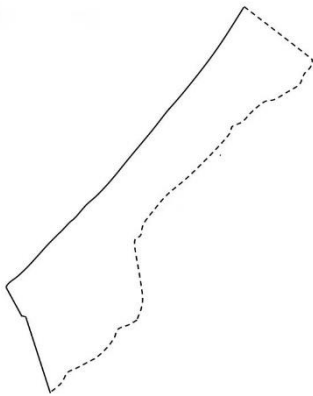


#GAZA2020

UNLIVEABLE



The Gaza Strip, home to two million Palestinians, is small Palestinian enclave that came under Israeli occupation, along with the West Bank and East Jerusalem, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world and has often been described as "the world's largest open-air prison".

Bordered by Israel and Egypt on the Mediterranean coast, the strip is 41 kilometres long, and from 6 to 12 kilometres wide, with a total area of 365 square kilometres.

Gaza was part of historic Palestine before the state of Israel was created in 1948 in a violent process of ethnic cleansing, expelling hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes.

WHAT IS #GAZA2020 ?

A campaign promoted by the Palestine Information Network (PIN) to highlight the herculean challenges facing Palestinians living in the Occupied Gaza Strip at the onset of the year 2020, and the urgent need to affirm and restore the rights, hopes and dignity of these inhabitants. The choice of the onset of 2020 for the launching of this campaign is inspired by the leading question of a 2012 United Nations report that probed whether Gaza will be liveable in 2020.

WHAT DID THE UN REPORT SAY ?

Gaza in 2020: A Liveable Place? published in August 2012 by the United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, forecasted that without urgent remedial action being taken at that time, Gaza's problems in water and electricity, education and health would only get worse by the time 2020 arrives. The report projected that the population of the Gaza Strip would increase from 1.6 million people in 2012 to 2.1 million people in 2020, resulting in a density of more than 5800 people per square kilometre. Infrastructure in electricity, water and sanitation, municipal and social

services, it said, were not keeping pace with the needs of the growing population. The Israeli-led blockade on Gaza was identified as a key reason for the territory's economic woes, and it stipulated that unencumbered access to the wider world was imperative for economic growth. "In the absence of sustained and effective remedial action and an enabling political environment, the challenges which confront the people of Gaza now will only intensify over the coming years to 2020," the report warned.

HAVE THE REPORT'S FORECASTS COME TRUE ?

The 2020 deadline of 'unliveability' was in itself simply a projection milestone utilised by the UN and mattered little to many Palestinians in Gaza preoccupied by the day-to-day struggles of survival and making ends meet.

Several Palestinians and [UN officials](#) had already proclaimed Gaza unliveable long prior to the onset of 2020. Nonetheless, the UN's projections about Gaza's ballooning demands have proven largely accurate - whilst the urgent remedial action it emphasised has not been occurred in sufficient measure to avert this reality.

Unemployment has reached nearly 50 percent, the per-person ratio of doctors and nurses has dropped, more than two-thirds of households are food insecure, and just three percent of Gaza's aquifer water is safe to drink, as per official statistics and reports from aid agencies.

According to Michael Lynk, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories: "The prediction of unliveability has already arrived. The common measuring stick used by the UN or any other international organisation to be able to evaluate how people live is human dignity, and Gaza has been without human dignity for years now."

HOW IS GAZA 'UNLIVEABLE'?

- **Water:** 96% of Gaza's drinking water is unfit for human consumption. Households spend a significant percentage of income on purchasing drinking water, which is not always safe; and given that many families cannot afford to purchase water, water-borne illnesses, especially among children, are widespread. Over 108 million litres of untreated sewage are discharged daily into the adjoining Mediterranean Sea, and the ground water system is increasingly compromised with pollutants.
- **No space:** Gaza ranks as one of the most densely populated polities in the world. With a population of approximately two million, the territory has a population density of some 5453 persons per square kilometre.
- **Unemployment and poverty:** Gaza has a 52% rate of unemployment and 70% of households are food insecure. Some poverty indicators point to almost [80% of the population](#) being impoverished.
- **Electricity:** Blackouts are frequent. Electricity is available for only half the day. Capacity has declined whilst demand has increased.

