

The Palestinian International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza

Newsletter

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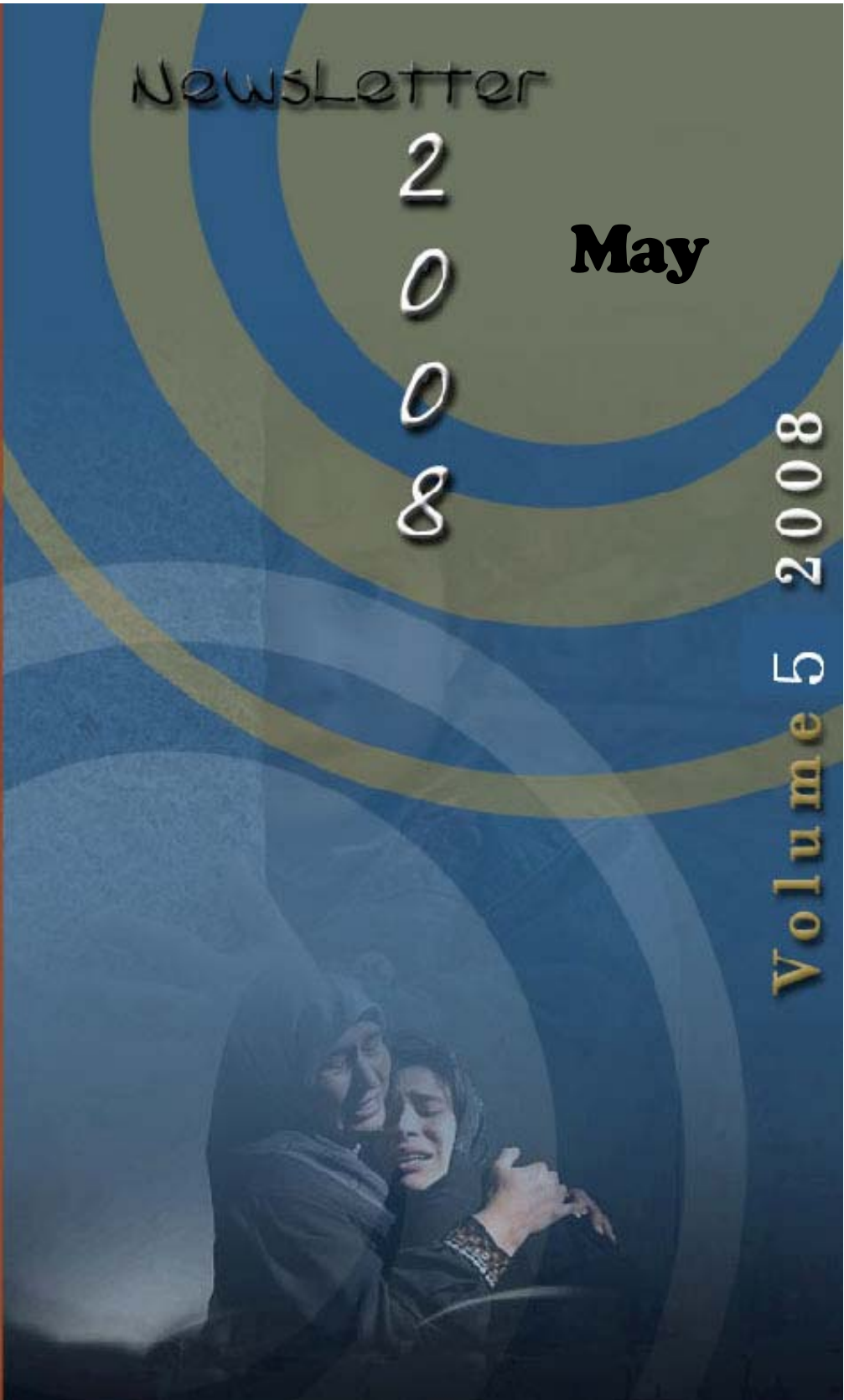


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Our News:

Archbishop Desmond Tutu meets members of the End the Siege campaign in Gaza

May 28th 2008

U.N. envoy Archbishop Desmond Tutu, head of fact-finding mission on the Israeli army killing of 19 Palestinian civilians in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip in November 2006, expressed shame over the deteriorating conditions in Gaza. Tutu was speaking during a press conference in Gaza city on May 29, Thursday morning, after concluding a two-day mission in Gaza.

"Its shame that we remain silent over what is going in Gaza, which needs external help and support, so the population there can enjoy legitimate humanitarian rights". "The situation in Gaza is extremely miserable, we have not seen a passerby or any aspect of normal life as same as in many parts of the world. We have not seen children who smile or play, we have not either seen cars carrying passengers due to lack of fuel" he said.



Desmond Tutu, left, Christine Jenkiz, right , during Thursday's press conference

He also called for lifting the Israeli blockade on Gaza, stopping Palestinian homemade shells fire onto nearby Israeli towns, as well as resumption of Palestinian-Israeli peace talks for achieving peace in the region. Tutu explained that his three-member panel, heard testimonies from survivors of the Israeli army massacre in 2006. Tutu met a group of Palestinian local human rights organizations including, Palestinian Centre for human Rights, Mezan Center for Human Rights, and ADDammer Association and received input on the probe. He also met with Dr. Ahmad Abu Twahina, Director of Gaza Community for Mental Health, and Dr. Abed Karim Ashour, members of the campaign.

