



Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)
المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

Gaza Strip: Actual Strangulation and Deceptive Facilitation

**New Report Documenting the 8th Year of Israeli Closure's Impacts on
Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

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It Has Been Said about the Closure that...

“If someone asks me about the Gaza reconstruction process, I usually answer: it is a big zero. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate. The slowness in the reconstruction process resulted in lack of job opportunities in many of the vocational sectors, on which the people of the Gaza Strip mainly depend to improve their life conditions.”

Mamadou Sow, Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Gaza, during an interview with the Safa Press Agency, 13 July 2015.

“The Scale of Destruction in Gaza is unprecedented, and what has been built is only a drop in the ocean of destruction. We observed the size of construction materials entering into Gaza and found that the Gaza reconstruction could take 30 years to rebuild the extensive damage from last summer’s Israel-Hamas war. I send a message to the donors to comply with their financial obligations towards the huge reconstruction process in Gaza. I also call for lifting up the Israeli restrictions and closure imposed on the Gaza Strip.”

Roberto Valent, Special Representative to UNDP’s Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People in the oPt, during an interview with the AP agency on 25 June 2015.

“The situation in the Gaza Strip is catastrophic, frightening and very hard. All of us are demanded to change the reality in Gaza.”

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany’s Foreign Minister, during a press conference in Gaza on 01 June 2015.

“The claimed changes taken to ease the Israeli closure are neither appropriate nor adequate. After 8 months on the declared cease-fire, we have not seen any change at the level of the humanitarian situation or the Gaza Reconstruction.”

Robert Turner, UNRWA’s Director of Operations in the Gaza Strip, during a meeting with Palestinian journalists at the UNRWA’s Headquarter in Gaza on 14 May 2015.

“Talking about the Gaza reconstruction after a year on a war that led to the destruction of around 240,000 educational and health facilities and displacement of thousands of people is very difficult especially in light of the current Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. It is very difficult to start the reconstruction process in light of the ongoing closure of the crossings and the mechanism imposed on the entry of construction materials. The UNDP has a special and certain plan for the reconstruction process, which must not be limited to the UNDP and UNRWA projects. However, the closure must be completely lifted, as we understand the Gaza people’s concerns over the Reconstruction process.”

Frode Muring, Special Representative of the Administrator in the occupied Palestinian territory, press statements during his visit to Gaza on 12 May 2015.

“None comes to Gaza without being affected by the massive destruction he sees. Not only houses were destroyed in the Gaza Strip, but livelihoods were affected as well. You can feel how explicitly depressed and angry the people here in Gaza are. What we have seen in the past weeks is that a lot in Israel also realize that the current situation will not continue and there is a need to put a mechanism that allows people to rebuild their lives. This is the best guarantee for the Palestinian’s security in Gaza and Israel’s security as well.”

Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, during his interview with the UN Radio Station on 04 May 2015.

The Israeli Closure under the International Humanitarian and Human Rights Laws

Since the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including Jerusalem, in 1967, the Israeli forces imposed their military control over these areas. As a result, the International community has since stressed that the Israeli forces is an occupying power and that the Palestinian lands are occupied territories.¹ The Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War is legally applicable to this territory and the Israeli forces have to comply with the convention and apply it. However, the Israeli forces have systematically violated this convention and other rules of the international law concerning the administration of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and governing of the Palestinian protected civilians. The international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, offers protection to war victims, including civilians in the occupied territories. This Convention thus states that the occupying power cannot arbitrarily apply force, measures or policies in its administration of the occupied territories. The interests of the civilian persons shall prevail, their property shall be protected and the legal status of these territories shall not be changed.

The policy of closure imposed by Israel over the Gaza Strip constitutes a form of collective punishment that violates IHL, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the international human rights law (IHRL). Article 33 of the aforementioned Convention stipulates, ***“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”***.

International human rights instruments uphold the right to freedom of movement, particularly Article 12 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that provides, ***“Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence. Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.”*** The closure policy also violates article 1 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR): ***“In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.”*** In addition, article 5 of the same Covenant provides, ***“Nothing in the present Covenant may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights or freedoms recognized herein....”***

1. Article 42 of the 1907 Hague Regulations emphasizes that whether occupation is partial or total, it is all about the actual control that applies to the Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip, as Israeli forces seize control over land, air and sea in addition to the border crossings. Article 42: “Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised.

Furthermore, the Committee Against Torture considered the policies of closure and demolition of houses that are practiced by the Israeli forces a violation of article 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These two policies cannot be justified in any case.²

Article 5 of the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination provides that everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the border of the State, the right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's country and the right to nationality.

The General Comment No. 27 issued by the Civil and Political Rights Committee in its 67 session in 1999, is considered the philosophical and legal interpretation for the right to freedom of movement. This General Comment stipulates that everyone has the right to choose his or her place of residence and to leave a country, including their own. It also provides for exceptional circumstances in which the right to movement may be restricted. The Comment highlights everyone's right to return to his country of residence. The General Comment addresses article 12 of the ICCPR and examines it from a legal perspective. This document is considered one of the most important ones as they are referred to in case of issues related to the freedom of movement and its restrictions.

The report of Professor Richard Falk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories since 1967, issued in January 2011 confirmed that the closure imposed on the Gaza Strip is illegal, regardless of the humanitarian impacts. It considers the closure as a form of collective punishment against civilians in violation of article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The report also shows that in spite of the Israeli alleged easing of the closure following the Israeli attack on the *Freedom Flotilla* on 31 May 2010, the harsh humanitarian conditions have prevailed. Although the closure had been eased in a selective manner, its basic features have remained side by side with the hardships and risks endured by the civilians in the Gaza Strip. Statistics mentioned in the report point out that truckloads allowed into Gaza after the alleged easing reached 28% of the average allowed prior to June 2007.³ Richard Falk's report issued in June 2013 warned that the Gaza Strip blockaded by Israel from air, land and sea for seven years may no longer be viable only three years from now. The Special Rapporteur called upon Israel to immediately end its blockade imposed on Gaza.

2. Article 16 of Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment stipulates, "1. Each State Party shall undertake to prevent in any territory under its jurisdiction other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment which do not amount to torture as defined in article I, when such acts are committed by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. In particular, the obligations contained in articles 10, 11, 12 and 13 shall apply with the substitution for references to torture of references to other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." 2. The provisions of this Convention are without prejudice to the provisions of any other international instrument or national law which prohibits cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment or which relates to extradition or expulsion.

