

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights Calls for Full and Immediate End to the Illegal Israeli Blockade of Gaza

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Global Research, October 02, 2014

[Palestinian Centre for Human Rights](#) 30
September 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) is gravely concerned over the continuity of the Israeli-imposed closure on the Gaza Strip for the eighth consecutive year and dissatisfied by the mechanism of the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip that was declared by the UN Middle East Envoy. Moreover, PCHR is concerned that this mechanism would institutionalize the Israeli closure that has been imposed since 2007. PCHR calls for fully and immediately lift the Israeli closure as it constitutes a form of collective punishment that is prohibited under the international humanitarian law. Ending the closure includes eliminating all restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of persons and goods, including imports and exports, to and from the Gaza Strip.

According to media sources, the UN Middle East Envoy Robert Serry stated on 16 September 2014 that the United Nations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority had reached a deal to allow reconstruction work to begin in the war-torn Gaza Strip under international observation of the use of materials. According to Reuters, Serry told the UN Security Council that the United Nations had brokered the deal 'to enable work at the scale required in the strip, involving the private sector in Gaza and giving a leading role to the Palestinian Authority in the reconstruction effort, while providing security assurances through UN monitoring that these materials will not be diverted from their entirely civilian purpose.'

The only right way to end the disastrous impacts of the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip is to immediately lift the illegal closure on the Gaza Strip, allow the freedom of movement of persons and goods and make a dramatic change in the Israeli policies in order to put an end to the current crisis under which the Gaza Strip population has been living. The entry of limited types and quantities of goods will never make a real change on the economic and social levels in the Gaza Strip, but will worsen the situation. Therefore, any deal that does not include the entry of basic needs, the freedom of movement of goods, including imports from and exports to the West Bank, Israel and abroad, and the freedom of movement of persons from and to the Gaza Strip, falls within the institutionalization of the Israeli-imposed closure and does not seriously contribute to the reconstruction process or improving the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Institutionalization of the closure means disregarding the principles of the international humanitarian and human rights laws, including the Fourth Geneva convention 1949.

Since 2007, the Gaza Strip has been suffering due to the illegal Israeli closure that has resulted in disastrous impacts on all aspects of life and deterioration of the humanitarian,

economic, social and cultural conditions. Moreover, the number of unemployed persons in the Gaza Strip has risen to about 200,000 supporting about 900,000 persons according to the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU). According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the number of the poor has increased up to 700,000 persons (38.8% of the total population), 380,000 of whom suffer extreme poverty (21.1%). The latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip has left huge destruction, due to which the Gaza Strip needs 5 years to be reconstructed on condition that the border crossings are fully open and 300 tons of cement, 1,600 tons of construction steel and 6,000 tons of aggregate are allowed in the Gaza Strip according to construction companies' estimates.

The international community has failed throughout the past 8 years to support the application of the provisions of the international humanitarian and human rights laws. This has been a shame for the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 as they have failed to take actions under their legal obligations to compel the Israeli authorities to respect that Convention and stop all policies that violate the Palestinians' economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

Therefore, PCHR calls upon the international community, particularly the UN, to oblige the Israeli authorities to fully lift the closure as it is a form of collective punishment that is prohibited under the international humanitarian law, and end the restrictions imposed on the movement of persons and goods. PCHR believes that the only way to address the closure imposed on the Gaza Strip is to admit that such a policy is illegal and falls within the collective punishment policy against civilians in the Gaza Strip.

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