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Years without Adequate Shelter

**Repercussions of the Israeli Attacks  
against Civilian Property in the 2014  
Military Offensive on the Gaza Strip**

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## Introduction

This report addresses the humanitarian tragedy of thousands of people, still living in temporary houses, due to the failure to implement the reconstruction plan for the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the 2014 Israeli offensive. Mainly, it highlights the suffering of persons living without adequate housing for the 4th consecutive year, severely impacting their quality of life and personal wellbeing.

The report focuses on five dimensions pertaining to the right to adequate housing within the context of the Gaza Strip and the 2014 Israeli offensive and relevant Israeli practices and policies. It highlights the deliberate attacks on residential houses and complete destruction of residential neighborhoods resulting in a crisis in housing and internal displacement as thousands of houses were completely destroyed and others partially impacted.

Additionally, it examines the slow progress in implementing the reconstruction plan, as thousands of units still await to be reconstructed even four years since their destruction. The report sheds a light on the challenges hindering this progress, identifying three main obstacles: a. the failure of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) to address the needs of reconstructing houses; b. the Israeli restrictions on the entry of construction materials to the Gaza Strip; and c. donors' delay in delivering their pledged contributions towards GRM. The suffering of families who continue to live in temporary housing is the cornerstone of this report, as it reflects the severe impact of political failure on their dignity and wellbeing as a consequence of a lack of adequate housing. This situation was ex-

acerbated by the financial crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which restricted funds aiding these families in paying rent since July 2018.

The continued denial of displaced families' right to adequate housing is a flagrant violation of their human rights; and the Israeli attacks against civilian property constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the destruction of property in an occupied territory by the occupying power. Additionally, the closure imposed on the Gaza Strip, and the consequent restrictions on the entry of construction materials, is in contrast with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

## 1. The systematic attacks on residential property during the 2014 Israeli Offensive

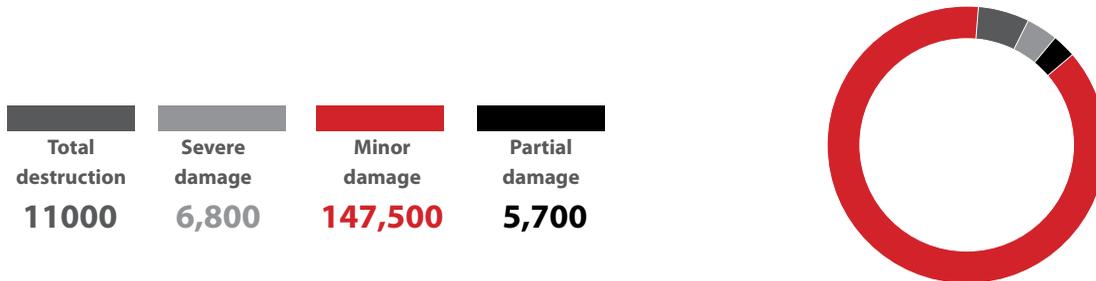
During the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces deliberately targeted Palestinian civilian residential property, with cases where entire neighborhoods were destroyed. According to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing's (MPWH), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Relief Agency (UNRWA), 171,000 were damaged: 11,000 (6.4%) totally destroyed, 6,800 (4.0%) severe damages (uninhabitable), 5,700(3.3%) severe partial damages, and 147,500 (86.3%) minor damages<sup>1</sup>.

**Table (1): Damaged housing units during the 2014 Israeli offensive**

	Total destruction	Severe damage	Partial damage	Minor damage	Total
Number	11.000	6.800	5.700	147.500	171.000
Percentage	6.4%	4.0%	3.3%	86.3%	100%

1. Shelter Cluster Fact sheet, October 2018, 15/11/2018. See: <https://www.sheltercluster.org/palestine/documents/shelter-cluster-fact-sheet-october-2018>.

Figure (1): housing units destroyed during the 2014 Israeli offensive



PCHR and human rights organizations' (HRO) documentation shows that 31,939 houses were destroyed during in the 2014 military offensive; 8,362 of them were totally destroyed and 23,577 sustained partial damage. The damaged houses sheltered 43,735 families, a total of 250,630 individuals; including 67,317 women and 124,528 children<sup>2</sup>.