3. Report of Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, issued in Arabic on 10 January 2011. See the report: <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/A72012A31C1116EC8525782C00547DD4>

He added that the suffering of 1.75 million Palestinians has been devastating due to the Israeli closure's social and economic repercussions.⁴ In his latest report issued in February 2014, Richard Falk called upon the Israeli government to lift the unlawful blockade imposed on Gaza, cease military incursions, allow the Gaza Strip population to fully benefit from their natural resources located within Gaza borders and waters, and take in account the deteriorating state of emergency in Gaza.⁵ These facts, according to the Special Rapporteur, prove the continuity and illegality of the closure as a form of illegal collective punishment that amounts to a crime against humanity. Furthermore, the report considers that the deprivation of basic materials necessary for civilians living under the occupation is a violation of the IHL.

The right to freedom of movement is a necessary condition to achieve other fundamental rights mentioned in the ICESCR, including the right to work (article 6), the right to an adequate standard of living (article 11), the right to health (article 12), the right to education (article 13) and the right to establish a family (article 10).

PCHR's Role towards the Israeli Closure

PCHR has paid special attention to the ongoing Israeli-imposed closure on Gaza since mid-June 2007 and all serious violations committed against civilians at the economic, social, cultural, civil and political levels. The Israeli closure is considered the cruelest in terms of the severity of its measures and its period of application. Its social and economic consequences have strangled over 1.8 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The position of PCHR in relation to the closure emanates from IHL and IHRL instruments, which consider it a form of collective punishment. It constitutes a way to punish civilians by targeting their livelihood. In its legal and documentary work, PCHR focuses on monitoring the impact of the Israeli closure on civilians at the humanitarian, social and cultural levels; the most prominent of which are:

1. In coordination with a number of Palestinian community-based organizations and international organizations, PCHR led advocacy campaigns requesting the closure to come to an end. These campaigns included the organization of dozens of conferences, seminars, workshops, and briefing the international delegations visiting Gaza on the impacts of the closure and different media activities aiming at unveiling the Israeli practices and violations resultant from the closure;
2. PCHR participated in the majority of activities organized by international and local organizations promoting the end of the closure or to reveal its impact on civilians. PCHR delivered several speeches in regards to the closure to UN human rights bodies such as Human Rights Council, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the two Special Rapporteurs and other instruments adopted by the UN in the field of human rights;
3. Documenting and monitoring the suffering of the Gaza Strip population who are banned to travel abroad freely or come back into it due to the ongoing

4. Report of Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, issued on 10 January 2011. See the report: <https://richardfalk.wordpress.com/2013/06/>

5. Report of Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, issued in Arabic on 13 January 2014. See the report: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/uns-falk-accuses-israel-of-ethnic-cleansing/>

closure and tightened restrictions imposed on the border crossings used for the movement of persons. PCHR sheds the light on the most affected categories by the closure of crossings, particularly those who need to travel abroad. These categories include patients who suffer from serious illnesses and are in need for medical treatment abroad due to lack of treatment in the Gaza Strip hospitals, students joining universities abroad, persons holding residency permits or having jobs abroad and those wishing to travel and were prevented to do so due to the blockade and closure of Gaza Strip's border crossings. PCHR published dozens of press releases and appeals to the international community and its human rights organizations to intervene in order to alleviate the suffering of these civilians;

4. PCHR has observed and documented the movement of goods at the border crossings. PCHR prepared comparative statistics on the actual needs, the shortages resultant from the minimized quantities and its disastrous impact on the civilians in the Gaza Strip. PCHR documented the effect of the ban on exporting industrial products on all economic sectors, particularly on the industrial facilities, which depend on imports to manufacture their production. PCHR also documented the ramifications of the deteriorating economic conditions on the poverty rates among families in the Gaza Strip and unemployment rates among the labor force;
5. PCHR issued 15 reports that tackled the impact of the closure policy on the economic and social sectors. These reports addressed the impact of the closure on the right to health, the right to education, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to work. The report also focused on the ramifications of the closure on the prospect for an economic development on fishers, organizations working on people with disabilities persons, infrastructure and the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip;
6. PCHR issued 85 periodic reports on the state of the Gaza Strip's border crossings since August 2006 to 15 June 2011;
7. PCHR worked on establishing a database on the impact of the Israeli closure. The database included the state of the border crossings – the crossings designated for commercial purposes or for the movement of persons – including their operational capacity and the opening days. PCHR has become the main source of data and information on the effect of the closure on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip to dozens of international and local institutions working in the field of human rights, in addition to field workers and those working in local and international media;
8. PCHR issued "Fact Sheets" to document the consequences of the naval blockade and the isolation of areas inside the Gaza Strip that were declared as "buffer zone". PCHR also issued fact sheets on the impact of the ongoing closure on the health sector, particularly in regards to the shortage of medicines used for serious illnesses and medical equipment. These fact sheets are updated to keep pace with the developments resultant from the closure; and
9. PCHR offered legal aid, through the Legal Aid Unit, to hundreds of individuals who suffered from the consequences of the closure. These cases included persons denied access to travel whether to complete their studies, to receive medical treatment or for any other purposes. PCHR filed many complaints or cases related to the closure consequences, especially depriving patients to travel

via Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing, before the different Israeli legal authorities.

Summary

Israeli forces continued to impose closure on the Gaza Strip for the eighth consecutive year and imposed more restrictions on the Gaza Strip population. They also continued to impose additional restrictions on the movement at commercial crossings and those used for the movement of persons. During the reporting period, there has been no dramatic change to the closure measures as the Israeli alleged easing of the closure did not reach the core of the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of persons and goods.

Movement of Persons: Israeli forces have imposed restrictions on the movement of Gaza population at Beit Hanoun crossing, the only crossing for the movement of persons to the West Bank, including Jerusalem and/or Israel. As a result, 1.8 million persons were denied their right to travel to hospitals, universities, holy places and for family visitation in the West Bank. Besides, they were prevented from travelling abroad. However, Israeli forces allowed limited categories to travel via Beit Hanoun crossing: patients suffering from serious diseases; Arabs holding Israeli ID's; international journalists; workers of international humanitarian organizations; businesspeople; and persons travelling via al-Karama crossing on the Jordanian border; persons with personal needs and limited number of elderly people to perform prayers in *al-Aqsa Mosque* in addition to allowing few number of Christians to travel to the West Bank on Christian holidays. These categories travel through the crossing under very complicated and degrading procedures. In the meanwhile, the almost-complete closure of Rafah International Crossing Point since the beginning of 2015 denied the Gaza Strip population their right to travel from or to the Gaza Strip. The number of Palestinians who are in need for travel according to the Palestinian Border and Crossings Commission reached around 90,000 persons; 50,000 of whom are registered at the Ministry of Interior, including 3,500 medical referrals.

