



While life for Palestinians under Israeli occupation since 1967 has never been easy, nothing since 1967 can compare to the politically- and militarily-imposed humanitarian disaster wrought on the Palestinians in Gaza by Israel and Western powers in the past two years.

Military Occupation and International Sanctions in parallel in 2006

The decisive victory of Hamas in the Jan., 2006 Palestinian elections triggered a drastic international reaction against the Palestinians for their democratic choice. Israel immediately began withholding customs revenues that it legally owed to Palestinians – 49 percent of the Palestinian government’s revenue. When the Hamas government was formed in late March, Canada led the West in ceasing aid programs to the Palestinians – 25 percent of the Palestinian government’s income. Israel also intensified punitive controls on movement and access throughout the West Bank and Gaza, ignoring directives put in place in a Nov. 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access by the US, Israel and the Palestinians. Given this worse-case scenario, the World Bank predicted that unemployment would increase from 23.4 percent (est. 2005) to 47 percent in 2008. It also estimated that poverty would increase from 44 percent (est. 2005) to 74 percent.¹ By late-Spring, 2006, the Palestinian government was unable to pay its civil servants, and government services became more and more scarce in many regions of Palestine.²

Collective Punishment in Gaza in Summer 2006 and beyond

Following the capture of an Israeli soldier in Gaza by Palestinian militants in late June, Israel imposed broad collective punishment on the entire Palestinian population in Gaza. Despite international humanitarian law strictly forbidding it,³ bridges, roads, electrical stations, agricultural assets and other civilian infrastructure in Gaza were destroyed by Israel. Through the three summer months of 2006, Israeli strikes killed about 250 Palestinian civilians, many of them through artillery shelling from Israel.⁴

Starting at this time, subsistence conditions began to be imposed on Gaza by Israel, including some of the following statistics: 70 percent of Gazans were unable to cover their daily food needs without assistance; only 30 percent of Gazans had regular income; most Gazans only had 6-8 hours of electricity per day, and six hours of water every two days.⁵ These conditions have only deteriorated since.

Starvation and other Oppressive Measures imposed in Gaza

In early 2007, the two leading Palestinian parties, Hamas and Fatah, formed a Unity Government in hopes of achieving Western acceptance of the government and therefore alleviating the suffering imposed on the Palestinian people. When the West – including Canada – refused to adjust its aid boycott with this new government, the Unity Government was dissolved when security tensions provoked Hamas to take control of Gaza by force.⁶ This is when the very worst of the crisis began as Israel began to punish the Gaza population in its feud with Hamas, through a variety of malicious mechanisms:

Israel declares Gaza “hostile territory.” In September, the Israeli cabinet declared Gaza “hostile territory” and voted to “restrict the passage of various goods... and reduce the supply of fuel and electricity.” Israeli officials claim that because of this declaration, Israel is no longer obliged under international law to supply utilities to the Gazan population. This is wrong, as described by HRW, “A mere declaration does not change the facts on the ground that impose on Israel the status and obligations of an occupying power.”⁷

Israel blocks Medical Supplies into Gaza. Israel has also severely blocked passage of medical supplies into Gaza since June. The UN reported shortages of several medicines, including pediatric drugs, antibiotics and treatments for chronic disease.⁸ Late in 2007 in Gaza, there were generally zero-stock levels of about 80-90 drugs from the 416 item “Essential Drug List.”⁹ HRW also found that due to medical supply shortages, facilities in Gaza can no longer offer advanced services like cardiovascular surgery, neurosurgery and advanced ophthalmology services.

Israeli Cuts to the Fuel Supply into Gaza. Late in October, as part of its sanctions, Israel began reducing the amount of fuel allowed into Gaza. In November, there was a 40% decrease in petrol, 49% decrease in diesel fuel, and a 14% decrease in industrial gas. Among other impacts: the Gaza water utility received only 19% of its monthly requirement for water and waste-water treatment; two Gaza hospitals faced severe shortages of diesel fuel; 11 primary health care facilities were forced to stop emergency generators; and municipalities have been unable to provide garbage collection.¹⁰

Israel severely restricts commercial imports to Gaza. As reported by UNRWA, “Since the middle of June, Gaza’s main terminals for movement of people and goods have been closed... A range of basic commodities are currently either unaffordable or unavailable [in Gaza.]”¹¹ Another UN organization (OCHA) reported a 71 percent decrease in goods entering Gaza in October as compared to May. Due to the lack of raw materials, the Palestinian Federation of Industries recently reported that 95 percent of Gaza’s factories had closed, leading to the loss of about 113,000 jobs.¹²