The variance in reported numbers of destroyed houses between HRO records and those of governmental and international bodies is due to categorization differences:

- governmental and international bodies considered every apartment within a building complex an independent unit, while HROs considered each destroyed building a single unit regardless of the number of apartments within;
- HROs sorted destroyed properties into two categories: complete and partial damages, while governmental and international organizations sorted them into 4 different categories depending on the severity of the damages: complete destruction, severe damage, partial damage, and minor damage.

2. [http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/2015/report\\_staics\\_2014.pdf](http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/2015/report_staics_2014.pdf).

## 2. The stalling reconstruction process

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Five years after the attacks, thousands of destroyed houses remain unbuilt and others are still under reconstruction.

According to MPWH, UNDP and UNRWA records, only 59.8% of destroyed properties were rebuilt a total of 102,272 units, 69.7% (7,666) were categorized under “complete destruction”; another 661 units, 8.1%, are currently under reconstruction. While sufficient funds are allocated for the reconstruction of 560 units (2.5%); 2,113 others (22.9%) remain unfunded.

In terms of partially damaged houses (uninhabitable, severe and minor damages), 94,606 units were rebuilt (59.1), and 9,262 others are still under reconstruction (5.7%). However, 56,132 damaged units, comprising 35.2% of partially damaged houses, remain without funding<sup>3</sup>.

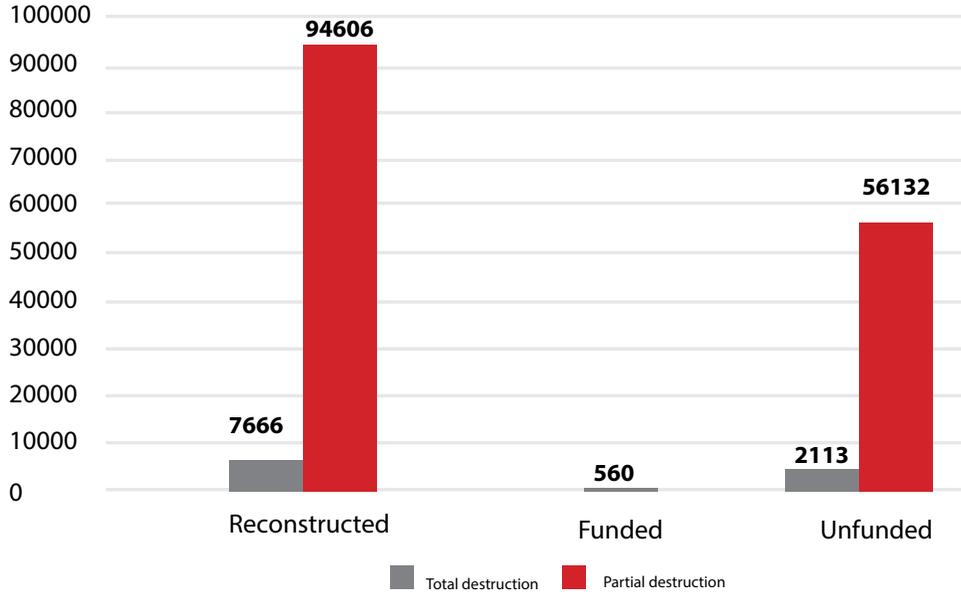
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3. Shelter Cluster Fact sheet, October 2018, 15/11/2018. See: <https://www.sheltercluster.org/palestine/documents/shelter-cluster-fact-sheet-october-2018>.

**Table (2): Reconstruction Progress of Destroyed Houses**

	Number	Reconstructed	Under reconstruction	Funded	Unfunded	Completion Percentage
Total destruction	11,000	7,666	661	560	2,113	69,7%
Partial destruction	160,000	94,606	9,262	-	56,132	59,1%
Total	171,000	9,923	9,923	560	58,245	59,8%

**Figure (2): Reconstruction Progress of Destroyed Houses**



### 3. Challenges hindering the reconstruction of destroyed houses

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The reconstruction of houses destroyed in the 2014 Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip continues to be a pressing issue affecting civilians' lives even four years after the event. The challenges hindering progress in the reconstruction process of the destroyed houses are three-fold: a. the failure of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) to address construction needs; b. the Israeli restrictions on the entry of construction materials to the Gaza Strip; and c. donors' delay in delivering their pledged contributions towards GRM.

