

# SLOW DEATH:

The Collective Punishment  
Of Gaza Has Reached A Critical  
Stage

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# Slow Death

## The Collective Punishment of Gaza has reached a Critical Stage

Israel has a long history of isolating the Gaza Strip, as it has subjected the Strip to many closures since the 1990s, but the blockade imposed in 2007 was an unprecedented form of severe collective punishment. In September 2007 Israel declared Gaza a ‘hostile entity’ and decided 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.’

Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared in 2010: ‘We will not allow the opening of the crossings to Gaza and outside of Gaza to the extent that it will help them bring back life into a completely normal pace.’ While Israel has a duty to protect its citizens, the measures it uses to do so must conform to international humanitarian and human rights law.

Under international humanitarian law, Israel remains the Occupying Power despite its ‘disengagement’ from Gaza in 2005 and its insistence that it is no longer occupying the Strip. Israel still maintains

effective control over entry and exit into Gaza, its air space and sea, as well as its population registry, telecommunications networks, and many other aspects of its daily life and infrastructure. Such control entails responsibility to safeguard the welfare of the civilian population. By enforcing the blockade on the Gaza Strip, Israel is violating the absolute prohibition on collective punishment in



international humanitarian law, punishing the entire population of Gaza for the acts of a few.

The blockade is preventing reconstruction and recovery of thousands of homes, schools, hospitals and water networks destroyed during Israel's military offensives in 2008-2009 and in November 2012, depleting the resources of a collapsing economy. The population of 1.6 million people, more than half of which are children, suffers from high levels of poverty and dependence on aid.

## **Gaza Crisis Deepens As Egypt Closes Border And Tunnels**

Israel's array of restrictions on trade and human traffic in and out of the Gaza strip, coupled with regular Israeli attacks on the Strip, prompted Palestinians to develop tunnels from the Palestinian Rafah into the Egyptian Rafah in order to survive the strangling Israeli siege. The tunnels under Rafah are used for the entry of construction materials, fuel and goods otherwise unavailable or available at a higher price from Israel. Nevertheless, the tunnels' influx was not enough to appease all the needed supplies of the Gaza Strip. Additionally the tunnel business had disastrous consequences. Many workers put in 12-hour shifts six days a week—or more—in cramped spaces. Gas explosions, electrocutions, caving tunnels and Israeli air strikes are common, raising the death toll amongst workers to over 250 since 2007.

The Egyptian authorities have lately tightened controls on the Rafah passenger crossing, Gaza's main access to the outside world. The Gaza-Egypt relation has been strained over the blockade of Gaza and the Egyptian campaign in the past year to shut down the tunnels. By the end of July 2013, the Egyptian army had destroyed all the tunnels, leading

to a stern crisis in fuel supplies that threatens to close almost 137 petrol stations in the besieged territory upon which most Palestinians rely.

Sewage treatment plants also face closure due to the shortage of sufficient diesel to drive the pumps. The authority pointed out that the shortages mean that raw sewage will accumulate and create an environmental disaster, with serious pollution along the Palestinian coast of the Gaza Strip. The destruction of the tunnels has also led to a complete halt of all construction materials and medical supplies.

On July 24, 2013 the UN's Middle East peace envoy, Robert Serry, warned the Security Council that "Gaza was experiencing some serious shortages of fuel and basic building materials for which the tunnels had become the primary entry point due to severe restrictions on imports via the official crossings. While the only Israeli crossing for goods has remained open and is handling increased quantities of consumers' goods, we are concerned that already difficult economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza will further deteriorate, if access into Gaza through legal crossings of basic commodities like building materials is not liberalized".

### 10 FACTS about the Implications of the Blockade on Gaza :

- According to UNOCHA, 57% of Gaza households are food insecure as of July 2013, however, if the current Israeli and Egyptians measures remain as they are, 65% of Gaza households will be food insecure ( WFP estimate June 2010)
- As of August 2013, over a third (35.5%) of those able and willing to work are unemployed (PCBS) - one of the highest unemployment rates in the world. Economists expect that the continuous closure of the tunnels will lead to a sharp increase in the unemployment level (43% by the end of 2013 compare with 32% in June 2013).
- The continuous closure of the tunnels will lead to a 3% decline in the growth by the end of 2013 compared with 15% as of June 2013.
- The construction sector is working with less than 15% of its previous capacity leading to more than 30.000 losses in job opportunities since July 2013.
- A longstanding electricity deficit, compounded by shortages in fuel needed to run Gaza's power plant, results in power outages of up to 12 hours a day (UNOCHA, July 2013).
- Only a quarter of households receive running water every day, during several hours only.
- Over 90% of the water extracted from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption.
- Some 90 million liters of untreated and partially treated sewage are dumped in the sea off the Gaza coast each day, creating public health hazards.
- Over 12,000 people are currently displaced due to their inability to reconstruct their homes, destroyed during hostilities (UNOCHA, July 2013).
- The economy has endured severe losses worth of \$460 million in all economic sectors within the past two months. (Ministry of Economy- Gaza)



