

GAZA UNDER SIEGE



Gaza is the world's largest open air prison. Since 2007 Israel – as an occupying power – has imposed an illegal blockade by land, air, and sea that prevents the free movement of goods and people. The coastal strip, and its population of 1.9 million people, is completely cut off from the outside world.

The decade-long siege has triggered major socio-economic and health crises, exacerbated by three major military assaults that destroyed much of Gaza's already fragile infrastructure.

A struggling economy

Israel completely banned exports from Gaza in 2007. This destroyed much of Gaza's industry and caused a massive rise in unemployment. 90% of commercial activities were forced to cease, and youth unemployment is currently higher than 60%.

Some movement of goods is now allowed, but there are heavy restrictions on the import of raw materials considered by Israel to have a "dual military-civilian use". In 2015 this included a complete ban on wooden planks thicker than 2.5 centimetres, which are essential for construction.

Limited access to land and sea has significantly undermined farming industries. Fishermen are only permitted 6 nautical miles off the coast, and 35% of agricultural land falls within Israel's buffer zone where farmers are shot at by Israeli forces.

Key facts

- UN warns Gaza will be uninhabitable by 2020 unless there is urgent change.
- 80% of Gazans are dependent on humanitarian aid to survive, and 47% of the population is food insecure.
- Gazans face electrical blackouts for 12–16 hours every day.
- 97% of water is not safe for consumption.
- Over 31% of essential medicines are unavailable.

Living without the basics

Repeated military offensives have severely damaged Gaza's only power plant, and in June 2017 Israel reduced its power supply to Gaza by 30%. Gazans can now expect as little as three to four hours of electricity a day.

The chronic fuel shortage caused by the blockade has dramatic health implications. Hospitals struggle to function, wastewater goes untreated, and industry has come to a standstill.

"The closure of Gaza suffocates its people... It's a collective punishment for which there must be accountability."

– Ban Ki-moon,
former UN Secretary General



Healthcare under occupation

Travel restrictions in Gaza do not just apply to students, businessmen, and tourists. Israel frequently delays or denies travel permits for those seeking urgent medical treatment not internally available. This has resulted in numerous avoidable deaths.

Among the worst affected are cancer patients, and 31% of essential life-saving medicines are unavailable due to the blockade.

In addition to material shortages, electrical outages mean that hospitals are reliant upon backup generators for up to 20 hours a day. Many services are not available as a result, and there are cases of nurses having to manually hand-pump air for new-borns when ventilators fail.



Israel attacks a UN school in Gaza using white phosphorus.

Gaza under attack

In 2014 Israel launched a 50-day deadly military offensive against Gaza. This was the third major assault in under 10 years. “Operation Protective Edge” killed 2,251 Palestinians, including 551 children.

Israel has been widely condemned for the targeting of civilians (who accounted for 65% of Palestinian fatalities), which constitutes as a war crime.

The bombings hit what fragile infrastructure existed. 142,071 housing units, 17 hospitals, and 258 schools were destroyed or damaged. Around half a million people were displaced, exposing them to poor water and sanitation access, psychological and health problems, and inconsistent access to education.

Hampered reconstruction

The blockade’s restrictions on essential building materials have made reconstruction efforts painfully slow. Thousands of people remain homeless since 2014, and buildings such as schools and hospitals are unfit for purpose. Oxfam estimate it will take over 100 years to rebuild at the current rate of progress.

International responsibility

The UN have reaffirmed that Israel, as an occupying power, is legally responsible for the wellbeing of Gaza’s citizens. This needs to be enforced by the international community.

The UK has a duty – as a signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention – to hold Israel accountable for breaches of international law. This includes doing everything to end the collective punishment inflicted through the continued illegal blockade, and to fully investigate charges of war crimes committed in the summer of 2014.



Take action now

The people of Gaza have a very clear message for the international community: Please act to end the siege NOW.

- Join us and become a member of PSC today
- Sign and share our petitions and actions on the PSC website
- Join our Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaigns
- Follow us on Twitter and Facebook

More information:

- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs www.ochaopt.org
- Defense for Children International www.dci-palestine.org
- B’Tselem www.btselem.org
- Medical Aid for Palestinians www.map.org.uk

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