- **Education:** Gaza requires almost 200 additional schools to adequately accommodate the needs of the population. Classrooms are overcrowded, and schools are running double - and even triple - shifts to accommodate the growing youth population.
- **Healthcare:** Gaza is denied access to appropriate medical technology and infrastructure is ageing. Drugs and medical personnel are in short supply. The healthcare system is severely constrained and often at the brink of collapse. Injuries from Israeli military assaults increase the burden yet further. Many patients are forced to seek – with great financial difficulty and bureaucratic obstacles – lifesaving treatment outside Gaza.
- **Lack of opportunity:** Economic development in Gaza has stalled. Exports are severely curtailed. Restrictions on fishing zones impede people's livelihoods. Import bans prevent critical goods, such as fuel and cooking gas, from entering the territory.
- **Trapped:** Israel and Egypt exercise tight control over exit points to the wider world or other parts of Palestine. The restriction on movement means that many students and patients cannot leave Gaza to pursue an education or seek treatment. Israel consistently denies Gaza residents medical permits to travel outside of the territory on 'security grounds'. Seeking the necessary permits from both Israel and Egypt can be extremely time-consuming and costly.

Dramatically exacerbating these factors have been the three major military operations launched by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza within the past 12 years. These have wrecked infrastructure including electricity lines and power stations, health services, schools, mosques and water supplies. Thousands of housing units were destroyed or damaged. They have also caused major setbacks for industry and agriculture. These assaults have cost Gaza thousands of lives and injuries. There is not a single family in Gaza who has not experienced death, injury, the loss of a home, extensive damage, or displacement on account of these operations. Resulting mental health problems have also added to the overall pressure.

- **2008/9** - 'Operation Cast Lead': 1391 Palestinians killed.
- **2012** – 'Operation Pillar of Defence': 167 Palestinians killed.
- **2014** – 'Operation Protective Edge': 2104 Palestinians killed.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS FOR GAZA BECOMING 'UNLIVEABLE'?

The 2012 UN report itself identified the siege on the Gaza Strip as being a key factor in the sculpting of this tragedy. "One of the main reasons for the economy's inability to recover to pre-2000 levels has been and is the blockade of the Gaza Strip," the report said. The blockade is now in its 13th year.

The other key over-arching factor, that long predates the siege, is the Israeli Occupation.

Gaza was part of historic Palestine before the state of Israel was created in 1948 in a violent process of ethnic cleansing, expelling hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes.