Dr. Eyad Sarraj, for Palestinian International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza, briefed the former archbishop of Cape Town on the impact of the Israeli-imposed blockade on Gaza Strip during a meeting on Wednesday 28th May in Gaza.

Dr. Sarraj warned of the critical humanitarian situation emanating from the ongoing closure of crossings. He illustrated that Israel has been using the policy of collective punishment in retaliation against the firing of rockets from Gaza. Israel knows well the impact of its policies on the civilians in Gaza, as the Israeli government does not seek peace.

Sarraj pointed that the Israeli people has been suffering under the Israeli occupation. Israel should be liberated as it is also the liberation of the Palestinians. Tutu emphasized the need to speak out against the siege and the necessity of reaching peace with the Palestinians. He also highlighted the necessity to end the internal division between Fatah and Hamas pointing that dialogue with Hamas is the right way, not destruction and killing.



Human Rights groups deliver medical aid to Gaza

May 13, 2008

Gush Shalom and Physicians for Human Rights and other Human Rights groups managed to send a convoy of medical supplies to the Gaza Strip on Tuesday May 13th.

The convoy, worth 60,000 Shekel purchased through donations in the framework of the Israeli Coalition Against the Gaza Siege, arrived at the Sofa Trade Crossing. The convoy includes laboratory and dental equipment. The equipment was intended for the Shifa Hospital in Gaza, the European Hospital in Khan Yunis, and Red Crescent for Gaza Strip.



Medical supplies delivered to Red Crescent

The Palestinian campaign to End the Siege on Gaza thanked all parties who

helped in easing part of the suffering of the Palestinian people on Gaza, as they are still facing harsh conditions due to the ongoing Israeli siege.



A strangled people

The bold claims about Middle East peace from London ring hollow in the empty streets of Gaza

Sami Abdel-Shafi in Gaza City

The Guardian, Saturday May 3 2008

It is a strange feeling: after working as a productive professional in Gaza for five years, I have become a black market junkie. I make several phone calls a day hunting for fuel for my car, diesel for the electricity generator waiting on standby to power the house, even cigarettes and vitamins. The only way to get hold of these things, to buy life-saving medicines, to purchase the essentials for a life of basic dignity, is through the black market, if at all. Today all Gaza suffers severe water shortages, with the fuel needed to pump and transport water (as well as sewage) dangerously scarce. The few cars seen on Gaza's mostly empty streets today almost invariably run on used cooking oil due to the lack of diesel.

That feeling of strangeness continued as I read the statement delivered by the Quartet in London yesterday. The four powers mediating in the Middle East - the United Nations, European Union, United States and Russia - spoke of "deep concern" and demanded "concrete steps by both sides". There was no sense, however, that they had properly grasped the depth of Gaza's plight or the realities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. World politics seems to have morphed into a diplomacy of denial - a denial of how much more firm the international community must be towards the cause of an occupied and dying people.

This diplomacy of denial only gives succour to Israel's urge to exercise its will over Palestinians, and over besieged Gazans particularly. Israel's cabinet seeks to play God over Gaza by bluntly controlling every facet of civilian life. Tearing up the West Bank presents a threat of similarly terrible consequences. Israel's separation barrier and hundreds of checkpoints threaten to create numerous smaller Gazas in the West Bank. The villages and cities that are becoming increasingly isolated and economically strangled today could become hotspots of desperation and violence tomorrow.

Last week in Gaza, Israel not only continued depriving the people of fuel and cooking gas, it held back supplies to UN agencies such as UNRWA - the agency devoted to the health, education, food supplies and more of Gaza's poor and deprived population. In hindering the operations of the UN, Israel was hindering the Quartet, of which the UN is a part.

Israel's current policies are slowly expelling Palestinians from their land and pushing those who remain into indignity, desperation and extremism. The word "siege" no longer seems adequate to describe what is being done to Gaza. The territory's 1.5 million people have been thrust into a humanitarian catastrophe. It has become a nonsense to speak of peace negotiations while Israel creates more injustices on the ground in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

In statements ahead of the Quartet's London meeting, Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, acknowledged the "difficult" issues of borders and the fate of Jerusalem as well as Israel's responsibility to improve the lives of Palestinians. Rice insisted that the US does not regard Israel's settlement expansion as a *fait accompli* when it comes to a final agreement on borders.

If there was a glimmer of hope in the Quartet's statement and Rice's words, however, it is hard to foresee constructive action in its tow. The US administration is nearing the end of its term. The UN is undermined. Israel's prime minister, Ehud Olmert, is appeasing hawks in Israel's military establishment, the settlement movement and the Knesset itself - even as he extends what increasingly looks like an illusory hand of peace to Palestinians. Palestinian politicians, too, must recognise that their embarrassing and divisive standoff only diminishes the world's appreciation of the suffering of their people.

In the meantime, the Palestinian people are approaching something close to destitution. It is not enough for the Quartet to push for peace between Palestinians and Israelis. World politicians and delegates, including Israelis of all convictions, must be encouraged, and allowed, to come to Gaza and witness what is happening here today. Only then will observers be able to assess just how Palestinians

are made to live, and to assess the world's moral obligation towards a people who surely deserve a chance of a dignified and peaceful life.

