



United Nations

Office for the Coordination of  
Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)  
occupied Palestinian territory

## GAZA ON THE EDGE

A Report on the Deteriorating Humanitarian Situation  
in the Gaza Strip<sup>[1]</sup>

1 October 2004

Since the beginning of 2004, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has sharply deteriorated. Intensified movement restrictions on the Palestinian civilian population and the escalation in the conflict are the primary causes. Economic options for Palestinians are disappearing and coping mechanisms for the community are nearly exhausted.

Israel has been facing serious security concerns particularly from militant attacks and Qassam rockets. Yet Israel also has obligations to ensure the humanitarian needs of Palestinian civilians are met.

All movement through Gaza's borders is controlled. An Israeli security fence surrounds all of Gaza and sea access to the west is prohibited. Palestinian movement in and out of Gaza is limited to two crossing points controlled by the Israeli security forces: Erez Terminal, for labourers with permits to work in Israel, and Rafah terminal in the south into Egypt. Commercial goods enter and exit mainly through the Karni Terminal but new security measures have restricted access.

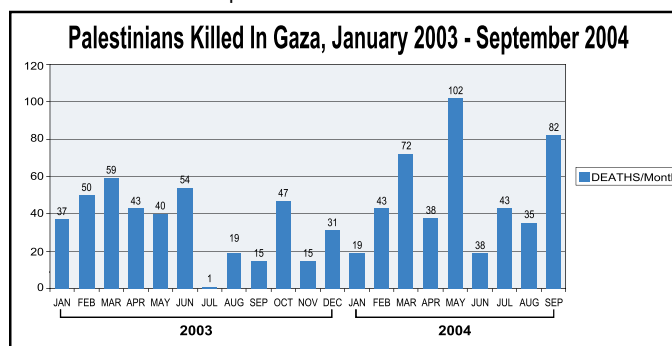
Gaza has a Palestinian population of 1.4 million and a 5.5% population growth. Based on 2003 conditions, the **poverty rate in Gaza is predicted to rise to 72% by 2006**. However, as the economic situation in 2004 has worsened significantly – these predictions are likely to be an underestimate. The Palestinian population in Gaza is dependent on international humanitarian assistance. This dependency will increase.

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, according to the plan agreed by the cabinet in June, is of itself unlikely to reduce poverty in the West Bank and Gaza if not accompanied by an easing of access restrictions.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Humanitarian Indicators

### DEATHS

Between January and September 2004, 453 Palestinians have been killed as a result of the violence and fighting in Gaza. Thirty-two Israelis have been killed in Gaza and four have been killed by Qassam rocket attacks launched from Gaza into the neighbouring Israeli town of Sderot. In 2004 an average of 45 Palestinians were killed a month in Gaza - up from 34 a month in 2003.



[1] Submitted to the Humanitarian Emergency Policy Group on 28 September 2004.

[2] World Bank estimates. See, *Disengagement, the Palestinian Economy and the Settlements*, World Bank, June 2004.

## DEMOLITIONS and HOMELESSNESS

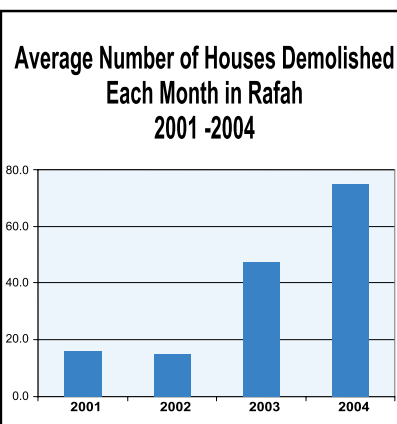
During the past four years, **24,547 Gazans have been made homeless** by Israeli demolitions. In 2004, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) **demolished on average 120 residential buildings each month** – or 4 each day. Approximately 1,200 Palestinians each month are made homeless.<sup>[3]</sup>

In September 2004 alone, 133 homes were demolished leaving 807 people homeless. Of this total, 49 homes were demolished in Khan Younis on 25 September.

In Rafah, southern Gaza, the rate of home demolitions increased from 15 homes/month in 2002, to 77 homes/month in the first nine months of 2004.<sup>[4]</sup>

Finding temporary accommodation and house reconstruction are priorities for aid agencies.

Under international humanitarian law, Israel has an obligation to provide this assistance to the fullest extent possible.



## HEALTH and EDUCATION

According to UNICEF, 61% of Palestinian parents in Gaza feel that they do not have the ability to meet the needs of their children in terms of care and protection.

Malnutrition rates have increased – chronic malnutrition for children under five years is 12.7% for Gaza – and expected to rise <sup>[5]</sup>.

Education standards have slumped – 42% of students in Gaza are reported to have recorded lower school achievement.

One-third of Palestinian children in 580 schools have had their education disrupted. In northern Gaza, the vulnerable school population during the current IDF incursion could be as high as 92,000 students in 104 schools.

UNICEF reports a marked increase in psychological disorders among Palestinian children exposed to violence.

Access outside of the Gaza Strip for specialised and chronic health patients has been curtailed since March 2004. Palestinian patients who would normally travel to Israel are now having to cross Rafah for treatment in Egypt.



