

# The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion



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## Executive Summary

The situation for 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip is worse now than it has ever been since the start of the Israeli military occupation in 1967. The current situation in Gaza is man-made, completely avoidable and, with the necessary political will, can also be reversed.

Gaza has suffered from a long-term pattern of economic stagnation and plummeting development indicators. The severity of the situation has increased exponentially since Israel imposed extreme restrictions on the movement of goods and people in response to the Hamas take over of Gaza and to indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israel. This report illustrates the gravity of the current situation across key sectors.

### ► Humanitarian Access

Movement in and out of Gaza is all but impossible and supplies of food and water, sewage treatment, and basic healthcare can no longer be taken for granted. As a result of the blockade and collapse of the economy, there is little money to buy food and limited food to buy. Food prices are rising and wheat flour, baby milk, and rice, among other essential goods, are increasingly scarce. During the period of May-June 2007 alone, these commodity prices rose 34%, 30% and 20.5% respectively<sup>1</sup>.

As the humanitarian crisis intensified, the number of trucks carrying commercial and humanitarian supplies into Gaza plummeted. In the months prior to the tightening of the blockade around 250 trucks a day entered Gaza with supplies<sup>2</sup>, now the Sufa crossing is only able to deal with a maximum of 45 trucks a day<sup>3</sup>. In most cases, this number is barely reached.

### ► Poverty and Dependency on Food Aid

The number of people living in absolute poverty in Gaza has increased sharply. Today, 80% of families in Gaza currently rely on humanitarian aid compared to 63% in 2006<sup>4</sup>. This decline exposes unprecedented levels of poverty and the inability of a large majority of the population to afford basic food. In 2007, this

meant that on average, households were spending approximately 62% of their total income on food compared with 37% in 2004<sup>5</sup>.

As a result, food aid increased dramatically to meet the needs of this increasingly impoverished population. In 2008, there are over 1.1 million people – some three-quarters of Gaza's population – who are dependent on food aid. In less than ten years, the number of families depending on UNRWA food aid increased ten-fold<sup>6</sup>.

### ► Unemployment

Unemployment in Gaza is close to 40% and is set to rise to 50%<sup>7</sup>. The private sector – that generates 53% of all jobs in Gaza – has been devastated, businesses have been bankrupted and 75,000 workers out of 110,000 are now without a job<sup>8</sup>. At present, 95% of Gaza's industrial operations are suspended because they cannot access inputs for production nor can they export what they produce<sup>9</sup>. In June 2005, there were 3,900 factories in Gaza employing 35,000 people<sup>10</sup>. Six months later there were just 195 left employing only 1,750 people. The construction industry is paralysed with tens of thousands of labourers out of work<sup>11</sup>. The agriculture sector has also been badly hit and nearly 40,000 workers who depend on cash crops now have no income<sup>12</sup>. The lack of employment in Gaza has been

<sup>1</sup> WFP Food Security and Market Monitoring Report: Report 9, June 2007

<sup>2</sup> OCHA Special Focus. "The closure of the Gaza Strip: the economic and humanitarian consequences", December 2007

<sup>3</sup> Oxfam Jerusalem, February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> OCHA Special Focus. "The closure of the Gaza Strip: the economic and humanitarian consequences", December 2007

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> UNRWA currently provides food aid for 182,400 families (approximately 860,000 individuals) in Gaza and the World Food Programme provides food for 302,000 individuals, amounting to a total of 1.1 million people. In 1999 UNRWA provided food aid to just 16,174 families in the Gaza Strip

<sup>7</sup> Exact figure is 37.6 percent. Palestinian Bureau of Statistics 2007 quoted in OCHA Special Focus December 2007, Closure of the Gaza Strip: The Economic and Humanitarian Consequences

<sup>8</sup> PALTRADE Presentation to PSCC, July 2007

compounded by Israel ending its reliance on cheap labour from Gaza. In September 2000, some 24,000 Palestinians crossed out of Gaza every day to work in Israel<sup>13</sup>. Today that figure is zero.

### ➤ Basic Services

The blockade is destroying public service infrastructure in Gaza. The Israeli government prevents the repair and maintenance of the electricity and water service infrastructure in Gaza by prohibiting the import of spare parts. The impact of this is amplified by Israel's parallel punitive restrictions on fuel and electricity to Gaza. Hospitals cannot generate electricity to keep lifesaving equipment working or to generate oxygen, while 40-50 million tons of sewage continues to pour into the sea daily<sup>14</sup>.