- Sami Abdel-Shafi is the co-founder and senior partner at Emerge Consulting Group, a management consultancy in Gaza City sami.abdelshafi@emergeconsultants.com, and Member of the steering Committee of End the Siege Campaign

On the siege on Gaza

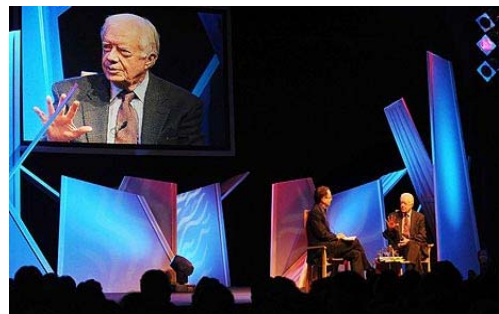
Carter urges 'supine' Europe to break with US over Gaza blockade

Jonathan Steele and Jonathan Freedland, The Guardian
Monday May 26 2008

Britain and other European governments should break from the US over the international embargo on Gaza, former US president Jimmy Carter told the Guardian yesterday. Carter, visiting the Welsh border town of Hay for the Guardian literary festival, described the EU's position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as "supine" and its failure to criticise the Israeli blockade of Gaza as "embarrassing".

Referring to the possibility of Europe breaking with the US in an interview with the Guardian, he said: "Why not? They're not our vassals. They occupy an equal position with the US."

The blockade on Hamas-ruled Gaza, imposed by the US, EU, UN and Russia - the so-called Quartet - after the organisation's election victory in 2006, was **"one of the greatest human rights crimes on Earth,"** since it meant the "imprisonment of 1.6 million people, 1 million of whom are refugees". **"Most families in Gaza are eating only one meal per day. To see Europeans going along with this is embarrassing,"** Carter said.



Former US President Jimmy Carter speaking at the 2008 Hay Festival. Photograph: Barry Batchelor/PA

He called on the EU to reassess its stance if Hamas agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza. **"Let the Europeans lift the embargo and say we will protect the rights of Palestinians in Gaza, and even send observers to Rafah gate [Gaza's crossing into Egypt] to ensure the Palestinians don't violate it."**

British, US Agencies: Israel's siege on Gaza causing severe economic, health crisis

Saed Bannoura - IMEMC News, May 23, 2008

With the people of the Gaza Strip beginning their third year of living under siege, a representative of the US Agency for International Development told the Palestinian news agency Ma'an on Thursday that the siege impedes investment and makes the development of the Palestinian economy impossible.

At the same time, the British Department for International Development has warned that the situation is "extremely serious and that there are significant risks to public health."



Palestinians imprisoned inside Gaza

British minister Baroness Crawley stated, "Due to fuel shortages, 60 million litres of raw and partially treated sewage flow into the Mediterranean each day and 90 per cent of mains water is polluted. Hospitals have between one and five days of fuel supply remaining", adding, "Electricity cuts and low supplies of fuel for generators mean that hospitals are at risk of being unable to keep essential equipment running such as refrigeration for vaccines". This week's report follows an earlier warning in March in which the British agency stated that the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip had caused the "worst humanitarian crisis since its occupation began."

For USAID, an organization that has been working in the Gaza Strip providing humanitarian aid, the organization's regional director Dr Howard Sumka stated, "I think it will be very hard for significant amounts of business to be done with Gaza as long as the closure regime is in place. Every donor and every private business person has had a problem getting the raw material they need into Gaza and getting the finished product out. We've experienced it. The World Bank has experienced it and others as well. Under the current circumstances it's not a bright future for Gaza, not immediately anyway."



Bush Should Press for End to Gaza Closure

Human Rights Watch, Gisha and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel

(Washington, May 13, 2008) – President George W. Bush should urge Israel to reverse its strict closure policy towards the Gaza Strip, three human rights groups said in a letter to the US president today. Human Rights Watch and two Israeli human rights groups, Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, called on Bush to dissociate the United States from the closure policy, which is causing grave harm to Gaza's civilian population.

"My message to the international community is that our silence and complicity, especially on the situation in Gaza, shames us all. It is almost like the behavior of the military junta in Burma"

Israel's comprehensive restrictions on the movement of goods and people into and out of Gaza, including fuel and other civilian necessities, constitute collective punishment against the civilian population, the three organizations said. Israel's stated intention has been to pressure Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups to end their rocket attacks on Israel.

Desmond Tutu
May 29, 2008

"It's debatable whether Israel's closure policy has had any impact on Palestinian armed groups who fire rockets at Israel," said Joe Stork, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. **"What's absolutely clear is that the closure has gravely harmed Palestinian civilians in Gaza."**

In their letter, the three groups said that Palestinian rocket and other attacks against Israeli civilians, such as those that killed a man in Kfar Aza on May 9 and a woman in Moshav Yesha on May 12, violate the core humanitarian prohibition against attacks that deliberately target or cause indiscriminate harm to civilians. However, unlawful attacks by one side to a conflict do not permit unlawful actions – in this case collective punishment – by the other.

"Given the extent of US financial and military support for Israel, President Bush needs to speak out clearly against Israel's closure of Gaza," said Sari Bashi, Gisha's executive director. "The United States should not be party to a policy that punishes civilians for the actions of these armed groups."