#### a. Failure of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) to meet reconstruction needs

On 16 September 2014, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, declared the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM), which was reached in agreement between the UN, Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. It entailed security assurances on the use of construction materials strictly for civilian purposes; it was enforced as of 14 October 2014.

GRM was strongly criticized by the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), civil society organizations and the private sector, as an effort to institutionalize the Israeli closure and provide an international cover for it. More so, it was seen as instilling international legitimacy for collective punishment and war crimes against civilians. PCHR also warned against applying GRM as it would aggravate the suffering of persons displaced by the attacks and impede the actual reconstruction efforts<sup>4</sup>.

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4. For more information: position paper issued by PCHR: Gaza under Closure and Rubble, UN Mechanism to Reconstruct Gaza Fails and the Only Solution Is Lifting the Closure, 11 March 2015: <https://pchr.org/en/?p=5348>.

According to PCHR's records, hundreds of affected persons complained that their allocated portions of cement were insufficient to rebuild or restore their destroyed properties. As such, reconstruction has halted in thousands of units before completion; and their owners still await additional allocations to finish rebuilding their properties. In general, owners of destroyed houses receive their allocated portions under GRM from the designated distribution centers. Allocations are announced periodically by MPWH in accordance with the Infrastructure Damage Assessment carried by UNDP and UNRWA.

**b. Israeli Restrictions on the Entry of Construction Materials to the Gaza Strip**

According to data obtained from the Palestinian Contractors Union, the Private Sector Coordinating Council (PSCC), the Palestinian Construction Industries Union and specialized construction firms, the Gaza Strip needs 6 million tons of cement to meet its normal needs over the course of 4 years. This need is significantly larger due to the wide-scale destruction across the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the 2014 Israeli attacks; however, only 2 million tons (30% of needed cement) were supplied into the Gaza Strip since its ending. Not only is this insufficient for the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure, but it also does not even meet the Gaza Strip's minimum needs<sup>5</sup>.

PCHR records indicate that 11,443 owners of completely destroyed houses submitted requests for construction materials; 5,398 (47.2%) received their allocated portions; 2,533 beneficiaries (22.1%) received limited portions of the allocated quantity under the In-

5. Statement of the Private Sector Coordinating Council (PSCC) in the Gaza Strip, 19/2/2018. For more information: [https://www.facebook.com/PscC.Palestine/posts/1895721744051065?\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=K-R](https://www.facebook.com/PscC.Palestine/posts/1895721744051065?__tn__=K-R)

frastructure Damage Assessment; while 3,515 beneficiaries (30.7%) did not receive any construction materials as their applications are either pending, delayed or under review<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, 130,693 owners of partially destroyed houses submitted requests for construction materials with relevant bodies; 88,749 (67.9%) received all allocated portions; 24,151 (18.5%) received limited quantities of allocated materials; while 17,793 beneficiaries (13.6%) did not receive any construction materials as their applications are either pending, delayed or under review<sup>7</sup>.

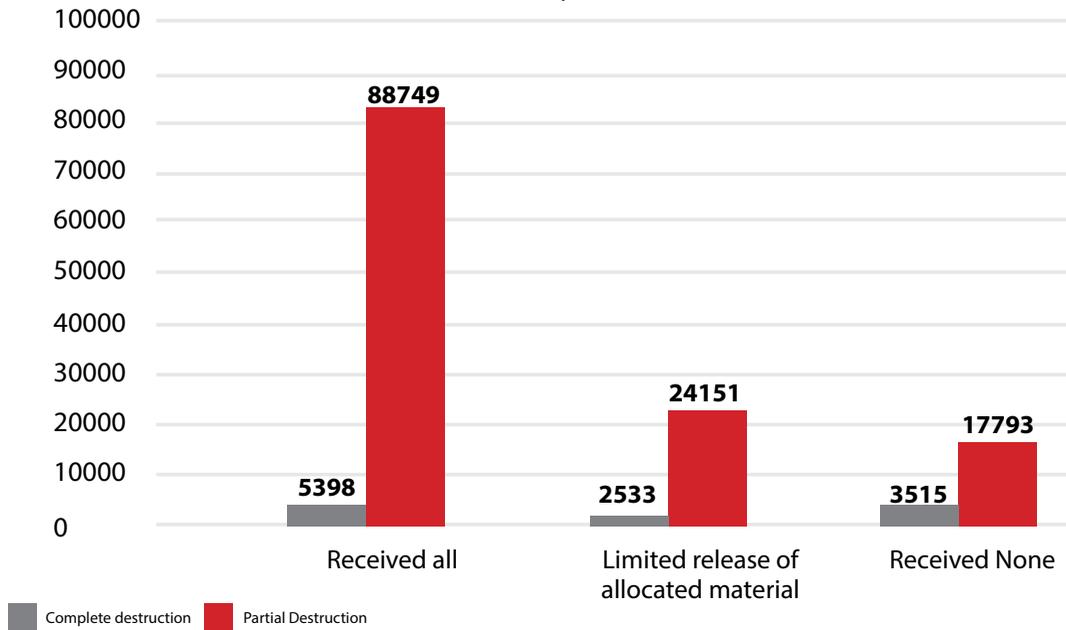
**Table (3): Progress of Applications Requesting Construction Materials by Owners of Destroyed Houses**