In September 2007, an UNRWA survey in the Gaza Strip revealed that there was a nearly 80% failure rate in schools grades four to nine, with up to 90% failure rates in Mathematics<sup>15</sup>. In January 2008, UNICEF reported that schools in Gaza had been cancelling classes that are high on energy consumption, such as IT, science labs and extra curricular activities<sup>16</sup>.

### ➤ Basic Medical Supplies and Access to Treatment

As a result of fuel and electricity restrictions, hospitals are currently experiencing power cuts lasting for 8-12 hours a day. There is currently a 60-70 percent shortage reported in the diesel required for hospital power generators.

According to the World Health Organisation, the proportion of patients given permits to exit Gaza for medical care decreased from 89.3% in January 2007 to 64.3% in December 2007, an unprecedented low. It is important to note that even those patients who are granted permits to exit Gaza are often denied access at the crossing itself. Twenty-seven such

cases were reported in the month of October alone. WHO has been monitoring the access of patients to specialized health services not available within the Gaza Strip. One main indicator monitored since October 2007 is the death of patients due to lack of access to referral services. During the period October-December 2007, WHO has confirmed the deaths of 20 patients, including 5 children.

### A New Policy for Gaza

The blockade has effectively dismantled the economy and impoverished the population of Gaza. Israel's policy affects the civilian population of Gaza indiscriminately and constitutes a collective punishment against ordinary men, women and children. The measures taken are illegal under international humanitarian law.

Israel has the right and duty to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks against its civilian population, but the current policy fails to provide Israel with increased security and has led to increasing polarisation. As the head of UNRWA has pointed out, 'Hungry, unhealthy, angry communities do not make good partners for peace.'

International efforts should be directed towards securing a swift end to the blockade of Gaza. Israel's current policy of isolation and refusal to engage with all elements of the Palestinian leadership only closes doors to negotiations while reinforcing the political and humanitarian crisis.

There is an urgent need for Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation in order to create and sustain a credible and effective peace process with Israel. The international community must provide the political support to facilitate such an undertaking. To date, failure to address the situation in Gaza has harmed both Palestinians and Israelis and has been detrimental to the broader peace process itself.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank. *Investing in Palestinian Economic Reform and Development*, Paris, December 17th 2007

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> OCHA Special Focus. "The closure of the Gaza Strip: the economic and humanitarian consequences", December 2007

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank. *West Bank and Gaza Up-date*, September 2006

<sup>14</sup> Oxfam Jerusalem / CMWU Gaza February 2008.

<sup>15</sup> UNRWA September 2007

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF press release January 2008

## Introduction

**The situation for 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip is worse now than it has ever been since the start of the Israeli military occupation in 1967. The current situation in Gaza is man-made, completely avoidable and, with the necessary political will, can be reversed.**

In response to the election of Hamas in 2006, its de facto takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 and the ongoing and indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel, the Israeli government imposed severe restrictions on the access of goods and people to and from Gaza.

This report charts the dramatic decline in key economic and humanitarian indicators for Gaza. In terms of poverty, food aid dependency, humanitarian access, unemployment, access to basic services and medical supplies, we are witnessing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Though there has been a long-term pattern of deterioration stemming from decades of occupation and, more recently, international sanctions on the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, the severity of the humanitarian situation has increased exponentially due to the Israeli Government's imposition of the blockade in response to indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israel.

We condemn continuing rocket attacks against Israel. Israel has the right and obligation to protect its citizens. However, as consideration of the humanitarian situation illustrates, the policy of blockade is a disproportionate response.

This humanitarian crisis is a direct result of on-going collective punishment of ordinary men, women and children and is illegal under international law<sup>17</sup>. Isolation and poverty are breeding increasing levels of violence for which both Palestinians and Israelis are paying the price.

Israel, as the occupying power, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the welfare of the Palestinian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), including the 1.5 million

Palestinians who live in the Gaza Strip, all of whom are protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The contention by Israeli officials that Israel is no longer bound by the laws of occupation since it redeployed its forces to the perimeter of the Gaza Strip in 2005 is a fallacy. Israel retains effective control of the Gaza Strip, by virtue of the full control it exercises over the Gaza Strip's land border, its air space and territorial waters, and the movement of people and goods. Hence, the Israeli authorities are bound by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to ensure the welfare of the Palestinian population in the OPT.