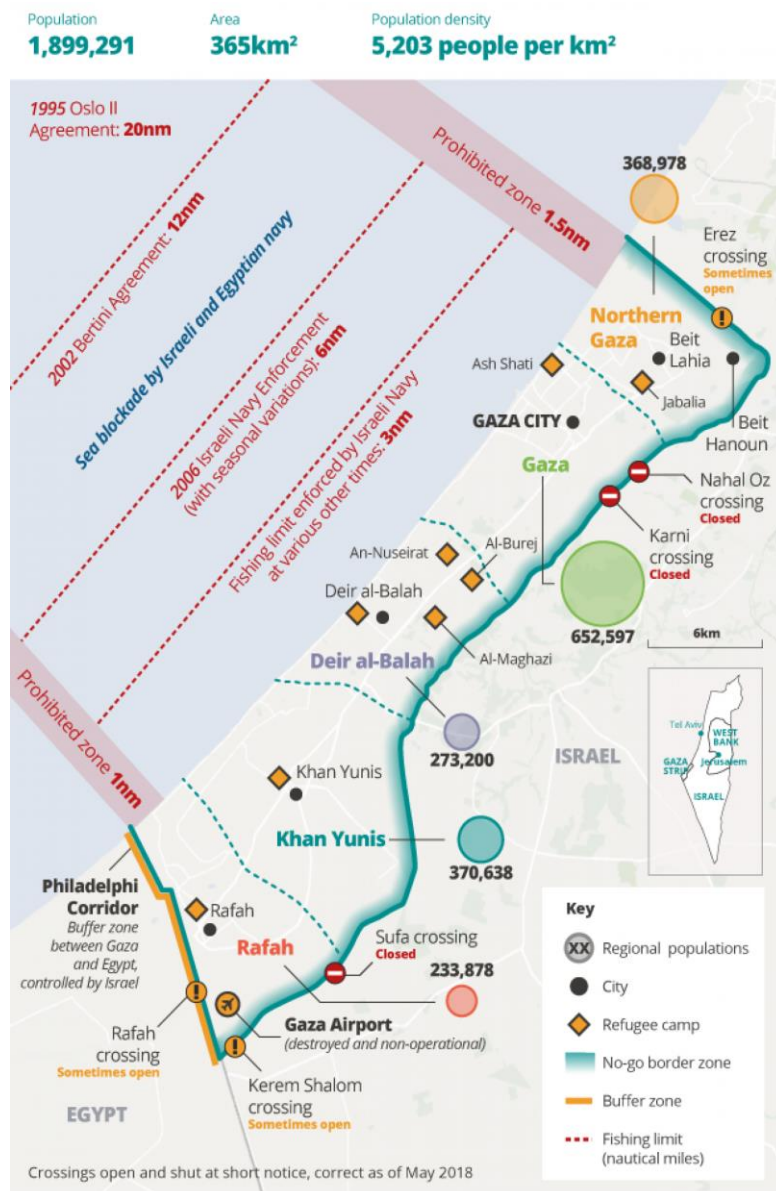
Of those Palestinians rendered refugees in the *Nakba*, many settled in Gaza. As a result, 1.4 million out of the 1.9 million total population or approximately 73 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza today are refugees.

Whilst not seized in 1948, Israel subsequently asserted military control of Gaza – along with the West Bank and East Jerusalem - in 1967 – a belligerent act deemed to constitute illegal occupation by the international community.

Israel has maintained control of Gaza ever since, and the territory remains under overall Israeli military occupation according to international law. Although Israel withdrew its soldiers and some 8000 settlers from the interior of Gaza in 2005, it continues to control virtually all entry and exit points, as well as Gaza's airspace and territorial waters, therefore retaining "unconsented-to effective control," the legal definition for qualifying as an occupying power.

Israel's continuing status as an occupying power in Gaza has been affirmed by the United Nations and international humanitarian bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as numerous human rights organizations.

Together, the effects of the Occupation and blockade have resulted in a situation where 80 percent of the population are now dependent on international assistance. Gaza's economy and its capacity to create jobs have been devastated, resulting in the impoverishment and de-development of a highly skilled and well-educated society.



Source: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestine Authority, UNOCHA, preliminary Gaza census results 2017

WHAT IS THE SIEGE?

The Israeli siege of the occupied Gaza Strip, in its current form, has been in place since June 2007, when Israel imposed an airtight land, sea and air blockade, isolating the enclave from the rest of the world. Israel controls Gaza's airspace and territorial waters, as well as two of the three border crossing points; the third is controlled by Egypt.

Although often claimed to be an Israeli response to Hamas' leadership of the Gaza Strip, an Israeli blockade policy has effectively been in place well before Hamas' rise to political power:

- **Late 1980s:** Israel began to impose additional restrictions on Palestinians in Gaza by introducing a permit system that required Palestinians there to get difficult-to-obtain permits to work or travel through Israel or access the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.
- **1991-1993:** Restrictions on movement of Palestinians in Gaza intensified. Israel also began to impose a separation between Gaza and the West Bank and East Jerusalem, even though the terms of the Oslo Accords stipulated that they all be treated as one political entity.
- **1995:** Israel built an electronic fence and concrete wall around the Gaza Strip, facilitating a collapse in interactions between the split Palestinian territories.
- **2000:** Israel cancelled many of the existing travel and work permits in Gaza, and significantly reduced the number of new permits issued.
- **2001:** Israel bombed and demolished the Gaza airport, only three years after it opened.