## Seven Years Of A Suffocating Blockade

A report issued in October 2011 by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that the Gaza blockade by land, air and sea ‘is a denial of basic human rights in contravention of international law and amounts to collective punishment. It severely restricts imports and exports, as well as the movement of people in and out of Gaza, and access to agricultural land and fishing waters. Gazans are unable to provide for their families and the quality of infrastructure and vital services has deteriorated’.

Before Israel’s implementation of a full siege on Gaza in 2007, there were six official crossings into Gaza: Erez, Karni, Nahal Oz, Kerem Shalom and Sufa with Israel, and Rafah with Egypt. Prior to 2007, an average of 70 truckloads of exports left Gaza a day, and 583 truckloads of goods and humanitarian supplies came





in. The majority of goods passed through Karni, in the North-East of the Gaza Strip. The main pipeline for the import of fuel (such as for the power plant in Gaza) was based at Nahal Oz. Since June 2007 Karni has been shut down, apart from a conveyor belt which delivers grain over the huge concrete perimeter wall. Sufa was closed entirely in September 2008. Most goods allowed into Gaza now enter through the much smaller Kerem Shalom crossing point in the South, which only functions partially. In the first two years of the blockade, an average of just 112 truckloads per day – one-fifth of previous levels – were allowed into Gaza.

Exports have been entirely banned with the exception of several small shipments. Erez in the North has facilities to process large numbers of people entering and exiting Gaza, but now only deals with small numbers of foreign visitors like aid workers and the handful of Palestinians permitted out in exceptional cases, mainly for medical treatment or study abroad.

The Gaza Strip's economy will never be able to reach its full potential as Israel continues to restrict external trade, including with Israel, and transfers to and from the West Bank. Israel limits the access to agricultural land and fishing waters, and additionally there is a chronic shortage of electricity. Current constraints discourage investment, prevent sustainable growth, and perpetuate high levels of unemployment, food insecurity and aid dependency.

Even though Gaza's economy showed a slight growth at an



average rate of 16 percent between 2011 and 2012, it only reflected the low base from which it had rebounded. This go and could be attributed to a combination of higher aid inflows, the easing of restrictions on entry of goods from Israel after the Israel attack on the Gaza flotilla mid 2010, and increased purchases through tunnels from Egypt.

Most of the growth before the recent wave of restrictions was driven by the construction sector which expanded by 40 percent contributing to almost 8% to Gaza's growth in 2012. The construction sector was relieved by the building material supplies coming mainly through tunnels from Egypt (more than 80% of construction materials). Prior to the Israeli blockade in 2007, Gaza's average imports through the Israeli crossing was 583 truckloads, in contrast, the average in the first half of 2013 was only 270 truckloads leaving Gaza's economy depending heavily on Egypt's tunnels.





## The Gaza Siege after The Egyptian Shut down Of The Tunnels In July 2013

The tunnels remain the main entry point for the transfer of construction materials into the Gaza Strip, as the import of basic construction materials for the private sector through Kerem Shalom, the official goods crossing with Israel, remains severely restricted.

Today, with the closure of the tunnels, the construction sector is working with less than 15% of its previous capacity leading to more than 30.000 losses in job opportunities.

Raw materials make up the majority of imports volumes from the Egyptian tunnels. Prior to the new measures, Gaza's businesses received more than 45% of the needed raw materials via the tunnels leading to noticeable increase in the operating businesses.

Currently and due to Egyptian measures more than 60% of industrial businesses are shut down and the rest operate at partial capacity. The sector is currently employing 7500 workers down from 27.000 prior to June 30, 2013 (35.000 prior to 2006).

Economists expect that the continuous closure of the tunnels will lead to a sharp decline in the growth (3% by the end of 2013) and unemployment level (43% by the end of 2013 compare with 32% in June 2013).