Movement of Goods: The Israeli authorities closed the only commercial crossing in the Gaza Strip for 143 days (39.1% of total days of the year). This resulted in shortage in many of the Gaza Strip basic commodities and needs, including some types of fuel, especially cooking gas, and all construction materials. The Israeli authorities continued to ban the exportation of all of the Gaza Strip products to the West Bank, Israel and world for the eighth consecutive year, excluding very limited quantities of Gaza exports (most of them are agricultural commodities). However, the Gaza Strip's exports used to be 150 truckloads per day before the complete closure was imposed on the Gaza Strip. The ban imposed on Gaza exports forced hundreds of factories in the Gaza Strip to shut down, including dozens of textile and clothing factories and furniture factories that are famous for their high quality products.

Although the number of truckloads allowed in the Gaza Strip increased, the quantity is still very low compared with that before the closure imposed on Gaza. Around 200 truckloads are daily allowed to enter into Gaza constituting 35% of the number of truckloads which used to enter into the Gaza Strip before the

closure (570 truckloads daily). It is noteworthy that the Gaza Strip needs increased due to the population growth during the last 9 years. Around the same time, Israeli authorities banned the entry of basic commodities, especially construction and raw materials necessary for production, industrial equipment, machines, production lines, iron pipes, bars used for welding metals and some types of wood. The frequent closure of the only commercial crossing and its operational capacity, which does not meet the needs of the Gaza Strip, led to shortage of a lot of basic needs and commodities, especially cooking gas as piles of empty gas cylinders were left at gas stations waiting to be refilled. Israeli forces allowed the entry of 140 tons of cooking gas daily (50% of the Gaza's daily need which amounts to 300 tons in this period).

Due to the policy of ongoing closure and social and economic strangulation, serious indicators emerged at the humanitarian level. Moreover, the social and economic rights of the Gaza Strip deteriorated due to the serious and long-term impacts of the Israeli policies that succeeded in undermining any real opportunity to reconstruct the Gaza Strip and restore its economy. This systematic policy resulted in violations of the Palestinians' right to an adequate standard of living as it includes the right to adequate housing, work, health and education.

The ongoing closure and Israeli military operations on the Gaza Strip led to the violation of the Gaza Strip population's right to adequate housing as the percentage of the Gaza Strip families suffering from food insecurity rose to 72%. Moreover, the number of Palestinian refugees who mainly depend on food aid offered by the UN agencies increased from 72,000 in 2000 to 868,000 in May 2015 (i.e. half of the Gaza Strip population). Furthermore, 100% of the potable water in the Gaza Strip is polluted and unfit for human use as it does not meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) standards. In spite of this, the amount of water available for the Gaza population is insufficient, as each person gets 90 liters of water a day, which does not satisfy WHO standards, which require that each individual receive 100 – 150 liters of water a day.

The restrictions imposed on the construction materials entry into the Gaza Strip in addition to the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism's failure violate the Gaza population's right to adequate housing. The human tragedy of people whose houses were completely destroyed continued due to the delay in the construction of new houses or reconstruction of houses destroyed by Israeli forces during the Israeli comprehensive offensive on the Gaza Strip. Israeli forces demolished 31,974 houses in the Gaza Strip; 8,377 of which were completely destroyed and 23,597 of which were partially damaged. The completely destroyed houses used to shelter 11,162 persons, including 30,835 children and 16,522 women, while the partially damaged used to shelter families of 190,000 persons, including 93,843 children and 50,926 women. Thus, those families still live in temporary houses, rented apartments, dilapidated houses and tents; therefore, they cannot move on with their life and are deprived of enjoying a decent life. According to the latest estimates, Gaza currently needs 130,000 units to overcome the housing crisis that resulted from the destruction of houses and to meet the natural population increase.

In the same context, although one year has passed on the latest Israeli offensive, the scene of destruction is still prevailing in the Gaza Strip as the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has failed to ease the suffering of civilians due to the unfair agreement, which imposes restrictions on the entry and usage of construction materials. Thus, the reconstruction mission became impossible according to this mechanism, as it contributed to the institutionalization of the closure and offered an international cover for it in addition to going in harmony with the main goal of the Israeli authorities represented in the imposition of more restrictions on the entry of construction materials. During the reporting period, 110,000 tons of cement were allowed to enter into the Gaza Strip but they do not meet the minimal needs of reconstruction requirements, which need 10,000 tons daily, as the entered quantity is only enough for 11 workdays. According to estimations by the Palestinian Contractors Union and Construction Companies, the Gaza Strip needs 5,000,000 tons of construction materials for the reconstruction process, including 1,500,000 tons of cement; 3,000,000 tons of aggregates; and 500,000 tons of construction steel and bitumen. It should be noted that these needs were initially estimated. The closure also resulted in deterioration of the economic indicators. The restrictions imposed on the entry of raw materials needed for production, ban on the exportation of the Gaza Strip products in addition to the destruction of around 70% of the economic facilities during the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip paralyzed various economic sectors. As a result, around 38.8% of Palestinian families live below the poverty line, 21.1% of them suffer from extreme poverty, and around 195,000 persons are unemployed in the Gaza Strip. The unemployment rate reached 40% among males and 57% among females.

The ongoing closure also negatively affected the right of Gaza Strip residents' right to education. The education sector has suffered a real crisis due to non-reconstruction of the educational institutions affected during the latest offensive. Due to that, 64 schools were destroyed, 7 of which were completely destroyed and 57 others were partially destroyed; 52 private kindergartens, 8 were completely destroyed and 44 others were partially destroyed; 6 universities and colleges were destroyed, including a university that was completely destroyed and 5 others that were partially destroyed. This led to a lack of a suitable environment for education as the rates of classroom density in some schools increased to 49 students in each classroom. Therefore, around 85% of Gaza schools were forced to work in 2 or 3 shifts while, 15% of which worked in one-shift system that negatively affected the students' ability to comprehend. In the same context, thousands of Gaza students are still deprived of studying in the West Bank universities in the fields they prefer, taking into consideration that such fields are vital and important for the Gaza population. As a result, the rate of Gaza students joining the West Bank universities became zero, it used to constitute 26% in 1994.