Underpinning the siege on Gaza is an Israeli 'separation policy' which seeks to sever Gaza from the West Bank, to obstruct contact between the two parts of the Palestinian territory, which were not only meant to make up the Palestinian state according to international resolutions and agreements, but also share the same language, culture, and economy, as well as family ties.

The siege and blockade are also central pillars of a policy of economic warfare intended to punish the entire population of the tiny, occupied coastal strip in the hopes that Palestinians living there will blame Hamas for their predicament and reject any resistance to Israel's continued control of the territory. As noted by the UN this amounts to collective punishment, which is a violation of international law.

In early 2006, Dov Weisglass, then a senior advisor to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, explained that Israeli policy in Gaza was designed "to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger." In 2012 it was revealed that in early 2008, Israeli authorities drew up a document calculating the minimum caloric intake necessary for Palestinians to avoid malnutrition so Israel could limit the amount of foodstuffs allowed into Gaza without causing outright starvation.

In addition to restrictions on movement, under the siege exports of produce and commercial goods from Gaza are banned or severely restricted. So-called "dual use items" that can be used for military or civilian purposes, such as steel and cement, much needed for construction and the reconstruction of homes and other structures destroyed by the Israeli military during recent and past military attacks, are denied entry.

According to a 2019 Israeli news report, a [government source](#) acknowledged that Israel has sought to push Palestinians to leave Gaza, noting that "attempts have been made" to persuade "certain nations" to take in Palestinians, but the attempts failed.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING PALESTINIAN YOUTH IN GAZA?

47.8% of Gaza's population are 17 years or younger. The Gaza Strip has the second-highest share of people aged 0-14 years worldwide. Moreover, the 'youth bulge' – the ratio of youth (15-29) to the total over-15 population – is exceptionally high, at around 50%.

The fact that the Gaza Strip has one of the youngest populations worldwide magnifies the challenges faced under conditions of siege and Occupation. Those over the age of 65 make up only 2.8% of the population in Gaza. According to the UN, this translates into the dependency ratio in the Gaza Strip being very high, further aggravated by the unemployment and low labour force participation rates.

A youth bulge can have positive and negative consequences. When these young people reach working age, the economy can benefit from an increased supply of labour, yielding a demographic dividend. For this, skills training that is relevant and of good quality is needed. On the contrary, if the economy does not provide opportunities and emigration is blocked, the consequences can be negative: social tension and frustration as possible outlets for lack of meaningful prospects. This remains the scenario in Gaza, unless the political and economic situation changes substantially.

Young people are unable to travel or meet people from different countries and cultures. Most have never been on a plane, train or ship. They have never seen mountains or rivers, visited the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories, or been given the opportunity to pray at al-Aqsa Mosque or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – among the holiest sites for Muslims and Christians - even though they are located in Occupied Palestinian territory just around 100 kilometres from the Gaza fence.



A Palestinian child at al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza City
(Image: Xinhua/Wissam Nassar)

WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF DESPARATION IN GAZA?

Despite some recent minor interventions by the Occupier to loosen some of the controls of the siege, the outlook in Gaza remains bleak. Thousands of Palestinian families continue to suffer food insecurity. An exodus of young people and graduates has gathered pace in recent years, raising fears that Gaza could lose its doctors, lawyers, teachers and thinkers - the foundation for the future.

The blockade has severely damaged the mental health of Palestinians in Gaza. Aid workers, including officials at the United Nations Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA), warn of an unprecedented mental health crisis unfurling across Gaza, exacerbated by a surge in violence unleashed over the last year and funding cuts to vital psychosocial support programmes.