Year on year, the Gazan population is getting poorer despite successive increases in international aid. Karen Koning Abu Zayd, the head of UNRWA recently warned, "Gaza is on the threshold of becoming the first territory to be intentionally reduced to a state of abject destitution, with the knowledge, acquiescence and – some would say – encouragement of the international community."<sup>18</sup>

In January 2008, the British government stated that it did not support Israel's closure of all crossings into Gaza as it prevented the delivery of vital supplies<sup>19</sup>. In February 2008, the government also said that cutting electricity supplies to Gaza risks further deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Gaza without improving the security situation<sup>20</sup>. As UK development and human rights agencies, we believe that this is not enough: concrete actions must be taken to end the blockade of the Gaza Strip and redirect policy towards an inclusive political process through which the root causes of the current crisis can be adequately addressed.

<sup>17</sup> Article 33, Fourth Geneva Convention, signed by Israel August 1949

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

<sup>19</sup> "Gaza: Joint FCO and DFID statement", Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 8 February 2008

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

## The Humanitarian Crisis

### The Rise and Rise of Poverty in Gaza

The poverty statistics for the Gaza Strip chart the impoverishment of an entire population. Today, over 80% of Palestinians in Gaza are dependent on humanitarian assistance compared to 63% in 2006. In less than ten years, the number of families depending on UNRWA food aid has increased ten-fold<sup>21</sup>. In 2008, there are over 1.1 million people – some three-quarters of the population of Gaza – who are dependent on food aid.

The rise of poverty in Gaza relates to the crippling impact of the Israeli blockade within the broader context of a long-term pattern of economic degradation in Gaza stemming from Israeli-imposed closures since the early 1990s and, more recently, the eighteen-month international aid embargo on the Palestinian Authority that was in place until June 2007.

Poverty levels continue to climb and the UN predicts that dependency on humanitarian aid “will sharply rise above and beyond the current level of 80% of the population.”<sup>22</sup> According to the World Food Programme, the mean household monthly income dropped by 22% in less than four months, between June and September 2007. During the same time period the number of households in Gaza earning less than \$1.2 per person per day soared from 55% to 70%. The National Deep Poverty Line is \$2.3 per day.

For 2008, the UN has launched the biggest ever humanitarian appeal for the Palestinians of \$462 million, well over twice the 2006 appeal, and representing the third largest UN request after the Sudan and Congo<sup>23</sup>. International governments have also pledged an unprecedented US\$7 billion for the Palestinians over the next three years.

More aid is going to the Palestinians than ever before and yet the humanitarian situation continues to

decline. Continued aid is vital to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza but it cannot provide a solution in itself.

### An Imprisoned Population

The present definition of what constitutes essential humanitarian supplies into Gaza is seriously deficient. Humanitarian agencies in the OPT have compiled a list of specific humanitarian goods which are essential for the survival and sustainability of life for the majority of the population, especially the most vulnerable groups such as children, the sick and the elderly. Unfortunately the Government of Israel has not allowed these items to enter.

In January 2008, up to half of Gaza’s population poured across the border into Egypt in what some commentators described as a “jail break.” Driven by need and diminishing supplies, it was an expression of the desperation felt by 1.5 million Palestinians who have been effectively imprisoned in Gaza over the past eight months.

Movement in and out of Gaza is all but impossible and supplies of food and water, sewage treatment, and basic healthcare can no longer be taken for granted.

As a result of the blockade and collapse of the economy, there is little money to buy food and limited food to buy. Food prices are rising and wheat flour, baby milk and cooking oil are increasingly scarce.

The Israeli policy of isolation is not new and Gaza has been subject to closures since the early 1990s. In November 2005, after much negotiation, Israel and the Palestinian Authority concluded an agreement on movement and access (AMA) for Gaza. The aim of the agreement was to enable the people of Gaza and the West Bank to move, to trade, and to live ordinary lives.

<sup>21</sup> UNRWA currently provides food aid for 182,400 families (approximately 860,000 individuals) in Gaza and the World Food Programme provides food for 302,000 individuals, amounting to a total of 1.1 million people. In 1999 UNRWA provided food aid to just 16,174 families in the Gaza Strip

<sup>22</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “The closure of the Gaza Strip: the economic and humanitarian consequences”, OCHA Special Focus, December 2007

<sup>23</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP): Appeal 2008 for occupied Palestinian territory, 2008

Israel stated that the Karni crossing, the commercial lifeline into the Gaza Strip, would be fully functional by the end of 2006 and that 400 export trucks could cross each day. In practice only 12 export trucks passed through each day in 2006.

Meanwhile, the number of trucks carrying commercial and humanitarian supplies into Gaza has also plummeted. In the months before the blockade began, around 250 trucks a day entered Gaza through Sufa with supplies, now it is only able to accommodate a maximum of 45 trucks a day. In most cases, this number is barely reached.

