

GAZA: Devastating Impacts of Israeli Blockade

As Gaza siege enters sixth year, harm will be felt for years to come

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Palestinians inspect a boat after it was destroyed by Israeli shelling off the coast of Gaza, August 2009.

([Mohammed Asad](#) / [APA images](#))

As Israel's blockade on Gaza enters its sixth year, warnings about the increasingly dire conditions in Gaza grow louder.

Reports by international agencies on the impact of five years of siege paint a grim picture showing how Israel's blockade is not just a policy of collective punishment imposed after the elected Hamas government began its rule, but also a policy of de-developing Gaza.

Israel's siege impacts every aspect of life in Gaza. An entire generation of children suffer from malnutrition-related deficiencies such as stunted growth and anemia — in addition to the psychological trauma incurred as a result of Israel's military attacks on the Gaza Strip.

University-age young people are severely limited in their higher education options, further contributing to the de-development of Gaza's economy.

The siege on Gaza will have an impact for years to come. History will not judge kindly the role played by the self-declared "international community" in aiding and abetting Israel's cruel policy of managed humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Hundreds of children killed, thousands injured

Save the Children and Medical Aid for Palestinians released a report this week on [the impact of the blockade on the health of children in Gaza](#). "Gaza's only fresh water source is now too dangerous to drink and is contaminated with fertiliser and human waste," the agencies warn, noting that Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with more than 4,500 people per square kilometer).

[A press release accompanying the report adds:](#)

Since the blockade started, the number of children under three being treated for watery diarrhoea has doubled. High levels of nitrate – found in faeces and fertiliser – is also linked to some cancers and is a massive risk to pregnant women.

Gaza's sewage system is also completely broken, much of it destroyed during Operation Cast Lead and treatment plants are overloaded or lack fuel. Open cesspits sit right next to family homes and in just the first two months of this year, three children drowned in open sewers.

The agencies add that the restrictions placed on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza, and the long-term poverty as a result of the crippling of Gaza's economy, means that "families are unable to buy nutritious food and are less able to produce nutritious food themselves." Indeed, one-third of Gaza's children are living in poverty. Malnutrition-related conditions such as stunting and anemia are therefore on the rise in Gaza.

Meanwhile, the agencies report, "Since 2007, 605 children in Gaza have been killed and 2,179 injured as a direct result of the conflict, and 60 children were killed and 82 injured in Palestinian factional and other fighting."

[As Norwegian doctor Mads Gilbert explained in a recent interview with The Electronic Intifada](#), the average age in Gaza is 17.6 years and 58 percent of Gaza's residents are 18 years or younger.

Factsheet: Five years of blockade

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has released a [factsheet outlining the impact of five years of siege on the Gaza Strip](#).

The impact of the siege on Gaza's economy is starkly illustrated by statistics; for example, 34 percent of Gaza's workforce, including half of its youth, are unemployed. Also, Israel restrictions mean that 35 percent of Gaza's farmland and 85 percent of its fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible. The restrictions on fishing have severely impacted the livelihoods of 35,000 while an estimated 75,000 metric tons of produce are lost each year because of the movement restrictions, according to OCHA.

OCHA's report also notes the danger of other industries in Gaza: "Since the intensification of the blockade in 2007, at least 172 Palestinian civilians have been killed and 318 injured while working in tunnels between Gaza and Egypt" — the only lifelines that Palestinians in Gaza have thanks to the nearly hermetic closure of the Israeli-controlled crossings with Gaza.

Impact on all aspects of life in Gaza

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network noted in a statement this week that [the blockade on Gaza violates an array of basic human rights](#), including residents' "right to life, health, education, food, water, standard of living and adequate housing."

The group adds: "The government of Israel contends that the closure of the Gaza Strip forms part of a policy of legitimate 'economic warfare' against the authorities in Gaza. International law is unequivocal however: the closure constitutes a form of collective punishment of the entire civilian population of Gaza and is in clear violation of international humanitarian law."

Essential medicines stocks depleted

Meanwhile, [Gaza has run out of 42 percent of essential medicines](#), the World Health Organization stated this week, adding that “Israel does not allow the Health Ministry in Gaza to send medical equipment for repair” — affecting the ability of Gaza’s health system to provide life-saving treatment.

Ma’an News Agency adds, citing WHO, “During Israel’s 3-week offensive on the Gaza Strip in December 2008, 15 out of 27 hospitals were damaged as well as 43 clinics.”

Israeli movement restrictions have also prevented patients from accessing specialized treatment outside of Gaza, and prevent medical practitioners from advancing their training. Israel has also conditioned the issuing of travel permits for medical treatment on cooperation with its spy agencies.

Drug and fuel shortages have increased the need for referrals outside Gaza, funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

“The 5 most frequent reasons for referrals are for cardiovascular, oncology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, or neurosurgery treatment,” WHO says.

Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem are the main specialized centers, but Israel has denied permits to nearly 12,000 patients, or their requests were delayed past their hospital appointment date.

“In the past two years, 618 patients were called for interrogation by Israeli security after applying for a permit,” WHO says.

The main Palestinian teaching hospitals are in East Jerusalem, but medics from Gaza are often denied permits to attend training courses.

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