Concerning the health conditions, the closure violated the Gaza civilians' right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, as the Israeli authorities continue to deprive patients of receiving medical treatment abroad. The Israeli authorities obstructed the travel of 3,188 Gaza patients transferred to receive medical treatment in Israeli hospitals or the West Bank hospitals. Five hundred twenty-nine of them were prevented due to security reasons, 320 were asked to change their

companions and 323 others were forced to wait for a new appointment while the remaining 2,016 patients were awaiting an Israeli reply following their security interview. Moreover, the Gaza Strip witnessed a continued decline in the medicine and medical supplies and equipment in the Gaza Strip in particular during March, April, June, July and October 2014. This shortage affected medicines needed in the nursery sections, surgeries, laparoscopic surgery, intensive care, orthopedic surgeries, electrocardiography (ECG) and birth papers, urinary catheters, eye surgeries, anesthesia, ventilators in addition to plasters and different types of injections.

As part of their policy to tighten the closure on the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces continued to isolate areas along the northern and eastern borders of Gaza of areas between 200-300 kilometers. The buffer zone includes around 35% of the best agricultural lands in the Gaza Strip (27,000 *dunums*⁶) and hundreds of water wells. People who try to reach these lands put their life in danger as the Israeli forces target the moving objects. This threatens the safety of families, who depend on the access to the lands in the buffer zone to practice their agricultural activities. The violations committed by the Israeli forces against civilians living in the border zones, either by targeting from their border sites or during incursions into the buffer zones, resulted in killing 5 persons, wounding 63 ones, arresting 62 others, destroying 14 facilities and leveling 2 lands.

Concerning the naval blockade, although the latest ceasefire agreement (August 2014) allowed Palestinian fishermen to sail within 6 nautical miles, Israeli naval forces did not allow them to reach that area and Israeli attacks continued within the 6 nautical miles. Consequently, fishermen have lost 85% of their income because of limiting the fishing area. The Palestinian fishermen were subjected to several attacks within the 6 nautical miles area. During the reporting period, PCHR documented about 440 Israeli violations against fishermen in the Gaza Strip Sea; 155 of which were shooting incidents that caused the killing of a fisherman and injury of 24 others. Moreover, PCHR documented 17 chasing incidents that resulted in the arrest of 60 fishermen. Israeli naval forces also confiscated about 40 fishing boats, damaged and destroyed 143 others or fishing equipment.



6. A dunum equals 1,000 square meters.

Introduction

This report is issued in the context of the continued closure policy imposed by the Israeli authorities on the Gaza Strip for eight consecutive years that has affected Palestinians' lives in a brutal way. These cruel conditions resulted from the restrictions imposed on the border crossings affecting the economic, social and cultural rights and all basic needs of 1.8 million in the Gaza Strip.

This report covering the reporting period (15 June 2014 – 14 June 2015) documents the state of the Gaza Strip's border crossings. Further, it presents comprehensive statistics on the border crossings showing the latest developments at the crossings and the impacts on the civilians' rights. The report also refutes the Israeli claims on the alleged "easing" of the closure imposed on the Gaza Strip.

This report also documents the movement at the crossings used for people, mainly the cruel restrictions imposed on the movement of the Gaza Strip population through Beit Hanoun crossing, which is their sole outlet to the West Bank, occupied Jerusalem and/or Israel; and Rafah International Crossing Point, which is their main outlet to the world. The report also addresses the impact of the restrictions imposed on 1.8 million and depriving them of their right to movement to the world or West Bank to have access to hospitals, universities, holy sites and relatives.

The report reviews the humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip and deterioration of economic, social and cultural rights of the Gaza population due to the serious and long-term impacts of the closure policy. It particularly sheds light on the violations of the rights to an adequate standard of living; adequate housing; education; health and economic rights.

The report also emphasizes the violation of the Gaza population's right to an adequate standard of living and the high rate of families suffering from food insecurity and facing difficulties in obtaining food and potable water. It also documents the suffering of population resulting from violation of their right to adequate housing and building new houses, the imposition of restrictions on the entry of construction materials in addition to the failure of the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. The report also tackles the deterioration of economic indicators and how thousands of Palestinian families lost their source of income as thousands of workers in various economic sectors in the Gaza Strip lost their workplaces and became unemployed. It also sheds light on the high rate of Palestinian families living under the poverty line and how the unemployment rates increased unprecedentedly due to the almost-total paralysis of all economic sectors.

Furthermore, the report documents the violation of the right to education and the delay in the reconstruction of educational institutions, which were destroyed during the offensive, and how thousands of the Gaza Strip students were denied the chance to receive their education in the West Bank universities. The report also addresses the violation of the right to health focusing on the lack of medicines

and medical disposables; medical referrals abroad; the difficulties hindering the patients' right to travel and ban and/or delay of the travel of hundreds of them. This led to serious health complications over the patients' lives.

The report stresses that the Israeli forces continued to isolate the border area in the Gaza Strip along the northern and eastern borders in the buffer zone. It also reviews the impact of the continued targeting of the buffer zone on decreasing its livestock products especially poultry and livestock farms. The report also documents the grave violations committed by Israeli forces against civilians living in the border area.

The report also covers the impact of the ongoing naval blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip despite increasing the area allowed for fishing up to 6 nautical miles and the impact of denying fishermen access to areas in which fish breeds beyond the 6 nautical miles. The report also tackles the frequent attacks against Palestinian fishermen, including opening fire at them, killing, wounding, chasing, searching and humiliating them in addition to confiscating, sinking and destroying their fishing boats.

During the reporting period, the report concludes that the facts on the ground reveal that the ongoing closure imposed on the Gaza Strip and false Israeli statements about easing the closure are still existent. There has been no dramatic change on the closure measures, while the facilitations claimed by Israeli authorities did not deal with the main restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement for persons and goods. The report also emphasizes that the Israeli policies and claims about easing the closure on the Gaza Strip aim to institutionalizing the closure and making it internationally acceptable. This means that Israel succeeded in circumventing the international law rules, including the international human rights and humanitarian laws.