Israel's control over Gaza's borders, airspace, territorial waters, tax collection, and population registry means it still bears legal obligations as the occupying power under international humanitarian law. On top of that, Israel has made itself Gaza's major source of electricity and sole source of fuel needed for transportation and the functioning of water, sewage and sanitation, and health facilities.

The laws of war, which apply to military occupations, prohibit the occupying power from attacking, destroying, or withholding objects essential to the survival of the civilian population. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel is obliged to protect the rights of Palestinians to freedom of movement, to secure access to health care and education, and to lead normal lives.

"Israel's stranglehold on supplies of fuel and other necessities have crippled transportation and other essential services," said Hadas Ziv, executive director of Physicians for Human Rights – Israel.

"Palestinian attacks on the border crossings have aggravated the impact of the shortages, but the main cause remains Israel's drastic reductions in supplies allowed into Gaza."



Future on the line

After almost a year of siege Gaza closer than ever to total breakdown

UK agencies
May 2, 2008

Agencies challenge Mid-East Quartet to break its collective complacency over Gaza's suffering

UK agencies today called on members of the Mid-East Quartet - the US, EU, Russia and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon - to end its complacency by putting the highest diplomatic pressure on the Israeli government to lift the blockade on Gaza and allow in adequate supplies to stop an impending humanitarian crisis. Quartet members will be meeting in London today (Friday).

The agencies, including Oxfam, Christian Aid, CARE International UK, CAFOD and Medecins du Monde UK, said that the stranglehold on Gaza's borders has made life for ordinary people in Gaza intolerable, and the work of the UN and other humanitarian agencies has been made virtually impossible. Only a trickle of medicine, food, fuel and other goods is being allowed in. It has made people highly dependent on food aid, and brought the health system and basic services such as water and sanitation near to collapse.

Two months ago, the agencies released a detailed report saying conditions in Gaza were the worst since 1967. Now it is worse still. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) last week was forced to temporarily suspend the distribution of food aid to 650,000 people due to lack of fuel and has reported that 300,000 people only have drinking water for 4 hours every 4 days. Meanwhile, rubbish from one million people piles up in the streets because there is no fuel to collect it.

"The collective complacency of the Quartet is putting the future of the people of Gaza on the line. We need the immediate unimpeded import of fuel, humanitarian supplies and essential equipment and materials that have been withheld by Israel for more than 9 months to ease this human suffering and avert a disaster. It is well within the power of the EU and the US to make this happen. Instead of wringing hands and wagging fingers they should insist on an immediate end to Gaza's suffering," said Oxfam's Chief Executive Barbara Stocking.

There are three essential elements. A guarantee that all the fuel Gaza needs will be delivered and that fuel will no longer be withheld to punish the people of Gaza for illegal acts they cannot control; clearance of food, medicines, spare parts for water systems and hospital equipment and everyday items such as toilet rolls, sanitary pads and paper for school books that have no security relevance but have been banned by Israel from entering Gaza; to secure full re-opening of all crossings for passage of goods and of people.

"Peace will not be achieved by locking 1.5 million people into a prison of spiralling poverty and misery. Strong leadership is needed from within the Quartet to convince Israel of the need to chart a new direction on Gaza," said Geoffrey Dennis, Chief Executive of CARE International UK.

Plans exist that would enable the reopening of the crossings in the matter of days. All that is needed is political will and agreement to make this happen and return to the Agreement on Movement and Access.

"It's time for the people with moral responsibility and international authority to take decisive action. This is a critical first step towards a viable peace," said Daleep Mukarji, Director of Christian Aid UK.





Narratives Under Siege (14): 700 Stranded Students

Palestinian Centre For Human Rights

Two days ago, on 1 June, Hadeel Abu Kwaik was sitting in her computer lab at Al-Azhar University in Gaza looking both worried and perplexed. Now she says she is "Happy but still worried. I'm still not sure we will be able to leave for the US."

Hadeel is one of the 'Fulbright seven,' who on 29 May all received letters from the US Consulate in Jerusalem informing them that their Fulbright scholarships would not be finalised. The consulate letter gave no reason for the sudden withdrawing of the Fulbright scholarships: instead all seven students, three women and four men, were "Strongly encouraged" to re-apply for the same student scholarships the following year, and assured they would receive "Priority consideration."

The withdrawing of the Fulbright scholarships caused international uproar, momentarily focusing the world's attention on the plight of the seven Gaza Strip students. US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice intervened, saying she was "Surprised" by the decision, and adding "If you cannot engage young people and give complete horizons to their expectations and their dreams, I don't know that there will be any future for Palestine. We will take a look. I am a huge supporter of Fulbrights."

In the face of mounting criticism from both within the US and Israel, the US State Department swiftly reinstated the seven Fulbright scholarships on 2 June, assuring the Gaza students that they were "working closely" with Israeli officials to secure permits for the students to be able to leave the Gaza Strip. Hadeel and her academic colleagues are expecting to travel to Jerusalem within the next few days, where they will be interviewed at the US Consulate in order to secure US visas. They will all then return to the Gaza Strip in order to prepare for their departure at the end of summer. Hadeel says she hopes to study her MBA in software engineering at university in Minnesota.

