

# AUSTRALIANS FOR PALESTINE

PO Box 2099  
Hawthorn VIC 3122  
Melbourne - Australia  
Tel: 03 9818 5080  
Fax: 03 9818 5009

info@australiansforpalestine.com  
www.australiansforpalestine.com

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Prepared by SS & SK/AFP

### Gaza in Context

## Providing a Voice

### BACKGROUND

Israel's 44 year old occupation and colonisation of Gaza and the West Bank is at the root of all violence

- The international community has failed to uphold UN resolutions calling for an end to occupation and for Israel to meet its obligations under International law toward the refugees.
- 75% of Gaza's population is made up of refugees denied for 63 years the right to return to their homes inside what is now Israel. Israel has kept this refugee population locked up behind high walls, denied them the right to citizenship, the right to freedom of movement and the right to self-determination. It has kept tight control of every aspect of their lives including visitation rights from family members who live outside Gaza's prison gates.
- Gaza has been under siege by Israel since August 2005 when Israeli settlements were evacuated with most of the settlers relocated to the West Bank.
- The siege was further tightened when Hamas took over in June 2007 and has remained in Israel's vice-like grip ever since, blockaded from land, sea and air.
- "Operation Cast Lead", Israel's 22-day assault on Gaza in Dec 2008/Jan 2009 left Gaza crippled, a state from which it has not been able to recover due to Israel's relentless acts of **collective punishment** that keeps the economy "on the brink of collapse". (1)

### FOOD INSECURITY

- 55% of Palestinians in Gaza are food-insecure and 10% of children show signs of stunted growth due to malnutrition.
- Almost 1 million people out of a total population of 1.5 million "do not have the self-sufficient means to grow or purchase the bare minimum amount of food for themselves and their families" while another 200,000-plus remain vulnerable to food insecurity. (2)
- 75% are dependent for their basic needs on some form of humanitarian aid from international donors. (2)

### RESTRICTIONS ON ENTRY/EXIT OF GOODS

- Israel restricts the passage of food and material into Gaza. In January 2011, Israel allowed only 4,100 truckloads of food and materials to enter as opposed to some 10,600 trucks that entered in August 2000.
- Exports fell from 2,460 truckloads to 107 truckloads.

### DAMAGE TO HOMES, LAND AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- 17% of agricultural lands and 200,000 dunums of grazing land (more than 49,420 acres) were entirely destroyed during "Operation Cast Lead". (2)
- Severe damage to the water purification and sewerage systems has led to Gaza's water supply being classified by WHO as unfit for human consumption. Between 90% and 95% of the aquifers in Gaza are not safe for drinking. (2)
- According to UNRWA, 76 buildings were destroyed in March 2011 displacing 158 people, including 64 children. In the first quarter of 2011, some 333 people were displaced including 175 children.

### NO-GO ZONES – agriculture and fishing

- 50% of households lost their source of income when Israel imposed a "no-go" zone of 2km from the fenced-in boundary. (2)
- 7,000 fishermen lost their income when Israel introduced new restrictions on fishing rights that limited fishing to only 3km from shore rather than 20km. (2)

## ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE

While both Hamas and Israel have targeted civilians, Israel has used force far more lethally against the civilian population. Its 3-week Operation Cast Lead (Dec08-Jan09) was a horrific display of excessive force that ended in the killing of 1,419 Palestinians and 5,300 wounded after years of violent attacks. Nor did it end there. Its attacks on the Gaza Strip are continuing. **(3) & (4)**

Date	Palestinians KILLED	Palestinians injured	Israelis KILLED	Israelis injured
19 Jan 09 – 28 Feb 11 <b>(after “Cast Lead”)</b>	151 including 19 children		9 including 1 children	
March 2011	18 including 6 civilians	60 including 3 children and a pregnant woman	3	
April 2011	23 including 2 children	81 including 33 children and 16 women		2 including 1 child
5May-11May11	3			
12-18 May 11	1 child	105 including 31 children, 3 women and 3 journalists		
19-25 May 11	1	1		
26May-1Jun 11	1			

### INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS / ISRAEL'S OBLIGATIONS

Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) states that “No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed . . . Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited” ***As an Occupying Power, Israel is legally responsible for the welfare of the Palestinians.***

### CONCLUSION

Israel considers any resistance by Palestinians to its repressive occupation, including attempts at meaningful economic empowerment, illegitimate and unlawful. This is the context in which the sanctions regime against Gaza has been justified, a regime that has not mitigated since the end of the war. According to Desmond Travers a co-author of the Goldstone Report, “If these issues are not addressed, Gaza may not even be habitable by World Health Organization norms.”

### REFERENCES

- (1) Wikileaks US Embassy cables of March 2008
- (2) Physicians for Human Rights – Israel Report – “Humanitarian Minimum – Israel’s Role in creating Food and Water Insecurity in Gaza, January 2011
- (3) [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)
- (4) OCHA

