

Gaza: Five Years Under Siege

For over five years in Gaza, more than 1.6 million people have been under blockade in violation of international law. More than half of these people are children. AFSC has joined together with 50 international development and United Nations agencies working in Israel and Palestine to say with one voice – end the blockade.

Israel, with the support of the US, imposed a full blockade over Gaza stopping the free movement of people and goods (including medical supplies, construction materials, mechanical parts, fuel, chemicals, raw materials for industrial production, electronic equipment, etc.) in and out of Gaza following the Hamas-Fatah split in 2007. As a direct result:

- Approximately 95% of industrial operations have ceased due to conflict related damage and a lack of electricity, production materials, and the ability to export goods.
- This has contributed to both a 40% unemployment rate and nearly 80% of the population living below the poverty line of \$2 per day.
- Due to poverty over 80% of the Gaza population is currently dependent on international food assistance and over 61% of the population is food insecure. Fifteen percent of children in Gaza suffer from stunting due to malnutrition.
- Restrictions on the import of fuel have forced rolling blackouts that leave people without electricity for 6 to 18 hours a day.
- Degraded water infrastructure results in 40% of Gaza households only having access to running water for 6 to 8 hours once every 4 to 6 days while the Gaza Coastal Municipal Water Utility is not allowed to import parts needed to repair broken, damaged or destroyed infrastructure.
- Over 75% of the 3,481 homes destroyed or damaged beyond repair during Operation Cast Lead have not been repaired or rebuilt due to the ban on the import of construction materials. Three years after the end of the war, thousands of people remain displaced from their homes. (For information on AFSC's response to this situation see:
<http://architectureforhumanity.org/node/1587>)

During 2010 the Israeli government said that it would “ease” the blockade and it allowed for a limited increase in the import of consumer goods including food and clothing into Gaza. However, severe restrictions on the import of many goods including raw materials necessary for industrial production, construction materials, medical supplies, fuel and many consumer goods remain in place. There has also been no easing on the restrictions imposed over exports from Gaza and the movement of people out of Gaza. Given this situation the Gaza economy

cannot recover, poverty rates remain high, and most of the population cannot purchase the consumer goods that are available in markets.

Palestinians are calling for change. As one of the youth participants in AFSC's Gaza program said,

"We are people with hopes and dreams. We can build our futures and our country if we are given the opportunity, but we need help. But help can't just be humanitarian aid. We don't need humanitarian aid. Don't view us as poor victims. We are people with rights and we need support in securing our rights."

After five years of the blockade, will we finally respond to the call of this young Palestinian and the 1.4 million other Palestinians like him?

The blockade has not resulted in a weakening of Hamas and has not increased the prospect of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Rather it has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Gazans and caused untold suffering. However, because this crisis is manmade, given political will it can be immediately ended. It is imperative that Israeli leaders find the political will to reverse course and end the blockade.

While Israel bears primarily responsibility for ending the blockade, the United States government must also be held accountable for its continued support for the blockade, its provision of unconditional military assistance to Israel, and the political cover it gives Israel at the UN. We repeat our 2010 call on the US government to end its support for this flawed and failed policy. The US should take all effective steps to push Israel to end Gaza's isolation, including demanding the immediate, unconditional and complete lifting of the Gaza blockade and opening the border to allow for the free flow of goods and people.