Israeli virtual blockage of all exports from Gaza. From June through November, exports were only allowed to leave Gaza on two occasions: 7 truckloads of potatoes on August 27, and 12 truckloads (strawberries and flowers) from November 28-30.¹³ The Red Cross reports that 5000 commercial farmers underwent a virtual 100% drop in sales as the export embargo left produce rotting at export crossings.¹⁴

Terrible Israeli violence in Gaza. Despite a Gaza-Israel truce on violence in the first five months of 2007, the first 10 months of 2007 saw 329 Palestinians killed by Israelis, including 39 children. (During the same period, 10 Israelis were killed by Palestinians.) Two-thirds of all Palestinian deaths were in Gaza.¹⁵

Israel blocks Medical Evacuations from Gaza. Israel arbitrarily cites “security concerns” when preventing exit permits for emergency medical cases from Gaza. In addition to the administrative harassment that evacuees must go through, they are also sometimes required to provide “information” to Israeli intelligence officers in order to get exit approval. According to HRW, “Israel’s denial of medical care to those in urgent need amounts to collective punishment against the population, which violates international law... Denying treatment to a 16-year-old girl with a congenital heart defect doesn’t make Israel any safer.”¹⁶ Eight patients died while awaiting exit permits from Gaza in November alone.¹⁷

Israel blocks Gazan students from studying abroad. After the summer of 2007, Israel has denied exit permits to approximately 670 Gaza students with credentials to study abroad in the Middle East and the West. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Israel should not make young people seeking education pay the price for its conflict with a political or military group.”¹⁸

¹ “West Bank and Gaza, Economic Update and Potential Outlook,” World Bank, Mar. 15, 2006

² For details on the impacts on Palestinians in the government services area through September, 2006, see CJPME Factsheet: “Crisis in Palestine (Spring-Summer-Fall 2006),” Oct., 2006

³ See “Israel/Occupied Territories: Civilian population at risk in Gaza,” Amnesty International, Jul. 14, 2006. See also “Israel/Occupied Territories: Deliberate attacks a war crime,” Amnesty International, Jun. 30, 2006

⁴ See “Special Report: Israel’s ongoing attack on the Gaza Strip,” Negotiations Affairs Department, PLO, Aug. 9, 2006, see data also available from the Middle East Policy Council, www.mepc.org

⁵ See CJPME Factsheet: “Crisis in Palestine (Spring-Summer-Fall 2006),” Oct., 2006

⁶ For more information on what led to the downfall of the Unity Government, see CJPME Factsheet: “Palestinian Leadership, 2005-2007,” Oct., 2006

⁷ “Gaza: Israel’s Fuel and Power Cuts Violate Laws of War,” Human Rights Watch, Oct. 29, 2007

⁸ A World Health Organization statistic as reported in “UNRWA Emergency Appeal, 2008,” UNRWA, Nov. 2007, p. 9

⁹ “The Humanitarian Monitor, occupied Palestinian territory,” Volume 19, Nov. 2007, p. 12

¹⁰ “The Humanitarian Monitor, occupied Palestinian territory,” Volume 19, Nov. 2007, pp. 1-2

¹¹ In Gaza, of 596 consumable surveyed, 32% were out of stock. Source: “The Humanitarian Monitor, occupied Palestinian territory,” Volume 19, Nov. 2007, p.13

¹² As reported in “UNRWA Emergency Appeal, 2008,” UNRWA, Nov. 2007, p. 5, 7, 9

¹³ “The Humanitarian Monitor, occupied Palestinian territory,” Volume 19, Nov. 2007, p. 1

¹⁴ “Dignity Denied in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” ICRC, Nov. 2007, p. 3

¹⁵ “UNRWA Emergency Appeal, 2008,” UNRWA, Nov. 2007, p. 10

¹⁶ “Israel: Government Blocks Medical Evacuations from Gaza,” Human Rights Watch, Oct. 20, 2007

¹⁷ “The Humanitarian Monitor, occupied Palestinian territory,” Volume 19, Nov. 2007, p. 2

¹⁸ “Gaza: Israel Blocks 670 Students from Studies Abroad,” Human Rights Watch, Nov. 20, 2007