The Palestinian Federation of Industries estimated that, on average, around 1,500 tonnes of construction materials entered Gaza through the tunnels per day, compared to 7,500 tonnes prior to the imposition of the recent measures. The price of construction materials on local markets rose sharply before declining to between 20 to 30 per cent above the normal price by the end of July 2013, and leading to a sharp slowdown in construction activities and the operation of concrete mix factories.

The Ministry of Economy in Gaza stated on August 28, 2013 that “as a result of the Egyptian political crisis, the economy in the Gaza Strip has endured severe losses worth of \$460 million in all economic sectors within the past two months. The industry sector is suffering from a \$69 million loss, the agriculture sector \$68,3 million, the Services Sector \$92 million, the transport sector \$83.4 million, the construction sector \$89.1 million, and domestic trade \$57 million.”

## 1. Health Care

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- 1- Since 2007 an average of 20-25% patients were denied permits to cross into Israel for medical treatment.
- 2- Since 2007 tens of patients died while awaiting referral to hospitals. (For example, in 2010, 29 patients died while awaiting referral by the Israeli authorities.)
- 3- Until 2013, more than 40% of the essential drug items in the essential drug list and more than 50% of medical consumables were out of stock
- 4- Lack of anti-infectives, including life-saving antibiotics, places vulnerable groups such as young children, the elderly and diabetics at particular risk
- 5- In July 2013, 27% (128 items) of essential medicines were at zero stock in the Central Drug Store in Gaza and 16% (78 items) were at low stock (between 1-3 months' supply).

The public health system in Gaza has been severely affected by the Israeli blockade and by the political divide between West Bank and Gaza. Severe shortages of essential drugs and medical supplies, unstable power supply and lack of fuel for generators, and inadequate maintenance capacity and spare parts for medical equipment, have contributed to deterioration in the quality of care. The blockade inflicts other enormous difficulties on the health system including a chronic shortage of specialized medical personnel and access to training. More than 1000 patients are referred monthly for specialized care to health facilities outside the Gaza Strip, but their access to East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, and to Israel and Jordan, is restricted by the Israeli permit system.

According to a report by the WHO, the main challenge to the health sector in Gaza before and during the Israeli attack in November 2012 is the availability of drugs and medical supplies; more than 40% of the essential drug items in the essential drug list and more than 50% of medical consumables were out of stock before the attack.

The shortages of drugs include lifesaving drugs, including those for treating cancer, drugs for treating cardiovascular disease, psychotherapeutics, and kidney dialysis products. Lack of anti-infectives, including life-saving antibiotics, places vulnerable groups such as young children, the elderly and diabetics at particular risk. A lot of people rely on a consistent supply of medication to manage chronic cardiovascular

diseases. Interruption of treatment places these patients at risk of complications such as stroke and myocardial infarction. Lack of cancer and dialysis treatments has severe short and long-term mortality implications.



## Egypt's restriction Affecting Health Care

According to the WHO, patients chose or were forced to delay their medical treatment in Cairo in view of the unstable situation and following restrictions on access to Egypt. Fewer than half the usual number of patients was referred to Egypt in July. The Rafah terminal was completely closed for 4 days for security reasons, in addition to 5 days for holiday and weekends in July 2013. Rafah terminal authorities reported that after July 10, hours were restricted to only 10 am-2 pm, and only

patients with official referral documents from the MoH-Ramallah were permitted to exit. In addition to the usual monthly average of 300 patients referred to Egypt by the MoH, estimates of private patients from Gaza who seek medical treatments every month in Egypt are between 1,000 (MoH-Gaza estimates) and 4,100 (Rafah terminal data). A total of 549 patients and companions were coordinated through Rafah in July, according to MoH.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza began restricting X-rays and limiting certain drugs to emergency use only, due to low supplies and the unreliable flow of medical supplies via the Rafah Crossing since July 2013. Twenty-five per cent of its drug supplies are normally received from, or through, Egypt via this crossing. Two principal Egyptian donors, the Arab Physicians Union and the Physicians Syndicate, are expected to halt donations to Gaza in view of current urgent needs in Egypt. These groups have played a crucial role as a source for rapid supply of critical items, such as dialysis solutions, common chemotherapy drugs, Factor VIII for haemophilia, immune suppressants for kidney transplant patients and treatments for other chronic blood disease conditions.

According to UNOCHA, at the end of July, “27 per cent (128 items) of essential medicines were at zero stock in the Central Drug Store in Gaza and 16 per cent (78 items) were at low stock (between 1-3 months’ supply).”