	Total	Received all	Limited release of allocated material	Received None
Complete destruction	11,443	5,398	2,533	3,515
Percentage	100%	47,2%	22,1%	30,7%
Partial Destruction	130,693	88,749	24,151	17,793
Percentage	100%	67,9%	18,5%	13,6%

6. For more details on the needs of the home construction stream, see the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism website: <https://grm.report/#/Reporting/Residential>

7. For more details on the needs of the home construction stream, see the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism website: <https://grm.report/#/Reporting/Shelters>

**Figure (3): Progress of Applications Requesting Construction Materials by Owners of Destroyed Houses**



According to Mr. Naji Sarhan, an engineer and Assistant Undersecretary at MPWH<sup>8</sup>, GRM has hindered the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, delayed the construction of thousands of housing units and was a key factor in obstructing economic and development projects in the Gaza Strip.

8. Interview conducted by PCHR's fieldworker on 31 October 2018.

Additionally, Mr. Sarhan confirmed that GRM mechanism proved its uselessness due to the Israeli authorities' disregard for their agreed commitments, especially their neglect for the progress timeline; and slow processing of construction materials requests which averaged three – four months. Furthermore, the approved quantities of construction materials for each processed application were far less than needed for complete reconstruction. He also confirmed that only 50% of requests were approved, noting that the more than 169,000 applications were submitted to the Israeli authorities through GRM; 130,693 of them were for partial damage beneficiaries, and 11,443 of them were for total destruction; while 17,963 of them were categorized under new houses.

In light of the above, and the testimonies collected by PCHR, GRM reconstruction mechanism has hindered the complete reconstruction of thousands of destroyed housing units. Therefore, it is necessary to abolish GRM for its inability to deliver the needs of the Gaza Strip, and allow the entry of construction materials to all residents, including the owners of destroyed housing units, factories, contractors and suppliers without restrictions or conditions.

### **c. Failure to Fulfill Pledges by Donor Countries**

The failure of donor countries to fulfill their financial obligations for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip delayed the construction of thousands of housing units that were destroyed during the 2014 Israeli offensive. While limited amounts of financial pledges were released, they only allowed for partial progress in the reconstruction schemes. As such, the housing sector is still in dire need for financial support to reach pre-2014 levels<sup>9</sup>.

According to the National Office for the Reconstruction of Gaza (NORG), the stalled release of financial pledges for reconstruction has hindered MPWH reconstruction work. It has also impacted economic development for many sectors in the Gaza Strip, including industrial, commercial, agricultural and service sectors. Additionally, NORG estimated the cost of reconstructing the 11,000 housing units that were completely destroyed during the 2014 Israeli offensive at approximately \$495 million, of which \$361.1 million is available, while a deficit of \$133.9 million remains. Also, the cost of reconstructing 160,000 partially damaged units was estimated at \$338 million, of which \$205.57 million is available and a deficit of \$132.43 million remains.

