

Call to end the isolation of the Gaza Strip

The political, economic and social isolation imposed on the occupied Gaza Strip violates international law and has dire consequences for future peace, development and security in the region.

We, the undersigned international, Palestinian and Israeli development and human rights organisations urgently call for an end to the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, an end to the international isolation, and dialogue and reconciliation between Palestinian parties. We also call for an end to 40 years of Israeli occupation in the interests of peace and justice for all.

“We are living in fear of the devastation of our society. The siege of the Gaza Strip is a terrible crime. I want to tell the world: don't say that you didn't know.”

Culture and Free Thought Association, Gaza

“The blockade makes export impossible so farmers are abandoning their crops. Israeli incursions result in huge destruction to lands and enterprises. Almost every industry in Gaza is facing ruin. This is collective punishment and must end.”

Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC), Gaza/West Bank

“Gaza alone without the West Bank cannot survive. It needs free borders and access. 1.5 million people cut off with no trade or water, it's impossible.”

Palestinian Medical Relief Society, Gaza/West Bank

“Gaza is a prison. There is no other way to describe it. 1.5 million people are trapped in Gaza and the result is violence. I'm not just talking about factional violence, domestic violence is also increasing.”

Women's Affairs Centre, Gaza

“How can Gaza be a normal place, how can we live a normal life here? Firstly there has to be free movement between Gaza and the West Bank and open access to the outside world.”

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza

Israel's 40-year occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, and its policies of closure and isolation have resulted in fragmentation across the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israel first imposed its closure policy on the Gaza Strip in the early 1990s and since then it has had a steadily worsening impact on access to education, medical care, employment and the economy. Now effectively imprisoned and with only a drip-feed of humanitarian aid, 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are entirely cut off from the West Bank and the outside world, facing a life without the essential requirements for survival let alone development. Over 80% of the population in Gaza live below the poverty line.

By sealing off the Gaza Strip, declaring it a hostile entity, cutting fuel and threatening to cut electricity, Israel is retreating from its responsibilities as the occupying power. Not only does it make a mockery of international humanitarian law, the illegal policy of collective punishment is only serving to deepen despair and frustration in Gaza. It does not provide security for either Israelis or Palestinians. Crucially, the security of one is indivisible from the security of the other.

The international community has exacerbated this situation by further isolating Gaza and pursuing a 'West Bank first' approach to aid and diplomacy that abandons 1.5 million people to poverty. The violent collapse of the Palestinian national unity government in June 2007 and split between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank has further entrenched the isolation of the Gaza Strip at the expense of an already impoverished population.

Continuing the isolation policy is illegal and will only lead to more suffering and take the whole region further away from peace.

- **The right to work and to an adequate standard of living:** The economy has been decimated as 85% of manufacturing businesses in Gaza have closed down, over 70,000 workers have lost their jobs, imports and exports remain blocked and production has ground to a halt.
- **The right to health:** Deteriorating conditions and a lack of medical supplies are diminishing the capacity of hospitals to treat patients in Gaza, while patients seeking medical care unavailable in Gaza are frequently denied permits to leave.
- **The right to education:** Students are prevented from studying at universities in the West Bank or abroad, while school textbooks cannot be printed due to lack of raw materials. The next generation is being held back which will have serious implications for future development.
- **The right to life:** Isolating Gaza has not stopped Palestinian rocket attacks into Israel and the entire population of Gaza remains vulnerable to continuing Israeli military attacks. All civilians, Israeli and Palestinian, must be protected under international law.

The organisations listed below are signatories only to the English version of this statement which can be found at www.christianaid.org.uk/gaza_statement

Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Al Haq, Al Mezan, Arab Human Rights Association, BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, Broederlijk Delen, B'tselem, CARE International UK, Christian Aid, CODA International, Council for Arab-British Understanding, Culture and Free Thought Association, Defense for Children International-Palestine Section, Diakonia, Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, Gisha: Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, HaMoked, Housing and Land Rights Network - Habitat International Coalition, Ittijah-The Union of Arab Community Based Associations, Medical Aid for Palestinians, Medico International, Near East Council of Churches, Norwegian Church Aid, Palestinian Agricultural Relief

Committees (PARC), Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, The Palestinian-International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza, Palestinian Medical Relief Society, Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), Physicians for Human Rights – Israel, Plateforme des ONG françaises pour la Palestine, Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, Swedish Cooperative Centre, Trócaire, War on Want, Women’s Affairs Centre, YMCA Rehabilitation Program and Beit Sahour YMCA, YMCA–YWCA Joint Advocacy Initiative