In journalistic jargon, this story "moved quickly" and has now concluded with a positive ending for the Fulbright students. But hundreds of other Palestinian students remain stranded inside the Gaza Strip, and the number is expected to rise this summer. According to data from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), almost seven hundred Palestinian students are waiting to leave Gaza in order to pursue their studies, and scholarships, abroad. "This number will increase within the next month, after the schools announce their exam results and students want to move onto universities" says Khalil Shaheen, Head of PCHR's Economic and Social Rights Unit. "All these Gazan students are stranded inside the Gaza Strip because of the Israeli siege and the closure, and they are being denied their rights to pursue their education, and their futures"

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights both explicitly confirm the rights of all people to freely travel to and from their own state. The Israeli closure of the Gaza Strip, which is about to enter its third year, is systematically and deliberately destroying the Gazan economy, its health and education services, and crushing the future of the people of the Gaza Strip. Students who want to pursue specialist education abroad, many of whom want to return to Gaza afterwards and assist in rebuilding their country, have been denied the right to do so because Israel remains intent on its illegal policy of collective punishment.

Twenty nine year old Said Ahmad Al-Madhoun has been waiting to pursue his Master of Law, after being awarded a fellowship by the Open Society Institute in January 2007. In March 2007 he was accepted at the American University, Washington College of Law. His studies were scheduled to begin in August last year. "I managed to get out of Gaza in December 2007 and to travel to the Egyptian border" he explains. "It was a complicated journey – because of the closure we were forced to travel through Erez Crossing (in northern Gaza) and then to the Egyptian border via another Israeli crossing at Kerem Shalom. But I was turned back because I didn't have a US visa." There was no way Said could obtain a US visa before traveling, because, like the vast majority of other Gazans, he wasn't permitted to travel to Jerusalem and visit the US Consulate. He attempted to travel to the US once



Hadeel Abu Kwaik is one of the 7 students whose Fulbright scholarships were withdrawn, then swiftly reinstated by the US State Dept. But almost 700 other students remain stranded in Gaza

more, in early January this year, and was once more turned back at the Egyptian border. "This is so frustrating; not just for me, but for all students in Gaza" he says wearily. "We want to work and to learn. We want to enjoy our freedom of movement. We want an opportunity. We want to determine our future."

When Hadeel Abu Kwaik first heard that her Fulbright scholarship had been withdrawn, she said she was "angry and disappointed. I wonder if Israel wants an educated neighbor or an angry one" she said publicly. Like Said, she wants to pursue her academic career overseas and then return to Gaza and work in her own community. Although she says she's happy at the news of her reinstated scholarship, she admits she is still worried about whether she will actually be able to leave, and her anxiety is clearly tainting her joy. "I won't be relieved until we actually reach the United States," she says.



An ongoing Crisis

Gaza forced back in time as shortages bite

Tobias Buck, The Financial Times
May 8 2008

There are a handful of chocolate croissants and cinnamon rolls in the shop window, but otherwise the small bakery in Jabalya in the northern Gaza Strip presents a sorry sight. The long metal tables that are normally coated in flour and pastry are empty, and the big ovens at the back of the store stand cold and silent.

Abdelfateh has prepared fresh dough but the electricity was cut in the early morning. His supplies of cooking gas ran out three weeks ago. "I used to make at least 40kg of pastry every day. Now I make maybe 5kg," says Abdelfateh. "It's a terrible situation. I basically come here just to show that the shop is still open."

The Gaza Strip, home to 1.5m Palestinians, has grown used to supply shortages since Israel started imposing a blockade more than 10 months ago. More recently, however, the pervasive lack of petrol, diesel, cooking gas and other kinds of fuel, along with the disappearance of spare parts and myriad other products have turned Gaza into the laboratory for a strange experiment: its inhabitants are living through a century of human development in a matter of months – and in reverse. Cars are being replaced by donkey-carts; electric ovens have made way for wood-fired stoves; a modern sewage system is ditched in favour of pumping untreated waste water into the sea; rubbish is burnt in the streets and professionals spend days scrounging around for a few litres of cooking gas.

Sohiel Kafarna, for example, has already eaten breakfast and lunch underneath the concrete canopy of one of Gaza's deserted petrol stations. The lawyer from Beit Hanoun, a village close to Gaza City, has heard rumours the station will sell cooking gas on Thursday.

He needs gas for his home and for his car. When petrol started to run out several months ago, Mr Kafarna paid a mechanic to convert his car to run on cooking gas. But now that thousands of Gazans have followed suit (one mechanic estimates that 90 per cent of the few cars still driving around Gaza run on cooking gas), this fuel, too, is proving an elusive commodity.

It is late afternoon, and so far he and five others have waited in vain. But he says he will hold out until the station opens. His wife has packed him food for supper as well. "There is no hope, but we depend on God," says Mr Kafarna.

For almost one month, Israel has not allowed any petrol or diesel into the territory, except for the UN bodies still working in Gaza. Supplies of cooking gas and of industrial diesel used to fuel the power plant arrive rarely, and are well below the daily need, according to the UN. The result is daily power cuts lasting 3-4 hours.

Outside many petrol stations, cars have lined up in long, ghostly queues. Some vehicles, abandoned by their owners, have waited in line for as much as a month and are caked in dust and dirt.

Elsewhere, huge piles of rubbish have been set on fire. It is the only way to dispose of waste in areas where dustcarts no longer have fuel.