In its recommendations, the report calls upon the international community and High Contracting Parties to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention to take practical steps, under their legal obligations, to oblige the Israeli authorities to respect this Convention and stop all policies violating all Palestinians' economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

First: Movement of Persons and Goods during the 8th Year of Closure

Movement of Persons

Residents of the Gaza Strip are still deprived of their right to the freedom of movement and severely suffer due to the restrictions imposed on all border crossings, which connect the Gaza Strip with the world, West Bank and Israel. During the reporting period, the Rafah International Crossing Point was almost-completely closed while only limited categories from the Gaza Strip were allowed to cross Beit Hanoun Crossing and the rest population (1.8 million) cannot move through it.

Beit Hanoun “Erez” Crossing

Israeli authorities continued for the eighth year of closure to impose tightened restrictions on the movement of the Gaza Strip population via Beit Hanoun Crossing, which is the sole outlet for the Gaza population to the West Bank, including Jerusalem and/or Israel. As a result, around 1.8 million were deprived of their right to movement to the West Bank, having access to hospitals, universities, holy sites and family visits and even traveling abroad. However, the Israeli authorities allowed very limited categories to travel via the crossing: patients suffering from serious illnesses; Arabs holding Israeli IDs; international journalists; workers of international humanitarian organizations; business people; families of prisoners in the Israeli jails; persons travelling via al-Karama crossing; persons with personal needs; limited number of elderly persons to perform Friday prayers in *al-Aqsa Mosque*; and limited number of Christians to attend the Christian holidays in Bethlehem in the West Bank. These categories are allowed to travel through the crossing under very complicated procedures and in a degrading manner.

Concerning patients, during the reporting period, Israeli authorities obstructed the travel of thousands of patients to receive medical treatment in hospitals in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and/or Israel due to the almost-impossible conditions imposed before patients. For the exceptional cases of patients suffering from serious illnesses and are allowed to apply for medical treatment, Israeli authorities refused to grant permits to thousands of them due to security reasons, changing the companion, waiting for a new appointment or awaiting an Israeli reply following their security interviews. Some patients from the Gaza Strip, who had medical referrals and applied to obtain permits to travel via Beit Hanoun Crossing, were blackmailed by officers from the Israeli Interior Security Services “*Shabak*” to collaborate with them and offer security information. The Israeli authorities also prevented hundreds of patients from traveling via the crossing to receive medical treatment under the pretext of not meeting the patients’ standards. For more statistics about patients’ medical referrals, see the section related to the impact of the closure on the Gaza Strip population’s right to health.

During the eighth year of closure, the Israeli authorities continued to impose restrictions on family visits for Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli prisons. Moreover, the Israeli authorities did not comply with the agreement reached between the prisoners and Israeli authorities in May 2012. Israeli authorities continued to allow the prisoners’ visits in groups under very complicated restrictions. Each group includes 2 persons for each prisoner from the 25 prisoners allowed to be visited. The Israeli authorities cancelled prisoners’ visits many times this year for no reasons or under false pretexts. For example, Israeli authorities cancelled the prisoners’ visits for 4 months from June to October 2014 due to the kidnap of 3 Israelis in the West Bank and during the offensive on the Gaza Strip.

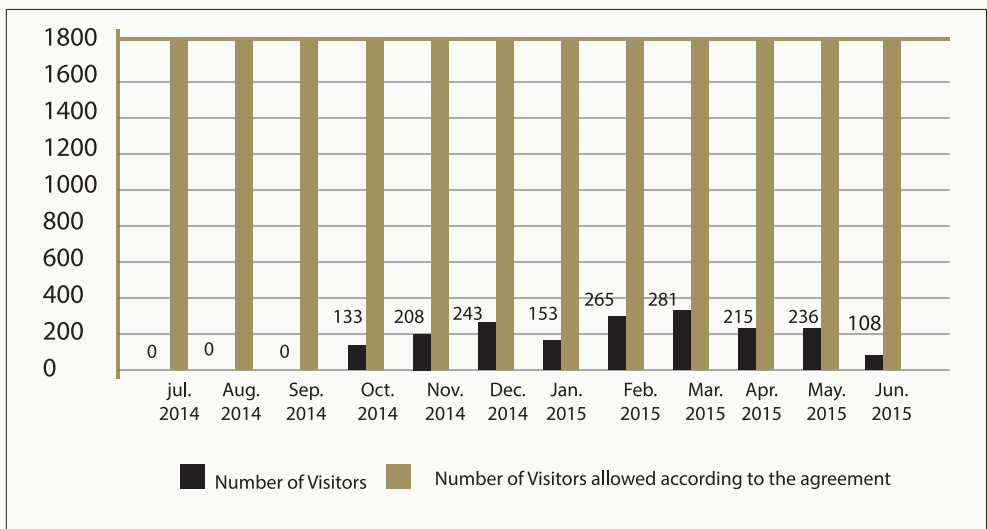
During the 8th year of the closure, the number of families allowed by Israeli forces to visit their imprisoned sons mounted to 1,842 persons. The number of visitors is limited compared with the number of visits allowed under the agreement reached between the prisoners and Israeli authorities in May 2012. According to the agreement, each prisoner has the right to two family visits a month. With

400 prisoners in Israeli prisons, the number of visits should reach 800 monthly (9600 visits annually). However, the Israeli forces only allowed 1,089 visits during the year. The same applies to the number of family members who are allowed to visit their relatives; the number of these members mounted to 1,842, whereas, the number should include 19,200 persons in case each prisoner is visited by 2 members of his family twice a month.

Table (1): The number of family visits to prisoners in Israeli jails in the 8th year of the closure compared with the number allowed according to the prisoners' deal

Month	Number of Prisoners	Number of Children	Number of Visitors	Number of Visitors allowed according to the agreement
July 2014	-	-	-	1600
August 2014	-	-	-	1600
September 2014	-	-	-	1,600
October 2014	75	25	133	1,600
November 2014	114	25	208	1,600
December 2014	146	39	243	1,600
January 2015	93	37	153	1,600
February 2015	156	64	265	1,600
March 2015	153	83	281	1,600
April 2015	147	42	215	1,600
May 2015	133	64	236	1,600
June 2015	73	13	108	1,600
Total	1,089	392	1,842	19,200

Diagram (1): The number of family visits to prisoners in Israeli jails in the 8th year of the closure compared with the number allowed according to the prisoners' deal



The families were subjected to arbitrary practices, obstacles and immoral and degrading treatment. They also suffered from the Israeli provocative measures and continuous threats to cancel their visits in the future if they did not respond to the Israeli orders. It should be noted that the Israeli authorities determine the visitor who is allowed to visit the prisoner, and those authorized are limited to the prisoners' father, mother or wife and one or two of them only are allowed to visit. Furthermore, in the case either one is incapable of visiting (due to sickness, old age or death), the Israeli authorities do not allow the change of the visitors' name; thus, the prisoner loses the right to his visit. Thus, the Israeli authorities continue to deprive children from visiting their fathers in Israeli prisons. Meanwhile, prisoners' families are not allowed to bring with them personal items, including clothes and food.