Photo: OCHA

## LAND LEVELLING

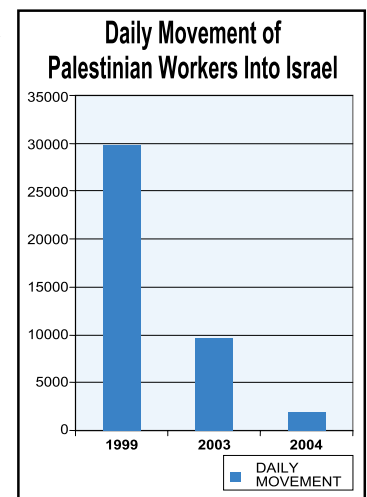
IDF land levelling has increased food insecurity in Gaza. Over 50% of Beit Hanoun's agricultural land, mainly comprising citrus fruits and olives, has been destroyed in the last four years. In July 2004, the IDF cleared 289 hectares of land in the Beit Hanoun area during a military operation called 'Operation Forward Shield'.

Throughout Gaza, land levelling increased this year. Levelling has taken place around Israeli settlements to create 'security' areas. Particularly affected are: the Moghaga area to the south east of Nezarim, the area around Morag settlement and around Abu Houli junction, where Israeli settlers cross the major north-south road to enter Gush Qatif settlement block.

## MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS OUT OF GAZA

### Palestinian Labour Movement From Gaza Into Israel

The deterioration in the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza has been caused primarily by movement restrictions on Palestinian goods and people. Movement restrictions intensified in 2000 but substantially increased during 2004 in conjunction with a spate of militant attacks. In 1999, **29,865** workers crossed into Israel. This year an average of **1,946** workers crossed daily from Gaza into Israel.



[3] Home demolition and homelessness figures are provided by UNRWA.

[4] Graph shows average demolitions per month to September 2004.

[5] *Forty-Two Months- Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis*, World Bank, 2004 p. 53.



## Exiting Gaza Through Rafah Terminal

Since 17 April, Israel has severely restricted passage through Rafah Terminal for all Palestinian males aged 16-35, including those seeking hospital treatment abroad and students.

Rafah Terminal closed for all Palestinians movement in both directions between 18 July and 6 August. More than 3,000 Palestinians, including many sick patients, were stranded on the Egyptian side of the terminal, without adequate food and sanitary facilities.

## Movement of Commercial and Humanitarian Goods In and Out of Gaza

Following an attack at Ashdod port in March 2004, when Palestinian militants exited Gaza by hiding in transport containers, the Israeli authorities introduced new screening measures at the Karni commercial terminal. These have led to a major reduction in the volume and balance of trade, with minimal commercial supplies now leaving Gaza.

In January 2004, the ratio of imports to exports was **3:1**. By June of this year, the figure changed dramatically to **12:1** - representing a significant net transfer of income out of Gaza.

The security restrictions on removing containers from Karni have led to a curtailment of humanitarian assistance. UNRWA has halted its emergency food distribution in June 2004, affecting 600,000 beneficiaries.

## MOVEMENT WITHIN GAZA: INTERNAL CLOSURES

The IDF periodically cut Gaza into three segments closing the Coastal road at Nezarim, and Abu Houli junction. In exceptional cases, the IDF cut Gaza into four by also blocking the road at the Morag-Sufa junction, as occurred in May 2004 during the IDF military incursion in Rafah, called 'Operation Rainbow'.

### Isolated communities

Some communities within Gaza have been particularly affected by the internal closure: (see map)

**Siafa (pop est. 190):** Since 22 April, the IDF have only allowed 3-4 residents with Siafa IDs and prior notification to enter and exit the community on foot. The official IDF opening hours are 6.30 to 8.30 and 14.00 to 16.30, however these are arbitrarily enforced. Between 15 and 20 September, Siafa's 24 school pupils were allowed to leave at 6.45 but were not permitted to re-enter before 17.00. Coordination with the IDF for international organizations wishing to enter the area has been extremely problematic.

**Al Mawasi (pop est. 5,000):** The entry-exit gate at At Tuffah checkpoint opens twice daily for Al Mawasi ID holders from approximately 8.00 to 13.00 and 14.30 to 17.00. Since 10 May, Al Mawasi males aged below 30 years require prior coordination with the IDF to pass; since 6 June 2004, prior coordination has been required for unmarried females aged 18 to 25.

**Al Ma'ani (pop est. 180):** The Palestinian area adjacent to the Israeli settlement Kfar Darom was declared a closed military zone following a suicide attack in the area on 27 February. Movement is restricted by the IDF to Al Ma'ani residents who are able to pass four times daily between 6.30 and 17.00.

## FISHING

No fishing has been permitted from approximately 40% of the Gaza coast since October 2003. In the remaining coastal areas, fishermen are limited to six nautical miles off the coast. Under the Oslo Accords, Palestinians were permitted to fish up to 20 nautical miles off the coast.

## HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

### Security of Aid Workers

The security of UN staff working in Gaza has been repeatedly threatened. The UN raised its assessment of security risk in Gaza to phase IV (the final phase before complete evacuation) on 22 July as a result of extensive IDF military operations in the northern Gaza Strip. These operations put UN staff crossing in and out of Gaza through Erez terminal at risk.

The UN recorded a marked increase in security incidents. During July 2004, there were eight incidents involving staff members in Gaza. A number of these incidents involved warning shots being fired in close proximity to staff, although coordination had been conducted with the IDF in advance of visits to enter these areas.

The IDF have prohibited UN staff from entering or leaving Gaza, a total of 60 days in 2004. Most recently, since 20 September, UN staff with the exception of diplomatic passport holders have not been able to cross Erez Terminal into Gaza in vehicles.