The agricultural sector in Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip has suffered numerous blows due to repeated Israeli incursions, which have destroyed orchards, fields, and polytunnels. Farmers have no alternatives to growing cash crops such as strawberries and potatoes as these comply with Israeli orders that nothing is planted over 40cm high. But cash crops are costly to produce and heavily reliant on accessible export markets. Many farmers have been crippled by Israel's continued border closures, which do not allow produce such as strawberries to reach EU markets.

*“At the moment we are planting strawberries but we don't know what we'll do with them when they are ripe. If the border closures continue for another week and it starts to rain, the rain will damage our crop and rot the fruit. Farmers will lose their expenses and be in serious debt.”*

Mohammed, 42, a strawberry farmer and a member of the Beit Lahiya Agricultural Cooperative

As an immediate, short-term step to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza whilst the end of blockade is being negotiated, Israel should widen its narrow definition of what constitutes essential humanitarian assistance. This would mean restoring fuel imports and electricity supplies, to allow people to cook, Gaza's electricity plant to function and for ambulances, school buses, project vehicles and ordinary transport to run. For fuel imports this

means, as a minimum, the following amounts over a 5 day operating week<sup>24</sup>.

Cooking gas	250-300 tons per day
Industrial diesel	700,000 litres per day to run the power plant and 400,000 litres per day to restock reserves (essential for Gaza's electricity plant)
Diesel	250,000 – 300,000 litres per day
Benzene for cars and ambulances	100,000 to 150,000 litres per day

In the short term, in order to ensure that Gazans can earn a decent wage to support their families and to stop aid dependency increasing further, Gazans must be able to import key commodities for agricultural and manufacturing production as well as export their produce. To this end, 500 truckloads of imports and 200 truckloads of exports a day should be allowed to cross over the next six months, rising to 600-700 trucks of imports and 400 trucks of exports once productivity has resumed and the parties are unable to restrict supply<sup>25</sup>. Steps should be taken to secure the reopening of the Gaza crossings in line with the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), brokered by the US and EU in 2005, and efforts renewed to ensure the full implementation of the AMA. Negotiations must ensure all agreements include full provision for imports as well as exports of goods and the movement of people.

## Economic Collapse

The Gaza economy is no longer on the brink of collapse – it has collapsed. In the last 6 months, the majority of private businesses have shut down and 95% of Gaza's industrial operations are suspended due to the ban on imported raw materials and the block on exports<sup>26</sup>. Entire sectors including construction and agriculture have ground to a halt, 3,500 factories out of 3,900 have closed in the last 6 months resulting in some 75,000 job losses in the private sector as a whole<sup>27</sup>. The World Bank states that even with the full funding pledged at the Paris

<sup>24</sup> PalTrade Gaza, 20 February 2007

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> “Investing in Palestinian Economic Reform and Development”, World Bank, December 17th 2007

<sup>27</sup> “The closure of the Gaza Strip: the economic and humanitarian consequences”, OCHA Special Focus, December 2007

Conference, economic growth will remain negative unless movement restrictions across the OPT are relaxed<sup>28</sup>.

In June 2005, there were 748 truckloads of exports leaving Gaza for Israel and other countries. A month later there were none. In December 2007, after much international pressure, reduced quantities of strawberries and carnations were allowed out but not enough to safeguard the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers<sup>29</sup>.

Any kind of economic recovery in the Palestinian Territory is impossible while the blockade of Gaza remains in place and even if it is lifted it will take years to repair the damage of the last 6 months, to re-build trade relations, restore infrastructure and resume productivity. In the absence of a functioning economy in Gaza, international aid is simply a stop-gap measure. Millions of pounds of European money, including that of UK taxpayers, is being spent, not on recovery, development and peace-building initiatives but on sustaining basic survival in Gaza. Meanwhile Israel has one of the best performing economies in the world with steady 5% growth rates per annum for the last four years<sup>30</sup>.

*“We have severe fruit shortages here in Bureij (refugee camp in central Gaza) . . . We cannot live without Israeli supplies. Our lives depend on the Israelis as we have no resources of our own, no fuel or food. If they close all the borders what will we eat?” said Sanaa.*

On top of the strangulation of the Gaza economy, the economic interdependence that once existed between Israel and Gaza is also being destroyed. In September 2000, just before the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada and the escalation of violence on both sides, some 24,000 Palestinians crossed out of Gaza everyday to work in Israel<sup>31</sup>. Today that figure is zero. Combined with the lack of jobs available in the Gaza Strip unemployment has reached close to 40% of the population<sup>32</sup>.