Israel says its sanctions are designed to weaken Hamas – the Islamist group that has controlled Gaza since last June – which uses the strip as a launch-pad for almost daily rocket attacks on Israeli cities. The government has also argued that Hamas is to blame for some of the shortages, by launching attacks on the few crossing points through which goods and fuel are still allowed into the territory.

However, aid groups and the international community are voicing growing criticism over Israel's policy. Last week, the Middle East Quartet – made up of the US, the UN, the European Union and Russia – issued a statement expressing its “deep concern over humanitarian conditions in Gaza” and urging the opening of crossing points between Israel and the territory.

Back in the strip, Monther Shoblak, director of the Gaza Emergency Water Project, is wrestling with a new problem: the lack of power, fuel and spare parts means there is no choice but to pump between 50m and 60m litres of raw and partly treated sewage into the Mediterranean every day.

It is dangerous to bathe, believes Mr Shoblak, but he fears the beaches will be invaded by hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren all the same.

“Soon the schools will close for the summer holidays. The only place for the children to go is to the beach,” he says.



New report details Palestinian plight

By JOHN ZAROCOSTAS (Middle East Times)
May 23, 2008

GENEVA -- The economic and social situation of workers in the occupied Palestinian territories has deteriorated alarmingly, with the Gaza Strip the most severely affected, according to an International Labor Organization report published Thursday.

“What we are witnessing in Gaza is a very serious social situation, with very high levels of poverty, and very high levels of desperation, frustration, and anger...” Philippe Egger, a senior ILO official, told reporters.

The situation has been aggravated by sharp hikes in food prices which have seen the consumer price index post steep increases in the order of 10 percent, 15 percent and up to 20 percent in the price of basic food staples, said the ILO official.

Egger, a Swiss national and a member of the ILO expert fact-finding mission, which in April visited the occupied territories, Israel, Egypt, and Syria, summed-up as follows: **“The situation is appalling from all respects.... How much can human beings bare such situations? There must be a limit.”**

The ILO said approximately 80 percent of the population in Gaza, or 1.3 million people, is now dependent on food aid, and 33 percent in the West Bank, or 700 thousand people and noted “Extreme poverty was 40 percent of the population in Gaza and 19 percent in the West Bank in November.”

The agency also concludes the prospects on the employment front “remain bleak.” The unemployment rate in the West Bank and Gaza combined stood at 22 percent in 2007, compared to 24 percent in 2006, the report notes but also stipulates there was a huge differential between the two areas, with unemployment at 30 percent in Gaza and 18 percent in the West Bank.

“All private sector activity in Gaza has virtually stopped, or disappeared, because of the economic siege, preventing any flow of goods into or out of Gaza,” said Egger, who is deputy director of the office of the ILO chief.

He said most private sector activity in Gaza “has virtually closed down” except possibly for bakeries, taxis, and very informal small-scale activities. “Most employers we have spoken with in Gaza have either closed their activities or have wanted to relocate to the West Bank.”

The ILO report says that of the 3,900 industrial establishments that existed in Gaza in June 2007 that employed about 35,000 workers, 96 percent have been forced to close. "By March 2008, only 130 working establishments remained employing 1,300 workers and operating at a fraction of regular capacity," it said.



Access to Health Services

Siege Hits Palestinians Before They Are Born

By Mohammed Omer

GAZA CITY, May 14 (IPS) - The Israeli siege of Gaza that has restricted access to food, water and medicine is now beginning to hit unborn children and newborn babies.

"Many babies are born suffering from anaemia that they have inherited from their mothers," Dr Salah al-Rantisi, head of the women's health department at the Palestinian ministry of health in Gaza told IPS. And the mothers are becoming anaemic because they do not now get enough nutrition through pregnancy.



That in turn happens because the Israeli blockade has choked the supply of food and medicines. **It can be a hard life for babies from day one, or even earlier.**

Credit: Mohammed Omer

Dr al-Rantisi also heads the women's health unit at Nasser hospital, where about 30 to 40 children are born every day. Many suffer from anaemia, he says.

Anwaar Abu Daqqa, 30, has lost three babies prematurely. The foetuses were malformed as a result of lack of nutrition and medicine for the mother, Dr al-Rantisi said. And in the last case she reached hospital late because she could not find transport.

"Premature babies born dangerously underweight is a daily and increasing phenomenon in Gaza's hospitals," he says.

The Gaza Strip is poorer and harder hit than the West Bank, but there too there are well documented instances of women having to give birth at checkpoints because of restrictions on movement.

The ministry of health says 9,000 to 10,000 babies are born in the Gaza Strip every month. Of every 1,000 born, 28 die from malnutrition, anaemia and other poverty-related causes. The ministry has no figures for surviving babies suffering from malnutrition. "There are many cases of pregnant women who need medicines that are not available in Gaza," al-Rantisi said. Most families could not afford them if they were available, he said.

The World Bank said last month that the poverty rate in Gaza is now close to 67 percent and that economic growth last year was zero.

One consequence of poverty is anaemia. The condition, a direct consequence of poor nutrition, is not new to Gaza. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reported in 2002 that 19 percent of Gazans suffer from anaemia. That figure is estimated by UNRWA now to be 77.5 percent. Children receive on average only 61 percent of their daily need of calories from UN supplies.

Many of the newly born have been hit by the political situation before they could open their eyes to the world. Of the many deliveries that take place at al-Shifa hospital, the largest in Gaza, no one can tell how many of these children could grow up to live happy and healthy lives. Through the many

dangers has arisen awareness of this new one – that sanctions can hit Gazans quite literally prematurely.