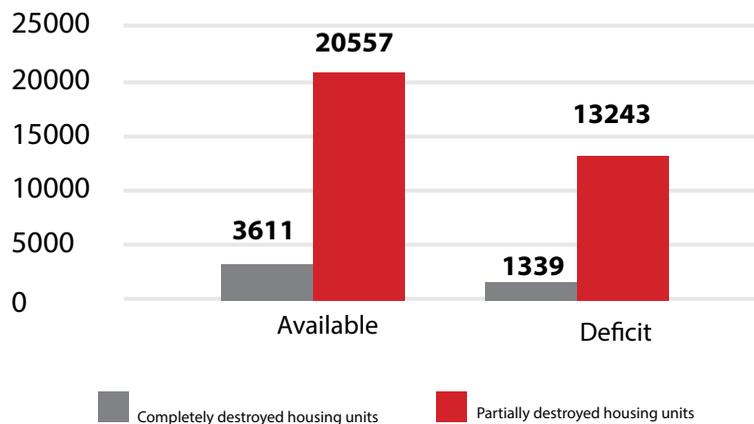
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9. On 12 November 2014, a conference on the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, sponsored by Egypt, Norway, the United Nations, the European Union and the League of Arab States, was held in Cairo. More than 50 countries and 20 regional and international organizations participated in the conference, which aimed at reinforcing the Palestinian government's ability to shoulder its responsibility for the Gaza Strip reconstruction, in addition to providing financial support for the reconstruction sector. The donor countries pledged during the conference to offer 5.4 billion dollars, half of which were allocated for the reconstruction sector.

**Table (4): Cost of reconstructing completely destroyed houses against available funds (Million dollars)**

	Available	deficit	Total cost
Completely destroyed housing units	361.1	133.9	495
Percentage	72.9%	27.1%	100%
Partially destroyed housing units	205.57	132.43	338
Percentage	60.8%	39.2%	100%

**Figure (4): Cost of reconstructing completely destroyed houses against available funds (Million dollars)**



As such, it is evident that donor countries' failure to fulfill their financial obligations resulted in failure to reconstruct at least 3,694 housing units that were totally destroyed; forcing the victims to live in temporary housing even 4 years after the destruction occurred. Furthermore, the financial deficit hindered reconstruction plans for 65,493 housing units that were partially damaged during the same events; extending the suffering of victims as their housing conditions are inadequate.

### **Al-Nada Neighborhood: Destroyed Houses and Homeless Families**

Hundreds of al-Nada neighborhood residents in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza Strip, continue to suffer in tragic living circumstances due to the failure in reconstructing their destroyed houses since the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip. This neighborhood was heavily targeted from the beginning of the offensive, with direct attacks on civilian houses. This forced civilian residents to flee the area and seek shelter at UNRWA schools or move-in with relatives who lived in relatively safer areas.

According to Osamah Mohammed Abdul Razeq Darabaih (53), member of "al-Nada Neighborhood Committee," the neighborhood's designated body for matters on the reconstruction process,

*"Israeli forces heavily targeted the neighborhood, which had 25 residential building; each building contained 18-20 housing units. As a result, 4 residential buildings were completely destroyed and became ramshackle structures, a total of 78 uninhabitable housing units. Four other buildings, 80 housing units, were severely damaged." Mr. Darabaih added that until the reporting period, "the reconstruction of the destroyed houses was yet to be initiated due to the*

*delay in releasing funds intended for reconstruction, although 4 years have passed since their destruction. As a result, the suffering of dozens of families continues in temporary and rented houses. The situation was aggravated following UNRWA's halt on rent allowances for at least 80 families living in rented houses, putting them under the threat of eviction at any time. In fact, many families were evicted due to failure to pay rent; consequently, they suffer degrading living conditions because of the stalling in the reconstruction process."*

**Mustafa Isma'il Mustafa al-Akhras (53), a displaced person of al-Nada neighborhood, married and father to 7 children, gave the following testimony to PCHR's fieldworker:**

*"On 17 July 2018, my 104-square-meter apartment was destroyed during the Israeli forces' targeting of al-Nada buildings in the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip. Although 4 years have passed, my apartment was not reconstructed yet due to the lack of funding as I am told by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing. I am still living in a 100-square-meter rented apartment in Gaza City. I rented this apartment following the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip and UNRWA promised to pay the rent allowance until my apartment is reconstructed and I can return to it. UNRWA issued me a rent allowance of 675 USD every three months, equivalent to 225 USD/month. However, UNRWA stopped paying the rent allowance 5 months ago claiming that they suffer from a financial crisis. I am currently suffering because I am unable to pay the rent allowance for the apartment owner and I cannot return to my home as it still awaits reconstruction. This means that I will not be able to return to my apartment years from now even if the reconstruction was soon initiated."*