The ban on imports and exports has also negatively impacted on Israeli industrialists and entrepreneurs who rely on trade with Gaza. In short, the working ties between Israel and the Palestinians that could potentially form the basis for long-term economic stability – as well as peaceful coexistence – are being severed, perhaps irrevocably.

The upcoming Israel-Palestine business conference in March {Double-checking that smaller conference is still taking place on 9 March, if not, will change to May} provides a much-needed opportunity to address these areas of concern. If it is to succeed, Tony Blair, the Special Representative of the Quartet, should ensure that the root causes of economic atrophy – movement and access restrictions in both Gaza and the West Bank – are addressed head on and in earnest. The Quartet should openly acknowledge that economic recovery and growth will only be possible when the blockade of Gaza and the closures in the West Bank are lifted.

## Blackouts in Gaza

Gaza’s main power plant currently operates on industrial diesel that is provided by the European Union as international aid to the Palestinian people. Yet the Israeli government prevents the EU from supplying any more than 2.2 million litres of oil a week, which is not sufficient for the power plant to operate on full capacity<sup>33</sup>.

Gaza’s power plant is capable of generating 140MW – enough to provide Gaza City and some of Middle Gaza with a steady supply of electricity – but since Israel destroyed the original transformers in June 2006, the plant’s export capacity was reduced by almost two-thirds. Today Gaza’s power plant has the capacity to provide 80MW of electricity but actually only generates 55-65MW due to the Israeli restriction on industrial fuel supplies<sup>34</sup>.

There is a 20% electricity deficit in Gaza that is already having serious implications for the

<sup>28</sup> “Investing in Palestinian Economic Reform and Development: Report for the Pledging Conference”, World Bank, December 17 2007

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.8

<sup>30</sup> “The Israeli Economy: Thriving in a Complicated Environment”, Fischer, S., Address to the Council on Foreign Relations, 18 October 2007

<sup>31</sup> West Bank and Gaza Update, World Bank, September 2006

<sup>32</sup> The exact figure is 37.6 %, PCBS 2007

<sup>33</sup> GISHA unofficial English translation of High Court verdict, February 2008

<sup>34</sup> Oxfam Jerusalem/ Gaza power plant/ Gaza Electricity Distribution Company, 2008



functioning of hospitals, sewage works and other public institutions. This is set to get much worse as Israel started to cut electricity supplies to Gaza as well as fuel in February 2008.

The electricity deficit also means the electric network is under-voltage most of the time, which increases the reliance on diesel-powered generators to supplement low voltage. Generators are found in households, hospitals, water and sewage systems. Currently, generators are the only alternative to electricity blackouts and cannot be operational without sufficient quantities of diesel and the availability of spare parts.

## No Water Works

The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) provides drinking water and removes and treats sewage for the whole of the Gaza Strip.

Without fuel, electricity and proper maintenance, the network cannot function. The immediate and direct consequences of this are as follows:

- Low voltage electricity forces, the use of generators to power water wells and sewage pumping stations. As they run out of diesel, water wells stop functioning and drinking water is cut off. Currently, the CMWU estimates that between 25-30% of the population of the Gaza Strip does not receive running water in their homes. Before the blockade, the CMWU was able to distribute water to 100% of its beneficiaries in the Gaza Strip when fuel was sufficient to supply low electric voltage.
- Sewage pumping stations also cease to pump sewage to the treatment plants. Consequently, some 30-40 million litres of sewage goes into the sea everyday because of the lack of fuel to pump or treat human waste.

## Gaza's Public Infrastructure is being destroyed

The Israeli government prevents the repair and maintenance of the electricity and water service

infrastructure in Gaza by prohibiting the import of spare parts.

The impact of this is amplified by Israel's parallel punitive restrictions on fuel and electricity to Gaza. Hospitals cannot generate electricity to keep lifesaving equipment working or to generate oxygen, while sewage continues to pour into the sea.

This two-pronged attack on basic services is having the effect of systematically destroying the water and sewage infrastructure of the Gaza Strip.

## The Deterioration of Healthcare in the Gaza Strip

Healthcare for 1.5 million people in Gaza has dramatically deteriorated on two levels: the provision of health services inside Gaza and access to treatment outside Gaza.

As a result of fuel and electricity restrictions, Gaza hospitals currently experience power cuts for 8-12 hours a day. This creates dependency on generators to run basic health facilities and critical surgical operations and procedures. There is currently a 60-70% shortage reported in the diesel required for hospital power generators. Furthermore, increasing use of hospital generators has led to the need for maintenance and replacement, which is mostly impossible given the lack of spare parts or new equipment.