According to activist Ahmed Abu Artema, most young people in Gaza cannot find work to support their basic needs, forcing them to accept 15-hour days for just a few dollars of pay. Rampant unemployment has paralysed their ability to secure housing, marriage and stability, which has increased their psychological distress, leading to suicide in some cases.

WHAT IS THE GREAT MARCH OF RETURN?

On 30 March 2018, Palestinian civil society launched the Great March of Return, an ongoing protest and cultural movement demanding an end to the blockade and asserting the right of return to the lands from which Palestinians were forcefully expelled during the events of the Nakba. The protests were a cry of desperation and an outlet for frustrations. Despite the protestors posing no danger to armed Israeli soldiers on the other side of the Gaza fence, by the end of October 2019, the UN estimated the number of Palestinians killed by the Israeli army during the weekly protests at 326 with 35 962 injuries including multiple amputees.

The deluge of injuries sustained has put Gaza's already beleaguered health sector under severe strain, with hospitals being forced to discharge other recovering patients prematurely almost every week to make space for new arrivals. At times, several limb-related operations have had to be carried out simultaneously, and there have been shortages of external fixator components and consumables such as IV solutions and antiseptics. Gaza's hospitals have also seen the onset of a superbug epidemic.



Injuries sustained during the Great March of Return
(Image: Agencies)

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD FOR GAZA?

“What distinguishes the humanitarian crisis in Gaza from the disasters and emergencies that normally push civilian populations to the edge of catastrophe, is that it is not the result of a hurricane, flood, tsunami, drought or famine but a human-made policy that is entirely avoidable,” writes Steven McCloskey.

International aid to Gaza, while much needed and preventing a total shutdown, has created humanitarian dependence rather than fostering development in Gaza. As such, humanitarian interventions that merely serve as a substitute for human rights offer no long term prospects for resolving the imbroglio in Gaza.

Without the unencumbered movement of people and goods from Gaza, the territory will inevitably be condemned to continued ruination.

As the United Nations advanced back in 2012, a reversal of the meltdown in Gaza requires durable and broad-based economic growth based on trade of goods and services.

“It will be essential to ensure the provision of basic infrastructure (particularly water/sanitation and electricity) and improved social services (particularly health and education). As a heavily urbanized environment with little room for further growth, Gaza needs to be open and accessible to the world. The viability of a future Palestinian state depends on a proper connection between the West Bank and Gaza, providing access to the Mediterranean for the entire occupied Palestinian territory.”

Furthermore, the plight of Palestinians in Gaza cannot be disconnected from the broader questions and quest for justice for the Palestinian people. Issues such as ending Occupation and Apartheid, the right of return of refugees, stopping illegal settlements, the status of Jerusalem, and seeking accountability for Israeli crimes against Palestinians, are all integral to resolving the challenges of Palestinians in Gaza, who are but one constituent of the Palestinian people.

As 2020 advances, we have to acknowledge that Gaza being unliveable is a stain on the conscience of the world.

As David Hearst writes, “by neglect, or default, all western governments have actively contributed to its misery. All are deeply complicit in an inhuman experiment: how to keep more than 2 million people on a level of subsistence considered intolerable and unliveable by the UN, without tipping them over into mass death.

“What has to happen for this to change? For how much longer will we delete...Gaza, its refugees, its daily suffering from the collective consciousness of the world?”

Palestinians in Gaza don't just need food, water and medicine. They are crying out for freedom, dignity and hope.

The Palestine Information Network (PIN) calls for a concerted effort to highlight the gravity of 'unliveability' in #Gaza2020. Let no effort be spared to raise widespread awareness of this catastrophe and initiate and participate in all

appropriate ventures that seek to restore the rights and prioritise the dignity of Palestinians in Gaza.

Sources: United Nations, Gisha, CIA World Factbook, Middle East Eye, Al-Jazeera, IMEU



PALESTINE
INFORMATION NETWORK

☎ **076 6572 681**

✉ **info@palestineinfo.org**

🌐 **www.palestineinfo.org**

💬 **@learnpalestine**