#### **4. Displaced Families' Suffering in Temporary Houses**

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Since the summer of 2014 to this date, 2,600 families, a total of 14,660 individuals, suffering without access to adequate housing due to the stalling reconstruction process intended to rebuild the destruction inflicted upon the Gaza Strip by Israel, according to MPWH, UNDP and UNRWA.<sup>10</sup>

For the fourth consecutive year, these families suffer in poor living conditions without adequate shelter. They are unable to rent for temporary housing due to the overall deteriorating economic situation across the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, temporary housing arrangements make it harder for families to access basic services such as education and health. It has also affected the social life of affected persons, as families are now dispersed across the Gaza Strip in contrast to their previously close-knitted communities where extended families lived together within the same community.

##### **a. UNRWA Stops Rent Allowance, Victims Unable To Pay Rent**

Since UNRWA suspended housing support for displaced families, hundreds of displaced families suffer from their inability to pay the rent of their temporarily rented dwellings, especially under the deterioration in economic wellbeing for the entire population of the Gaza Strip, and displaced population specifically.

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<sup>10</sup>. Ibid

PCHR's records indicate that UNRWA stopped paying rent allowance for 1,600 families since July 2018<sup>11</sup>. These families live in rented apartments since their destroyed houses were not reconstructed, even though 4 years have passed since the end of the Israeli offensive. It was agreed upon, after the end of the 2014 military offensive, that UNRWA would pay rent allowances for affected families until their homes are reconstructed and they are able to return to them.

According to Mr. Mo'een Moqat, an engineer and Deputy Director for Infrastructure & Camp Improvement Program at UNRWA,<sup>11</sup> UNRWA stopped rent allowances since July 2018 due to an aggravating financial crisis that the organization is going through. Mr. Moqat added that UNRWA pledged to pay rent allowances for around 13,300 families following the end of the 2014 Israeli offensive. This number continued to decrease, the current number of beneficiary families is 1,600. It should be noted that UNRWA paid rent allowances over the past 4 years for those families; installments were made quarterly each covering a 3 months' rent. He continued that UNRWA paid rent allowances for beneficiaries until last June (the second quarter of 2018); however, it is still unable to provide those allowances for the third quarter of 2018 due to the lack of necessary funding. Mr. Moqat emphasized that UNRWA understands the suffering of families living in rented houses, and works hard to obtain funding and to provide rent allowances for both the third and fourth quarters of 2018.

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11. A meeting made by PCHR's fieldworker on 22 November 2018.

**Rami 'Adel Kharawat (31), a Palestinian Authority (PA) employee, from 'Ezbet Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, said to PCHR's fieldworker:**

*"On 22 July 2014, during the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, my 150-square-meter house was completely destroyed by the Israeli warplanes. As a result, my pregnant wife Suha (26) and my 2-year-old daughter Mona were killed. After the end of the offensive, I lived in a tent near the rubbles of my house. After both the Damage Assessment Committee of the Ministry of Housing and UNRWA certified the destruction of my house, I moved into a rented apartment. UNRWA provided a rent allowance of 600 USD every three months until June 2018, after which allowances stopped due to their alleged financial crisis. I have been unable to pay my rent since then as I receive a deducted PA salary of 700 NIS (approximately 195 USD), this put me through great hardship and forced me to borrow money to pay my accumulated debt to the landlord. My salary is not enough to provide the basic needs of my family, and I am unable to borrow more money. I have anxiety and live in constant worry especially that my landlord requested that I leave the apartment. I have no choice but to return to live in a tent by my destroyed house."*

**Mr. Ibrahim Mahfouth Mohammed al-Farra (52), a married man and father of 6 children, from Kahn Younis, told PCHR's fieldworker:**

*"On 23 August 2014, my 3-story house (each floor consists of 1 apartment) established on an area of 200 square meters and sheltered 4 families (my brother, 2 married sons of mine and me) was completely destroyed in the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip. As a result, all of our*