As an occupying power, Israel has an obligation to ensure the right to health of the population of Gaza, without discrimination. This includes access to timely and quality healthcare, and ensuring the free passage of medical supplies to the population of Gaza.

## Denial of Emergency Treatment Outside Gaza

Access to treatment outside the Gaza Strip becomes even more critical in view of the worsening crisis within internal healthcare facilities. Furthermore, lifesaving treatments such as chemotherapy are not provided in Gaza.

According to the World Health Organisation, 18.5% of patients seeking emergency treatment in hospitals outside Gaza in 2007 were refused permits to leave. This is an overall annual average: a month by month comparison shows that the proportion of patients given permits to exit Gaza for medical care decreased from 89.3% in January 2007 to 64.3% in December 2007, an unprecedented low.

It is important to note that even those patients who are granted permits to exit Gaza are sometimes denied access at the crossing itself. Twenty-seven

such cases were reported in the month of October alone. Permit delays and denials have resulted in dozens of patient deaths, either in Gaza hospitals or at the Erez crossing itself. WHO has been monitoring the access of patients to specialised health services not available in Gaza Strip. One main indicator, monitored since October 2007, is the death of patients due to the lack of access to referral services. During the period October-December 2007, WHO has confirmed the deaths of 20 patients, including 5 children.

*On the outskirts of Al Bureij camp, central Gaza, live Munir, his wife Sanaa, and their six sons. Munir is dying of thyroid cancer, which has spread to other parts of his body. Munir has not been able to access chemotherapy for months, as he cannot get a permit to cross into Israel or Jordan. Two of Munir's sons are also haemophiliac.*

I have advanced thyroid carcinoma and metastasis means the cancer has spread to my cervical lymph nodes in my neck and shoulder. It's an aggressive form of cancer. I was diagnosed four years ago. I had been unwell for a while but they were not able to diagnose the cancer in Gaza so I travelled to Jordan for treatment and then to Egypt, where they finally discovered the tumour.

I used to travel to Jordan from Rafah crossing to receive treatment but now the border is closed. I was then referred to Israel for chemotherapy but it's very difficult to get out because of the closures imposed on Gaza. I have asked to be transferred to Jordan, but the Israelis will not issue me with a permit due to 'security issues'.

I have two sons with Type B Haemophilia. They were able to go to Israel for treatment until six months ago. My oldest son Hamed is 22 and he spends three days a week in Shifa hospital (the central hospital in Gaza City) being treated for the serious bleeding in his joints caused by his haemophilia. Sometimes when the bleeding is severe he has to go for daily blood transfusions.

But Shifa has a shortage of medicines to treat him. It's also very difficult to get there as he has to travel alone and is unable to walk properly. He uses his electric wheelchair to get to the main road and then gets a bus or taxi to take him to the hospital in Gaza City. My wife used to travel to Israel with him for treatment but Israel has refused him permission for six months.

***'I have advanced thyroid carcinoma... it has spread to my neck...'***

**When was your last chemotherapy session?**

I was supposed to enter Israel in July for chemotherapy but my entry permission was refused.

**Do the Israeli authorities give a reason for refusing you permission to receive treatment?**

No reason other than 'security issues'.

**Are you able to get any treatment in Gaza?**

No, the dosage I need is not available here. Shifa hospital doesn't have the treatment I need. There are many cancer patients in Gaza who need radiation therapy that isn't available here, so they take liquid alternatives. When I take the liquid dose every three months I have to be isolated for three days in a separate room. No one is allowed

to enter the room as they may be affected by the radiation, so my wife leaves food for me outside the door.

#### Are you able to work?

I used to be a driver but now I can't work, I can't move and my health is deteriorating all the time. The tumour they found during the surgery was so big it had spread to my shoulders and the nerves in my arms were affected so I am unable to work.

I was in Shifa hospital earlier today but they didn't have the medicine I needed due to stock shortages. I also needed X-rays but the machinery wasn't working as spare parts are not being allowed in Gaza. One of my lungs is collapsing due to the chemotherapy and I am deteriorating not only physically but also emotionally due to the metastasis. I will be leaving

my family alone and there is nothing I can do to receive the treatment I need. I am devastated.

I am not getting the treatment I need. I am dying slowly. I'm very tired. When I hear about people being killed on the television it wears me out. I also have a chest disease and am unable to speak properly without the help of medicines, which I can't find here in Gaza.

