 2006 general elections, which international observers considered free and fair, and formed a unity government in which MPs from Fatah and other parties were offered ministerial posts. However, in June 2006 Israeli troops abducted dozens of Hamas ministers and parliamentarians and put them in jail, while the US and other western governments joined Israel in refusing to recognise or speak to Hamas.

Israel and the US encouraged Fatah to stage a coup in Gaza, but Hamas pre-empted this in June 2007.

Mahmoud Abbas is the elected President of the Palestinian people, but his party, Fatah, does not have a mandate.

**Myth: Israel always tries to minimise civilian casualties — it is targeting only Hamas.**

**The truth:** Israel has the most technically advanced weaponry in the world, with the exception of the US. Its computerised drone planes (which it sells to the UK) send back extremely detailed information about every square foot of the Gaza Strip. And yet hundreds of civilians have been killed and wounded, with the one power plant, ambulances, schools and hospitals being hit.

**Myth: Any nation faced with missile or bomb attacks would respond with massive fire power.**

**The truth:** For years Britain experienced terrorist attacks by the IRA, with many more fatalities than Israel has suffered. It never resorted to bombing civilian targets and infrastructure, but succeeded through patient negotiation.

**Myth: Hamas uses the citizens of Gaza as 'human shields'.**

**The truth:** Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas on earth, with 1.5 million inhabitants living in an area about 25 miles long and five miles wide. There are no caves or forests to hide in or operate from — only urban areas.

**Myth: Israel has the welfare of the people of Gaza at heart.**

**The truth:** Since June 2007 Israel has sealed off the Gaza Strip from the outside world, so that it is almost impossible to get in or out, or to import or export goods. Patients used to be able to leave Gaza to seek medical treatment elsewhere, but in the last year Israel has denied permits to most patients and dozens have died.

**Myth: The people of Gaza are not really suffering — this is exaggerated for propaganda purposes.**

**The truth:** John Ging, director of the UN agency for refugees in Gaza, Professor Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Territories and representatives of Oxfam and other international aid organisations reacted angrily to Israel's claims. For years they have been monitoring the situation and calling attention to the desperate and deteriorating plight of the people of Gaza.

**Myth: People who criticise Israel are anti-Semitic.**

**The truth:** To be anti-Semitic is to be racist towards Jews. But many Jews, and even Israelis, are highly critical of Israel's policies. The policies of ethnic cleansing and seizure of land are rooted in Zionism, or the belief that Jews have exclusive rights to Palestine. To be anti-Zionist is to oppose this ideology and these policies. But Israel uses the anti-Semitism argument to intimidate people into silence.

**Need to know more?**

See [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org) for information, publications, maps, current news and events.

- For detailed reports from international and Israeli organisations see: [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org), [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org), [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk), [www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk), [www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk), [www.adalah.org](http://www.adalah.org), [www.icahd.org](http://www.icahd.org)
- For current news see: [www.electronicintifada.net](http://www.electronicintifada.net), [www.maannews.net](http://www.maannews.net)

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