*family members stayed with relatives. Afterwards, each family rented an apartment, paid for by UNDP every 6 months. I rented an apartment, one of my married sons lived with me as well, for 200 USD/month. Early in 2017, UNPD stopped paying the rent allowance claiming that they suffer from a financial crisis, putting my family and me through extreme hardship. With my monthly salary of 1500 NIS, I am stretched thin trying to provide essential and basic needs for my family. I had to borrow money to pay my rent; yet, my landlord pressed us to leave the apartment because I have not been able to pay off my accumulated debt. The landlord cut water and electric supplies, and we were forced to leave after 10 months of living in such an inhumane situation. My family has moved in with my other married son, we occupy a room that is still under construction. My wife is sick and requires constant medical care, which I cannot provide. I have two daughters in university and a son who is unemployed, all living in a small room. I am still indebted to my former landlord, while unable to provide my children's needs for education as well as my wife's medicine."*

#### **b. The Deteriorating Living Conditions of Affected Families**

Hundreds of families, who lost their houses during the 2014 Israeli Offensive in the Gaza Strip, suffer from deteriorating living conditions, especially under the overall poor economic conditions of the Gaza Strip population. In 2018, their poor conditions aggravated to an unprecedented extent as dozens of families were unable to pay both for rent of their temporary housing arrangements and for their basic needs such as food, clothes, education and health expenses.

'Othman Abdul Hafith Abu Salem (46), married with 6 children, from al-Nada neighbor-

hood and currently living in Tal al-Za'tar neighborhood, gave the following testimony to PCHR's fieldworker:

*"During the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, my apartment was completely destroyed. After the attacks stopped, my family and I moved into a rented apartment in Tal al-Za'atar neighborhood and UNRWA used to pay us 200 USD/month for rent. However, UNRWA stopped paying the rent allowance 5 months ago. As a result, my suffering aggravated due to my inability to pay rent. I am an employee at the PA and receive only NIS 430 per month (approximately 121 USD), which is insufficient for the minimum basic needs of my family. I currently suffer very hard conditions as I am unable to cover the expenses of education for my sons enrolled in universities and schools and I fear that I might be forced to take them out of their schools and universities as I have no means to pay for them. My wife also suffers a chronic disease and needs medicines on a daily basis, I am unable to provide it for her. Few days ago my landlord gave me an ultimatum until the end of this month to pay my overdue payments or be evicted. My family and I are under threat of becoming homeless in a few days, I cannot give the minimum for my family, I cannot keep my children in school and I cannot provide treatment for my wife."*

Salwa Abdul Men'em Abdul Rahim Nofal (21), from al-Nada neighborhood residents, who were displaced from their houses and currently living in Tal al-Za'tar neighborhood, said to PCHR's fieldworker:

*"During the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, our 100-square-meter apartment was completely destroyed. Therefore, my family (my mother, sisters and me) moved to live in a*

*rented apartment in Tal al-Za'tar neighborhood. UNRWA helped us in paying the rent for the landlord; however, they stopped helping us 5 months ago. Our family is depending on the pension of my deceased father since 2002. We spend money from this limited amount of money as my mother does not work and I am a student at the Faculty of Dentistry and my sister Samia is a high school student. Despite not having any additional income, my late father's pension was sufficient for us before our house was destroyed, but after losing everything in the destruction our expenses doubled and we become unable to pay for our basic needs. When UNRWA stopped paying us the rent allowance for the apartment, our tragedy was exacerbated, and my sisters and I are under the threat of having to stop studying if the situation persists."*

### **c. Inadequacy of Temporary Housing Units and the Dispersal of Families**

Hundreds of affected families suffer from their inability to cope in the temporary housing units that do not fit their needs and hinders their access to health and education services. Ms. Nash'at Ra'ed Rafiq Hamad (36), married with 5 children from al-Amal neighborhood in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, told PCHR's fieldworker:

*"My 75-square-meter 2-bedroom apartment in my family's housing complex was targeted by Israeli artillery shelling and was completely destroyed in 2014. After the end of the Israeli offensive, UNRWA asked me to move to a mobile house (a Caravan) until my destroyed apartment is reconstructed, but I refused that and demanded to move to a rented apartment. UNRWA approved my request, and I rented an apartment for 200 USD/month paid for through UNRWA's rent allowances. UNRWA later cut rent allowances. Without a source of income and*