It should be noted that the Israeli authorities have denied Palestinian prisoners from the Gaza Strip family visits since 06 June 2007 and for 5 years in violation of the international human rights law. Article 116 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates, *“Every internee shall be allowed to receive visitors, especially near relatives, at regular intervals and as frequently as possible. As far as is possible, internees shall be permitted to visit their homes in urgent cases, particularly in cases of death or serious illness of relatives”*.

Rafah International Crossing Point

In view of the almost complete closure of Rafah International Crossing Point, which is the sole outlet for the Gaza Strip population, and the closure of Beit Hanoun crossing, which is under the Israeli control, 1.8 Palestinian civilians have been denied their right to movement and travel from and to the Gaza Strip. A number of Palestinians who are in need for travel according to the Palestinian Border and Crossings Commission in Gaza reached around 90,000 persons; 15,000 of whom were registered at the Ministry of Interior, including 3,500 persons had medical referrals abroad. According to the Palestinian Border and Crossings Commission, Rafah International Crossing Point was open since the beginning of 2015 for 15 days, only for serious humanitarian cases. During these days, 6,348 persons travelled abroad, 5,274 persons returned to Gaza and 324 others were returned by the Egyptian authorities to Gaza.

According to PCHR's follow-up, the closure of the abovementioned crossing led to serious suffering for persons from the Gaza Strip whether inside Gaza, as they were denied their right to travel abroad, or persons outside Gaza, as they were denied their right to normally return to Gaza. Over the 8th year of the blockade, thousands of Palestinian civilians, who were stuck on the Egyptian side, were waiting for their turn to return to the Gaza Strip at different intervals. This category included dozens of patients, hundreds of Palestinian families residing abroad and intended to visit Gaza via Egypt and hundreds of Palestinian students studying at Egyptian universities on their way to spend their vacation with their families in Gaza. In addition, the humanitarian tragedy aggravated because the Egyptian authorities detained dozens of Palestinians for a long time in the so-called “deportation room” at the airport, waiting for Rafah crossing to be exceptionally open and have them deported to the Gaza Strip. The detainees experienced inhuman conditions and

unsafe environment where diseases can be easily spread out. Moreover, hundreds of Palestinians abroad were prevented from travelling to Egypt while they were on their way to Gaza due to the closure of the crossing for different and long periods.

Goods Movement

The Israeli authorities continued to impose restrictions on the movement of imports and exports into and from the Gaza Strip. As a result, there was lack of goods and basic needs of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which left negative impact on the social and economic aspects of life.

On the level of imports, the Gaza Strip's markets have been suffering from the lack of basic goods for the 8th year at different intervals. In spite of the availability of most of goods, especially consumables and foodstuff, and the increase in the number of truckloads allowed into the Gaza Strip, the Israeli authorities have been imposing restrictions over dozens of basic and necessary goods. They increased the entry of certain types of goods to the Gaza Strip while banned the entry of others in order to deceive and delude the international community about the alleged easing of measures related to the entry of goods into the Gaza Strip. In addition, PCHR documented the rate of truckloads allowed daily into the Gaza Strip during the 8th year of the closure; it was only 220 truckloads. This amount does not exceed 38.5% of imports allowed before mid-June 2007 (570 truckloads daily). It should be mentioned that the Gaza Strip's population during the last years of the closure depended on goods that used to be smuggled into Gaza by tunnels established on the Egyptian-Palestinian borders to meet their basic needs. After the tunnels were closed in June 2013, there was lack of basic needs, including different types of fuel and all types of construction materials.

Only One Commercial Crossing, Namely Karem Abu Salem, Functions

During the reporting period, Israeli forces allocated Karem Abu Salem "*Kerem Shalom*" Crossing, southeast of Rafah, as the only commercial crossing in the Gaza Strip, in spite of its inability to meet all the needs of the Gaza Strip's population. Therefore, there was lack in the goods' quantities allowed to enter into the Gaza Strip. The situation becomes worse especially when the crossing is closed at different intervals and for different reasons. Furthermore, Israeli authorities intentionally closed the 3 other crossings which were working alongside with Karem Abu Salem Crossing to meet the Gaza Strip's population needs, to get into this suffocating situation and tightly control over the Gaza Strip. In the beginning of the third year of blockade, Israeli forces obstructed the work at Nahal Oz Crossing, which was allocated to provide the Gaza Strip with fuel. The quantity of the Gaza Strip's imports of fuel was decreased to the lowest levels that do not meet the minimum needs of the Gaza Strip. On 01 January 2010, the Israeli authorities completely closed Nahal Oz Crossing. They then transferred the entry of limited quantities of fuel to Karem Abu Salem Crossing whose operational capacity does not meet the daily needs, especially the cooking gas. Additionally, on 15 June 2008, Israeli authorities closed Sofa Crossing, which was designated for the entry of construction materials. Besides, they allowed the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip through the aforementioned crossing until November 2008, when it was completely closed. As a result, those limited quantities of humanitarian aid

were transferred to Karem Abu Salem Crossing.

At the beginning of the 4th year of blockade, Israeli authorities obstructed the work at al-Montar “Karni” Crossing and then completely closed it on 02 March 2011. Furthermore, in early 2012, Israeli forces destroyed al-Montar Crossing’s facilities, which was considered as the biggest and the best commercial crossing to transport goods from and into the Gaza Strip, as 75% of the Gaza Strip needs were imported through this crossing. According to the November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, the capacity of al-Montar Crossing allows the exportation of 400 truckloads of fruits, vegetables and industrial and commercial products, and the entry of 600 truckloads of the Gaza Strip’s needs. It should be noted that his crossing was located in the main industrial zone in the Gaza Strip that was destroyed during the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip in late 2008 and early 2009.