The fear of bombing comes later; the first dangers are the lack of food, water and medicines.

Tahani Safi, 29, lies worrying about the caesarean section scheduled for the next day. She suffers from malnutrition, high blood pressure, diabetes, and a shortage of protective water around the child in the womb.

There are many mothers with such difficulties. Such cases can be found at any hospital, but doctors say the number of cases of conditions a result of poor food and medical care in Gaza is now rising. Health authorities have warned that the life and health of countless unborn babies is in serious danger all across Gaza.

So far 146 Gazans have died directly as a result of the Israeli siege, and the border closures and shortage of medication and health care this has brought, according to the ministry of health.

The U.S. celebrated Mothers Day Sunday May 11. No one in Gaza did. (END/2008)



Critically ill patients from Gaza appeal to Israeli court

IRIN News - UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

JERUSALEM, 22 May 2008 (IRIN) - Ahmed al-Baghdadi's doctors said he must leave the Gaza Strip and travel to Israel to receive urgent life-saving medical care if he hopes to fight the tumours in his body. Rada al-Khadir, aged 22, needs to get treatment immediately, her Israeli doctor said, or her liver disease could prove fatal.

Both patients have been denied permission to leave by the Israeli military. On 20 May - along with 11 other Palestinians from the Gaza Strip in need of immediate medical care in Israel, the West Bank and Jordan - they filed separate petitions to the Israeli High Court, asking that they be allowed to leave the enclave and go to the relevant hospitals.

In an affidavit obtained by the Israeli Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) organisation, Baghdadi said his egress was made conditional on his willingness to collaborate with the Israeli General Security Services (GSS).

"If you want to reach the hospital, take my mobile phone number, talk to me and give me information on people," he was allegedly told by a member of the GSS, who allegedly also offered him a sum of money.

Baghdadi said he was so desperate to receive treatment that he even slipped into Egypt illegally at one point, when the border was blown open, but got caught and was sent back to Gaza before he was able to get the full care he needed there.

The Israeli GSS has denied it makes the entrance of patients to Israel conditional on their willingness to collaborate.

Rafah versus Erez crossings

With the southern Rafah crossing to Egypt still generally closed since last June, having been opened for only a few days in recent months for patients, the northern Erez crossing, controlled by Israel, remains the only way out for nearly all people in need of medical care.

In what was an apparent gesture by Egypt to Hamas, which controls Gaza and is currently in talks on a ceasefire with Israel, on 10 May Rafah was opened for patients, but Khadir, though she tried and waited at the border, was unable to pass through.



Photo: Tom Spender/IRIN

A Palestinian man lies in hospital. Thirteen Palestinians from the Gaza Strip have filed separate petitions to the Israeli High Court asking that they be allowed to leave the enclave and go to relevant hospitals

She was denied entrance to Israel through Erez on "security grounds", although the authorities had said there would be a bus that could take her to points outside the Jewish state for treatment. However, since she was denied permission, no bus has been arranged, PHR said, adding that the last shuttle was in March.

The Israel Medical Association issued a statement several weeks ago asking that cancer patients in need of life-saving treatment be allowed to enter Israel.

At the beginning of last month, the World Health Organization released a report saying 32 Gazans had died while awaiting a permit to leave Gaza or after having been denied permission to exit. Officials say the number has since risen.

"Preventing those patients from getting urgent and life-saving medical care is physical torture that causes prolonged suffering," said Dani Filk, a medic and the PHR chairman.

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A Gesture of Hope and Defiance

23 years' solitary for a detainee's wife

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
26-05-2008

Tahani is one of hundreds of Palestinian wives whose husbands are held in Israeli prisons. For the past 23 years, she has had to raise their six children alone. In June 2007, the Israeli authorities suspended all family visits; she is desperate to see him once again.

Tahani fears she will never see her husband again. They have lived apart for 23 years, after he was captured in Gaza by Israeli forces and later detained in Israel, leaving behind a pregnant wife and five children. The prison sentence he received will ensure that he remains behind bars for the rest of his life.

Shortly after the capture of her husband, she gave birth to a little girl, the sixth child in the family. "Today she is 23 years old and has just had a baby herself. My husband has become both a father and a grandfather while in prison. But we don't know if he ever will be able to see his grandchildren," she says.

Tahani used to go and visit her husband twice a month, under the ICRC's family visits programme. But she says that since 2001 the Israeli authorities have allowed her only three visits, for security reasons. In June 2007 the authorities stopped them completely.

"I miss my husband terribly and I need him to take care of the family. I have only been allowed to talk to him once by telephone," Tahani states, holding up a photo of him that was taken in prison 13 years ago. She explains that photos are normally taken every six months in prison and given to the families.

The only way to communicate directly with her detained husband is by Red Cross Messages – personal messages sent and delivered through the ICRC. The messages may contain only personal information and have to undergo censorship by the authorities.

Gesture of defiance

Gaza: ICRC calls for immediate resumption of family visits to detainees in Israel
26-05-2008

"This measure is depriving both detainees and their relatives of an essential life line," "It further exacerbates the daily hardship faced by the Palestinian population trapped in the Gaza Strip. The ICRC has facilitated family visits for decades, always in line with Israeli security measures. While we acknowledge Israel's security concerns, we strongly believe that they alone cannot justify the all-out suspension of family visits to detainees."