#### What impact has this had on your family?

(Fighting back the tears, Munir was unable to respond to this question, and only shook his head.)

#### What is your monthly income?

We receive some food supplies from UNRWA and some friends are able to help one of our sons to go to university. But our house is rented and every month is a struggle.

*'I will be leaving my family alone and there is nothing I can do... I am devastated.'*

### Children are Paying the Price for Gaza's Isolation

The impact of Gaza's isolation on children, who account for more than 56% of the population, has been enormous.

Almost 2,000 children have dropped out of school in Gaza in the last five months because families can no longer send their children to school, while across Gaza, the electricity cuts are disrupting teaching hours and shortening the school day<sup>35</sup>. The new school year started with shortages of textbooks and other crucial resources due to the blockade<sup>36</sup>.

In September 2007, an UNRWA survey in the Gaza Strip revealed that there was a nearly 80% failure rate among grades four to nine, with up to 90% failure rates in Mathematics. In January 2008 UNICEF reported that schools in Gaza had been skipping classes that are high on energy consumption, such as IT, science labs and extra curricular activities.

According to the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, John Ging, "What we are seeing is the collapse of education standards due to the cumulative effects of the occupation, closures, poverty and violence".<sup>37</sup>

*"The winter holiday was terrible without electricity. The electricity went out for more than 8 hours every day and we only got it back while we were sleeping.*

*"I used to go with my mother every winter holiday to buy new clothes. We did not go shopping this holiday. There is nothing in the market. Even if we found clothes, they were either not nice or very expensive. Even after the Rafah border opened, only a few goods entered the market and they are very expensive.*

*"I cannot do my homework when I use the chargeable light. The lighting is weak and it affects my eyes. I also cannot concentrate, because all my family members sit around the light.*

*"Sometimes at school we cannot use the science lab or the computer lab because of the electricity cuts, which makes it difficult for us to understand our lessons.*

*"Electricity cuts affect our studies so much."*

Asma, 15, a tenth grade student from Thatelsawari School in Gaza

<sup>35</sup> "Thousands of children dropping out of school in Gaza as ongoing blockade deepens humanitarian crisis", Save the Children UK, February 7 2008

<sup>36</sup> UN Humanitarian Monitor, September 2007

<sup>37</sup> Press statement by John Ging, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, 5 September 2007 [http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/releases/pr-2007/gaza\\_5Sep07.pdf](http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/releases/pr-2007/gaza_5Sep07.pdf)

## Failing to Deliver Security

Israel retains effective control of the Gaza Strip, by virtue of the full control it exercises over the Gaza Strip's land border, its air space and territorial waters, and the movement of people and goods. Hence, the Israeli authorities are bound by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to ensure the welfare of the Palestinian population in the OPT. The blockade, in response to indiscriminate rocket attacks into Israel, constitutes a reprisal against a civilian population and is forbidden by international humanitarian law.

The Israeli government of course has the obligation to protect Israeli citizens from rocket attacks from Gaza. However, if the blockade of Gaza is to stop Palestinian rocket attacks and to force the population to reject Hamas, then it is failing on every front<sup>38</sup>. The current strategy of isolation and blockade has not succeeded in stopping the Qassam rocket attacks and has not enhanced Israel's security. If anything it has increased polarisation at the

expense and security of both Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza.

The security of Israelis and Palestinians is indivisible: one depends on the other. Personal, national, economic and internal securities are fundamentally interconnected.

For Palestinians in Gaza, most aspects of their lives are characterised by insecurity: military presence and attacks, extra-judicial assassinations, loss of land, restrictions on movement, lack of drinking water, unemployment, and barriers to healthcare and education.

For Israelis, the daily threat of attacks from suicide bombs, rockets or other militant action is a constant source of insecurity.

Peace will not be achieved by locking 1.5 million people into a prison of spiralling poverty and misery. Failure to end the policy of isolation will only continue the cycle of increasing poverty and extremism in Gaza rather than bring an end to it.

<sup>38</sup> Israeli authorities have repeatedly indicated that the restrictions on the Gaza Strip's population are in reaction to the frequent firing of so-called "qassam" rockets by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza into Israel. These indiscriminate rockets have killed some 11 Israeli civilians in the past four years in Sderot and have spread fear among the population and damaged the town's economy. The Israeli army has retaliated by launching frequent air bombardments and artillery strikes in which hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, including dozens of children, since last year

## Risk of Non-Engagement

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The international policy of isolating Hamas has not reaped any benefits. On the contrary, it has led to increasing polarisation across the Occupied Palestinian Territories and resulted in a political stalemate with Israel.