The complete closure of al-Montar Crossing and designating Karem Abu Salem as the main and only crossing in the Gaza Strip resulted in deteriorating the situation on the industrial, commercial and agricultural levels in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, it added more obstacles for the goods’ movement and raised the transportation costs. As a result, this increased the prices of goods allowed into the Gaza Strip and added more financial burden on the Palestinian exporters. Furthermore, Karem Abu Salem Crossing is considered inappropriate for the Gaza Strip’s exports, because its capacity is limited so it cannot absorb the number of trucks that used to be exported through the al-Montar crossing before tightening the blockade on the Gaza Strip. It should be mentioned the cost of transporting a goods’ container from Ashdod seaport to the Gaza Strip outweigh the cost of transporting it from China to Ashdod port. The cost of transporting the container from China to Ashdod seaport is NIS 6,600 (distance 9,000 kilometers), while the cost of transporting it from Ashdod seaport to the Gaza Strip is NIS 10,400 (distance 70 kilometers), due to the high fees imposed by the Israeli authorities on goods imported into the Gaza Strip.

Severe Restrictions on the Movement of Imports and Exports

According to PCHR’s documentation, in spite of increasing the amount of goods allowed into the Gaza Strip through the only commercial crossing “Karem Abu Salem”, its percentage is still low compared with the percentage allowed before the imposition of the closure on the Gaza Strip. Israeli forces allowed the entry of 200 truckloads via this crossing, which constitutes 35% of the number of truckloads allowed before June 2007 (570 truckloads daily). It is worth noting that the Gaza Strip’s needs increased due to the population growth in the last 9 years. In the meantime, the Israeli authorities have been still preventing the entry of many basic goods, especially construction materials, raw materials, industrial equipment, machines, production lines, iron pipes with different sizes, welding electrodes and different types of wood. Moreover, the frequent closure of that only commercial crossing in addition to its failure to meet the Gaza Strip needs resulted in the lack of many goods and basic needs, especially the cooking gas. A person needs to wait weeks for his gas cylinder to be refilled. The daily average of cooking gas allowed into the Gaza Strip reached 140 tons, which constitutes less than 50% of the Gaza Strip daily needs (300 tons).

Concerning exports from the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces continued to impose a ban on the Gaza Strip exports to the West Bank, Israel and abroad with the exception of limited quantities, including industrial and agricultural products. As a result, there has been no chance to revive the Gaza Strip's economy, which is already deteriorated due to that policy. During the three past years, the Israeli authorities allowed the exportation of limited quantities of the Gaza Strip's products, the majority of which are agricultural ones (flowers, strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers). Moreover, they allowed lately the exportation of limited quantities of clothes, fish and furniture. During the reporting period, the Gaza Strip exports reached two truckloads daily, while it used to be 150 truckloads daily before the closure was imposed. The ban imposed on the Gaza Strip exports resulted in shutting down hundreds of factories, including dozens of clothes and furniture factories that are popular for their good quality products.

Second: Impact of the Closure on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has continued due to the policy of economic and social strangulation for the 8th consecutive year. Therefore, serious indicators emerged relevant to the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, especially those related to food security for the Gaza Strip population, including children. In addition, economic and social rights deteriorated due to the serious and long-term impacts of the Israeli policies. These policies succeed in undermining any real opportunities to reconstruct Gaza, revive the Gaza Strip economy and restart the economic sectors. Moreover, the abovementioned systematic policies resulted in violations against the Gaza Strip population's right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to adequate housing, the economic rights, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and the right to education.

Violation of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

The international conventions underscored the right to an adequate standard of living as being one of the most important rights in the declarations and conventions related to human rights, as individuals will never have a decent life without enjoying the minimum level of this right. According to article 25 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *"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, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control"*. In addition, article 11 of the ICESCR provides, *"The States Parties to the present Covenant 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 right to an adequate standard of living is not confined to food, clothing and housing. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that monitors the implementation of the ICESCR concluded that the fundamental rights emanating from article (11-1) are not confined to food, clothing and housing.

For example, in its General Comment No.15, the Committee found that the right to water clearly falls within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living.

The Israeli closure and consecutive attacks have targeted all what shall contribute to facilitating access to livelihood for the Palestinian civilians, the majority of whom experience harsh conditions. As a result, the living conditions deteriorated in an unprecedented manner that violated the right to an adequate standard of living. The food insecurity rate, thus, increased, while the nutrition rate decreased and the water pollution rate unprecedentedly increased.

Food Insecurity

Due to the high rates of unemployment and deterioration of income levels already resulting from the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of persons and goods, the rate of food insecurity rose while the rate of nutrition decreased. This negatively affected the levels of food security of the Gaza Strip population, especially those who lost their source of income due to the almost paralysis of the economic sector. Children Malnutrition raised concerns for Palestinians and organizations working in the fields of health and children. The categories most affected by food insecurity are the families, whose breadwinners used to work in Israel and stopped because of the closure, and families of laborers at agricultural and industrial sectors because they are unable to offer their families the food they need.

Food security requires that all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. If civilians lack the ability to obtain the needed food, due to physical, social or economic constraints, there will be food insecurity.

The report of the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute-MAS about the food security in Palestine pointed that the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip formed the largest determinants of food security, as it affected the availability of foods, the price of foods and the income in Palestine, especially in the Gaza Strip.

The report added that this destructive military aggression came to complicate the situation as the Gaza Strip's economy suffered from fragility and instability, which resulted from 8 years of severe blockade and restrictions on the freedom of movement from and into the Gaza Strip.

According to Nizar al-Whaidi, Director of Soil and Irrigation Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, the latest Israeli offensive launched by the Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip mainly targeted the civilians' food security in Gaza. Al-Whaidi also stated, ***“Twenty thousand dunums of agricultural land have been the scene of the Israeli occupation operations, while 15 thousand others were excluded from the agricultural production because they were targeted during the wars”***. Moreover, al-Whaidi added, ***“3.500 million meters of soil were excluded from the agricultural sector and became dead, pointing that the soil might be contaminated with radioactive and carcinogenic materials”***. It should be mentioned that they do