Christoph Harnisch
Head of the ICRC's delegation in Israel
and the occupied territories

Even though the family visits have been suspended for almost a year, Tahani and some 1,100 other relatives of detainees from Gaza still sign up for them with the ICRC, a gesture of hope and defiance. The ICRC has continuously asked the authorities to allow a resumption, but this has repeatedly been turned down.

Most Mondays, hundreds of family members gather for a "sit-in" in front of the ICRC office in Gaza City. Followed closely by local media, they come to express solidarity with their detained relatives and to demonstrate against the suspension of the visits. They also aim to offer the detainees some hope.

"On Mondays they are waiting in the prisons to see our faces on television or hear our voices on the radio, since they can't see us or talk to us in real life," she explains.

Personal, not political

Tahani's most fervent wish is for her husband to be released from prison and come home to be reunited with the rest of the family. But for now all she can do is to repeat her demand for the visits to be resumed.

"This has nothing to do with politics. We just want to be able to see our relatives, to meet them, to talk to them. If I am not allowed to visit him any more, we might not see each other for the rest of our lives," she says.

Families of Palestinian detainees held in Israeli prisons get some financial support from the Palestinian authorities. This helps in a territory where living conditions are extremely hard for most families and essential services sometimes non-existent. But Tahani's difficulties are more than material: "My children have been raised without their father to guide them. Today they are all grown up," she sighs.

However, she worries much more about the well-being of her husband. Detainees depend on visits from their families for basic items, such as clothes. But the psychological benefits from the visits are much greater.

"The visits are very important to the detainees, to let them see their families. My husband is just spending his time in prison waiting for us to come. I can only hope it will be soon," she murmurs.



Article

A human rights crime

Jimmy Carter

The Guardian, Thursday May 8 2008

The world must stop standing idle while the people of Gaza are treated with such cruelty

The world is witnessing a terrible human rights crime in Gaza, where a million and a half human beings are being imprisoned with almost no access to the outside world. An entire population is being brutally punished.

This gross mistreatment of the Palestinians in Gaza was escalated dramatically by Israel, with United States backing, after political candidates representing Hamas won a majority of seats in the Palestinian Authority parliament in 2006. The election was unanimously judged to be honest and fair by all international observers.

Israel and the US refused to accept the right of Palestinians to form a unity government with Hamas and Fatah and now, after internal strife, Hamas alone controls Gaza. Forty-one of the 43 victorious Hamas candidates who lived in the West Bank have been imprisoned by Israel, plus an additional 10 who assumed positions in the short-lived coalition cabinet.

Regardless of one's choice in the partisan struggle between Fatah and Hamas within occupied Palestine, we must remember that economic sanctions and restrictions on the supply of water, food,

electricity and fuel are causing extreme hardship among the innocent people in Gaza, about one million of whom are refugees.

Israeli bombs and missiles periodically strike the area, causing high casualties among both militants and innocent women and children. Prior to the highly publicised killing of a woman and her four children last week, this pattern had been illustrated by a report from B'Tselem, the leading Israeli human rights organisation, which stated that 106 Palestinians were killed between February 27 and March 3. Fifty-four of them were civilians, and 25 were under 18 years of age.

On a recent trip through the Middle East, I attempted to gain a better understanding of the crisis. One of my visits was to Sderot, a community of about 20,000 in southern Israel that is frequently struck by rockets fired from nearby Gaza. I condemned these attacks as abominable acts of terrorism, since most of the 13 victims during the past seven years have been non-combatants.

Subsequently, I met with leaders of Hamas - a delegation from Gaza and the top officials in Damascus. I made the same condemnation to them, and urged that they declare a unilateral ceasefire or orchestrate with Israel a mutual agreement to terminate all military action in and around Gaza for an extended period.

They responded that such action by them in the past had not been reciprocated, and they reminded me that Hamas had previously insisted on a ceasefire throughout Palestine, including Gaza and the West Bank, which Israel had refused. Hamas then made a public proposal of a mutual ceasefire restricted to Gaza, which the Israelis also rejected.

There are fervent arguments heard on both sides concerning blame for a lack of peace in the Holy Land. Israel has occupied and colonised the Palestinian West Bank, which is approximately a quarter the size of the nation of Israel as recognised by the international community. Some Israeli religious factions claim a right to the land on both sides of the Jordan river, others that their 205 settlements of some 500,000 people are necessary for "security".

All Arab nations have agreed to recognise Israel fully if it will comply with key United Nations resolutions. Hamas has agreed to accept any negotiated peace settlement between the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, and Israel's prime minister, Ehud Olmert, provided it is approved in a referendum of the Palestinian people.

This holds promise of progress, but despite the brief fanfare and positive statements at the peace conference last November in Annapolis, the process has gone backwards. Nine thousand new Israeli housing units have been announced in Palestine; the number of roadblocks within the West Bank has increased; and the stranglehold on Gaza has been tightened.

It is one thing for other leaders to defer to the US in the crucial peace negotiations, but the world must not stand idle while innocent people are treated cruelly. It is time for strong voices in Europe, the US, Israel and elsewhere to speak out and condemn the human rights tragedy that has befallen the Palestinian people.

• Jimmy Carter, a former president of the United States, is founder of The Carter Center project-syndicate.org