## 2. Population Locked In

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Israel is one of the most advanced armies in the world. The threat from Gaza to Israel is in no comparison to the harm being inflicted on Gaza by Israel in forms of a strangling siege, destruction of the infrastructure and attacks on civilians. The disproportionate impact on Gaza cannot be justified. The blockade does not target armed groups but rather punishes Gaza's entire population by restricting the entry of food, medical supplies, educational equipment and building materials. The blockade constitutes collective punishment under international law and must be lifted immediately.

The freedom of movement including to travel, work, study and visit family members abroad continues to be denied to Palestinians. The ban on movement applies also to travel between Gaza and the West Bank – including east Jerusalem –together recognised as a single territorial unit by the international community and Israel as signatory parties to the Oslo accords. Such movement would be essential for a normal functioning of the Palestinian society. According to UNOCHA, the restrictions on movement of people and goods between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are part of a “policy of separation” adopted by the Israeli authorities. As a result, people in Gaza are denied access to West Bank universities; cannot market their products or seek work in the West Bank; and cannot maintain normal family or cultural ties with Palestinians in the West Bank.

Since August 2010, only 2,140 residents (from the exceptional categories) have been allowed to exit Gaza via the Erez crossing per month on average. This is less than the average of 25,000 number of exits in September 2000, before Israel tightened its restrictions on the movement of Palestinians. Despite the Israeli authorities’ commitment in 2010 to streamline entry and exit permits to and from Gaza for medical and humanitarian reasons and for aid workers, there has been so far no tangible improvement in practice. On the contrary, there has been a decrease in the rate of permit approvals for entry or exit of UN agencies’ national humanitarian staff. Permit policy for aid workers and medical

patients remains arbitrary, unpredictable and time consuming.

There has been an improvement at the Egyptian Rafah border since 2011, but since June 2013 the Egyptian authorities have kept the Rafah border crossing with Gaza closed for prolonged periods or operating far below normal levels. According to the Ministry of Interior, Administration of Crossings, Rafah border has only been operating partially from 11:00 am to 03:00 pm (for 4 hours only), while only allowing 2 categories of passengers to cross. Only those with residencies abroad or foreign passports and chronic patients or severe cases with a referral from the Ministry of Health. Hence, the waiting list at the Palestinian side as at least 10,000 registered passengers on it, of whom a large number of families with residency permits about to expire, a large number of students and patients with chronic diseases.

Before these restrictions, the Egyptian Authorities would only allow males between 18 - 40 years old to travel provided that they carry valid travel documents; but currently the Egyptian Authorities do not this group to travel without a valid reason and valid travel documents. As a result, a large number of Palestinian males are banned from travelling. Additionally, women are now also prevented from entering Egypt, only if having a valid reason to travel, such as a trip abroad.

Also the Egyptian Authorities are prohibiting foreigners from entering Gaza, and only allows Palestinians with a

Gazan ID card to enter the Gaza Strip.

In the entire month of July, Egyptian Authorities allowed 6236 Palestinians to cross into Egypt. This is 30% less than those who crossed monthly in June. During the entire month of August 2013, 3340 Palestinians have crossed into Egypt, this is 25% of those who crossed before June 2013.



## Before the Siege

## After the Siege

## After 2010 Easing

## “Egyptian Restrictions” June 2013

- 583 trucks were entering per day on average
- 95% of the inputs used by Gaza manufacturers were imported through the crossings with Israel.

- 112 trucks were entering per day on average
- 70% of imports were primarily consumer goods including food.
- Most Imports of industrial, agricultural and construction materials were restricted.

- 270 trucks were entering Gaza per day on average
- Imports increased from 20% to 35% of pre-blockade levels; primarily consumer goods including food.
- Imports of many raw materials still restricted.

- 179 trucks entering per day on average
- Imports decreased to 89% of pre-June 2013.
- Imports of many raw materials still restricted.

- 7,400 truckloads of construction materials were entering Gaza per month.

- Israel prohibited the import of construction materials, including cement, gravel, wood, pipes, glass, and steel bars.

- Inflow of construction materials at only 11% of pre-blockade levels.
- The volume of construction materials that entered Gaza via the tunnels in 2013 was over three times the amount allowed through the Kerem Shalom crossing.