Firstly, there is an urgent need for Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation in order to create and sustain a credible and effective peace process with

Israel. It is in the interest of all parties to the conflict that both the West Bank and Gaza are included in the political process.

The policy of isolation and refusal to engage with all elements of the Palestinian leadership only closes doors to negotiations while reinforcing the political and humanitarian crisis.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The current strategy on Gaza is failing at all levels. As development and human rights agencies we call on the UK government, the wider international community, the Israeli government and the Palestinian leadership to pursue a new strategy of engagement.

These are the steps towards a programme of action that we advise should be pursued in order to end the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, resolve the political deadlock and revive a credible and effective Middle East peace process for long-term security, peace and development for all Israelis and Palestinians.

### 1. The humanitarian imperative: immediate actions needed

- We ask the UK government and EU to issue a strong public condemnation of the continuing blockade of Gaza and the Israeli government's use of collective punishment and associated violations of international humanitarian law and to make clear that this policy is both unacceptable and illegal.
- We urge the Special Representative of the Quartet to make a public statement on the extent of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, its economic implications and the need to incorporate Gaza into any strategies for economic and political engagement.
- We urge the UK government and EU to exert greater pressure on the government of Israel to open the crossings into Gaza and stop fuel and electricity cuts in order to stem the worsening humanitarian crisis. They should work with the PA, Hamas and Egypt to this effect.
- As an immediate, short-term step to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza whilst the end of blockade is being negotiated, we call on the Israeli government to widen its definition of what constitutes essential humanitarian assistance to include:
  - Essential inputs for the maintenance and rehabilitation of public service infrastructure including spare parts, cement, technical assistance and cotton which is essential for locally made hygiene items.
  - Access to treatment abroad for patients requiring urgent medical care allowing for parents to accompany children under the age of 18.
  - Resumption of normal fuel imports to allow ordinary people to cook, Gaza's electricity plant to function, for ambulances, school buses, project vehicles and ordinary transport to run.
- Finally, we ask that the UK government and EU put pressure on the government of Israel to ensure that emergency assistance essential to fulfilling fundamental human rights is never used as a bargaining tool to further political goals. Notably, Israel should refrain from imposing sanctions that negatively affect the provision of humanitarian assistance and ensure that the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip is not punished for the positions and actions of Palestinian factions.

### 2. End the blockade: steps to reactivate economic activity in Gaza

- We call for concrete provisions within the current peace negotiations that actively focus on ending the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and ensure that humanitarian needs and human rights are actively addressed during this process.
- We ask the UK government and EU to actively promote plans for the reopening of the Gaza crossings in line with the Agreement on

Movement and Access (AMA), brokered by the US and EU in 2005, and to renew their efforts to ensure the full implementation of the AMA. Negotiations must ensure all agreements include full provision for imports as well as exports of goods and the movement of people.

- We call for the negotiation of an agreement between the divided Palestinian leaderships and with Israel to open the crossings into the Gaza Strip, and that this process is supported by an independent third party.
- We ask the Special Representative of the Quartet to ensure that the upcoming Israel-Palestine economic conference on 9 March addresses the fact that restrictions on movement are one of the root causes of economic stagnation and therefore also a brake on the political process.

### 3. Work towards an inclusive political process

We maintain that members of the Quartet (and the Middle Eastern countries involved in the negotiations) have an obligation, as state parties to the Geneva Conventions and other international human rights treaties, to ensure respect for international law. They should use these prerogatives as a positive force for change and insist that the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (PA) as well as Hamas and other Palestinian Armed Groups adhere to their human rights and international humanitarian law commitments.

- We urgently call for Palestinian dialogue and urge the UK government and the international community to help facilitate this process of reconciliation.
- We ask that once a representative national authority has been created that it is recognized by the UK government, the international community and the Israeli government as a legitimate party.
- We urge the UK government and EU to abandon the failing policy of non-engagement and begin political dialogue with all Palestinian parties.
- We call on the international community to take steps to bring an end to the escalation of violence on all sides and ensure the protection of civilians in both Palestine and in Israel.
- We call on the Israeli Government and Palestinian armed groups to immediately cease all attacks against civilians. All unlawful attacks must stop: the Government of Israel should put an immediate end to disproportionate attacks in Gaza and Palestinian armed groups should immediately stop indiscriminate rocket attacks into southern Israel.
- We call on the UK government and EU to ensure that the Israeli government lifts movement and access restrictions throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories to facilitate long-term Palestinian economic development.

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EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 THURSDAY 6TH MARCH

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