*with accumulate debt, my family and I had to move into my parent's already crowded small house where we occupy the living room. My living accommodation is extremely inadequate, a living room is not suitable for a husband and wife and their 5 children, noting that my own parents, brothers and sisters live there. Since I moved into their house, they also had to adjust and it has been extremely difficult on all of us; nonetheless, I have no other option as I cannot afford renting and I cannot return to my own house as it is yet to be rebuilt even though four years have passed since then."*

Additionally, hundreds of families living in close-knitted communities in adjacent residential buildings. These families were displaced from their houses due to the destruction sustained during the 2014 Israeli offensive, as a result, they were dispersed across the Gaza Strip in different cities and neighborhoods which has severely impacted their social wellbeing and sense of community.

**According to a statement provided by Mr. Faisal Mohammed 'Essa al-Sha'er (32), from Rafah, married with 3 children:**

*"On 02 August 2014, our 140-square-meter house was targeted and completely destroyed by the Israeli forces. My father Mohammed 'Essa Ismail al-Sha'er was fatally injured in the attack, and 4 of my brothers sustained various injuries. Our destroyed house sheltered 3 families: my family of 5; my brother's family of 5 and 4 unmarried brothers. Afterwards, all 3 families moved into rented apartments each receiving a quarterly rent allowance of 600 USD. UNRWA cut rent allowances since July 2018, and all of us have difficulty paying the rent and forced*

*to borrow money to pay the landlords. All our lives, we lived in the same building, our family was very close and we shared everything. We are now dispersed in different neighborhoods in Rafah city. Our hope was that our house would be rebuilt within a few months of its destruction, and I would be able to take care of my now orphaned siblings who are unemployed and in schools and need my help and support. I receive a monthly salary of 1300 NIS (approx. 400 USD), it gets me by but not enough to support my brothers and sister while they live far from me, one of my brothers had to quit his undergraduate studies because we cannot pay fees. If our house was rebuilt, it would be a lot easier for me to support my siblings in daily expenses and provide necessary guidance and support.”*

## **5. Displaced Families’ Suffering under International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law**

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The stalled reconstruction process is a flagrant violation of the human right to adequate housing, not only to those who lost their houses during the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip but also to thousands of other families who need new housing, which requires construction materials to be allowed in, when considering average population growth over 4 years.

The Israeli systematic attacks on civilian properties, and the premeditated destruction of houses is a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), particularly Article (53) of the Fourth Geneva Convention on prohibited destruction, which stipulates that *“Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually*

*or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or to other public authorities, or to social or co-operative organizations, is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.”*

Furthermore, the Israeli closure policy imposed on the Gaza Strip, and the strict restrictions it entails on the movement of goods especially those imposed on the entry of reconstruction materials; consequently, denying civilians from rebuilding their houses, contradicts Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which asserts that *“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services ...”*

These practices are also in contradiction of Article (11) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which obliges State Parties to recognize *“the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right.”*

## 6. Recommendations

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- » Abolition of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM), due to its failure in fulfilling the Strip's minimum reconstruction needs. Even more, GRM has contributed to the institutionalization of the Israeli closure imposed on the Gaza Strip for more than 13 years;
- » In accordance with their legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the High Contracting Parties to should endeavor to force Israeli authorities to end all forms of the unjust closure, including opening all crossings to accelerate the reconstruction process and alleviate the suffering of victims of Israel aggression, especially owners of civilian property;
- » Donors should immediately fulfill their financial obligations pledged in the Cairo International Conference on Palestine "Reconstructing Gaza." Delays in delivering pledges gravely impeded the reconstruction process, exacerbating the suffering of those who lost their homes and shelter during the Israeli offensive;
- » Urgently provide relief programs to help affected civilians living in inadequate housing or rendered homeless, until their houses are reconstructed;
- » Elimination of factors inciting donors' wary, most importantly the ongoing Israeli closure, GRM and the continued Palestinian division; as well as, the always-present threat of another Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip;
- » The Palestinian Authority is demanded to immediately restore national unity and consolidate efforts against the Israeli-imposed closure on the Gaza Strip, open all crossings for the movement of goods and persons. It should exert every effort to help the Gaza Strip recover from the disastrous consequences of the closure, especially poverty and unemployment.