- The construction sector is working with less than 15% of its previous capacity
- More than 30,000 layoffs
- Less than 200 tonnes of construction materials entered Gaza through the tunnels per day, compared to 7,500 tonnes prior to the imposition of the recent measures.

- 4 Israeli commercial crossings were in use: Karni, (main commercial crossing with a capacity to process over 750 trucks daily); Sufa, (construction materials); Nahal Oz (fuel and cooking gas); and Kerem Shalom (passage of goods) .
- The Israeli Erez Crossing is a pedestrian and cargo crossing into Israel

- Israel has closed 3 of the 4 commercial crossings: Karni, Sufa and Nahal Oz
- Kerem Shalom crossing: 86 trucks entering per day on average
- Erez open for limited pedestrian traffic but no cargo crossing

- Israel has closed 2 of the 4 commercial crossings: Sufa and Nahal Oz
- Kerem Shalom crossing: 183 trucks entering per day on average
- Karni remains closed except for a conveyor belt that is processing 137 truckloads per week on average, 38% of what was promised.
- Erez open for limited pedestrian traffic but no cargo crossing

- Israel has closed 2 of the 4 commercial crossings: Sufa and Nahal Oz
- Kerem Shalom crossing: 179 trucks entering per day on average
- Karni remains closed.
- Erez open for limited pedestrian traffic; but no cargo

## Before the Siege

## After the Siege

## After 2010 Easing

## After the “Egyptian Restrictions” June 2013

- The Israeli Erez crossing is a pedestrian crossing into Israel
- An average of 4500 travelers per day allowed through Erez crossing.
- The Egyptian Rafah crossing is a pedestrian crossing into Egypt
- A general ban on the movement of Palestinians through Erez, except for limited numbers of “humanitarian cases”.
- An average of 130 travelers per day allowed through Erez crossing.
- The closure of the Rafah Crossing, except for intermittent openings.
- Restrictions on the transfer of cash to banks in Gaza.
- An average of 169 travelers per day are allowed through Erez crossing, mostly patients and accompanying family members
- Rafah border has only been operating partially from 09:00 am to 04:00 pm (for 7 hours only)
- Increase in permits for business-people.
- Permit policy for aid workers and medical patients still arbitrary, unpredictable and time consuming.
- 191 travelers per day are allowed through Erez crossing.
- Rafah border has only been operating partially from 11:00 am to 03:00 pm (for 4 hours only)
- 6236 Palestinians crossed into Egypt in July, 30% less than in June.
- 3340 Palestinians have crossed into Egypt in August, 25% of those who crossed before June 2013.
- Over 10,000 people are registered and waiting to travel to Egypt and other destinations via Egypt, including medical cases and students



# TAKE ACTION NOW

## CALL ON THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES TO LIFT THE 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, lack of resources, and Israeli assaults have destroyed a population of 1.6 million people, of which 50 percent is younger than 18 years old.

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 EuroMid Observer for Human Rights therefore urgently demands the International Community to help alleviate immediately the blockade on the Gaza Strip.

1. First, we demand the Israeli government to dismantle the blockade.
2. Second, we call on the Israeli government to end the targeting of innocent people, which is in violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention.
3. Third, we call on the Egyptian government to open the Rafah Crossing for pedestrians and goods, without any restrictions.
4. Fourth, we call on the international community to address the human rights violations committed by Israel, and to economically sanction Israel until it respects the human rights of the Palestinians. The international community should be able to separate between the collective punishment of the Palestinians by Israel and the political conflict between the Palestinians and Israel.
5. Fifth, we call on the International community, and 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.



# End Notes

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5. Interview with Eng. Hatem Awada, deputy minister of the Ministry of Economy in Gaza, about the economic situation in Gaza and the impacts of the siege and latest events on the economic sector, August 2013.
6. Interview with D.E. Yousef Ghraiz, minister of Public works and Housing in Gaza, about the housing situation in Gaza and the consequences of the siege and latest events on the housing sector in Gaza, July 2013.
7. NRC Norwegian Refugee Council, Overview of the Housing Situation in the Gaza Strip, March 2013 available

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11. World Health Organization, Monthly Report: Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip, July 2013 available at: [http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/who\\_monthly\\_report\\_on\\_rad-july\\_2013.pdf](http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/who_monthly_report_on_rad-july_2013.pdf)
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MAPIM is a medium to coordinate, consult and facilitate efforts to improve the effectiveness of Islamic organizations and activists in the efforts to build Islamic society that is "Khairu Ummah" as a whole.