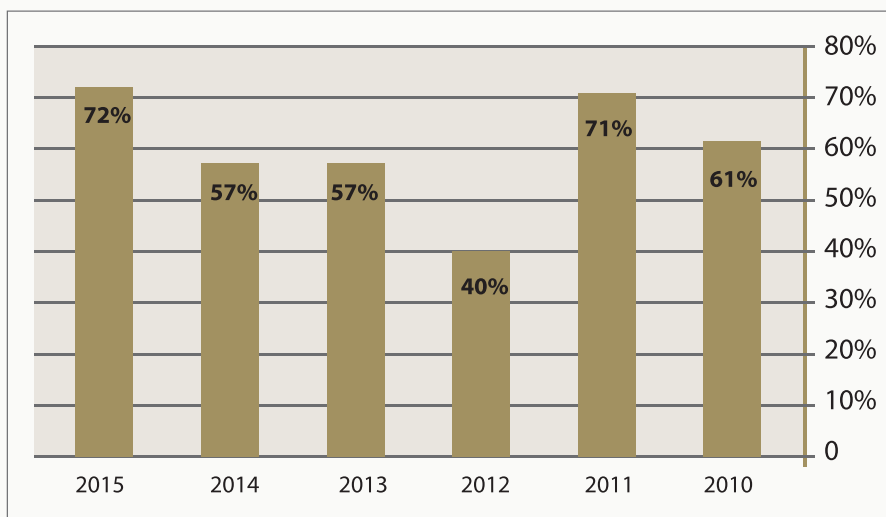
not have soil-testing equipment to test soil and therefore condemn the Israeli occupation practices. Furthermore, al-Whaidi pointed out that the agricultural sector incurred losses due to the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip; the losses were estimated at US\$ 550 million, US\$ 350 million of which resulted from direct damage. He stressed that the Israeli occupation aims to strike the food security and cause a crisis that remains for the coming generations. He also confirmed that 30% of the Gaza Strip area is in need for an urgent intervention to be rehabilitated, as there are no irrigation networks or land leveling equipment to rehabilitate the lands that were targeted during the Israeli attacks. Eventually, al-Whaidi said, ***“The Israeli occupation has committed a crime whose impacts will remain for the coming generations without any assistance from anyone”***⁷

The report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) pointed out that 72% of families suffer from food-insecurity. The number of Palestinian refugees depending mainly on food aid offered by the United Nations agencies increased from 72,000 in 2000 to 868,000 by the end of May 2015, i.e. half of the Gaza Strip population.⁸

Table (2): Deterioration of food insecurity levels in the past years

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Percentage of food insecurity	61%	71%	40%	57%	57%	72%

Diagram (2): Deterioration of food insecurity levels in the past years



7. Nizar al-Whaidi, Director of Soil and Irrigation Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, during a press conference held by MAAN Development Center to highlight the impacts of the latest Israeli offensive on health, environment and water, 27 November 2014.

8. A report on the assistance offered by UNCTAD to the Palestinian people, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations, September 2015, for more, see: http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/tdb62d3_ar.pdf

Pollution of Potable Water

The water conditions in the Gaza Strip is deteriorating and affecting the Palestinian civilians' lives, including their right to access to a regular supply of safe water.

Monther Shublaq, Director of the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), warned of the disastrous results that will face the water sector in Gaza in the next few years, especially in light of the depletion of the Gaza Strip aquifer. Shublaq added, ***“100% of water produced in the Gaza Strip is polluted, unfit for drinking and/or other household uses and does not comply with the World Health Standards. Gaza suffers from a water crisis due to the Israeli policies that targeted the water sector. Nevertheless, the amount of water available to the Gaza Strip population, which does not comply with the World Health Standards, is not sufficient. Everyone gets around 90 liters of water daily, which is less than the amount identified by the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO states that each individual should use 100-150 liters of water daily”.***

The pollution of potable water is attributed to the disruption of sanitation projects, banning the equipment needed for the sewage treatment plants and pumping 80 million liters of sewage into the sea on daily basis. The polluted seawater intrusion leads to increasing the rates of soil salinity, polluting the aquifer and threatening the main source of potable water. Moreover, this seawater intrusion results in serious impacts that have been affecting the Palestinians' health. The intrusion of polluted water into the aquifer in an unprecedented manner, due to the inability to treat sewage water, resulted in the damage of a wide range of farmlands around the sewage treatment pools throughout the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, Shublaq stated that there is an annual shortage, which is around 100 million cubic meters, pointing that this shortage has led to an intrusion of seawater into the aquifer and affected the quality and quantity in accordance with WHO standards.

Shublaq highlighted the impacts of the latest Israeli offensive on health, environment and water. Additionally, he stressed that the Israeli authorities prevented water institutions from providing services and clarified that 30% of water utilities became inoperable due to the latest offensive on the Gaza Strip, power outages and targeting the CMWU officers. Because of all of that, water supply to people and sanitation plants were negatively affected. Moreover, Shublaq pointed out that the water and sanitation sectors losses were estimated at US\$ 34 million aside from the large damage caused to the wells, reservoirs and station plants. Shublaq stressed that the delay in removing the rubble threatens of losing 30% of water utilities. Furthermore, the rubble of the destroyed houses is one of the most important reasons polluting the aquifer, as the houses were targeted with toxic weapons. The toxins were swept by rainwater and in case of floods, there would be an uncontrolled crisis. Shublaq called the international organizations to conduct water, soil and air examinations and to examine the Palestinian environment to identify the impacts of weapons used by the Israeli forces during the three offensives on the Gaza Strip.⁹

9. Monther Shublaq during a press conference held by MAAN Development Center to highlight the impact of the latest Israeli offensive on water, health and environment, 27 November 2014.

The water authority attributed the aquifer pollution to the raise of nitrates concentration in the water because of the wastewater leakage into the aquifer and the excessive use of fertilizers and agricultural pesticides. The water authority emphasized that concentration of nitrates and other elements in water is significantly high in the aquifer, from which civilians are provided with water via distribution networks. Moreover, the nitrates concentration in the aquifer might exceed three or four times the universally recommended rates. In this case, this water cannot be potable; it can be used for household uses only.¹⁰

Violation of the Right to Adequate Housing

The right to adequate housing is explicitly recognized in the international law, particularly in the international human rights law. The majority of international instruments, including a number of declarations and conventions relevant to human rights, include clear provisions relative to the right to adequate housing. The recognition of this right has been promoted at the national level, as many national constitutions addressed this right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is considered the first document at the international level to explicitly address the right to housing as a basic human right, formulates it in article 25(1): *“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, medical care and necessary social services....”* The Universal Declaration of Human Rights established the foundation on which the right to adequate housing developed, as article 11(1) of the ICESCR provides, *“The States Parties to present Covenant 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 international co-operation based on free consent.”*

The Israeli closure imposed on the Gaza Strip imposes restrictions on the entry of construction materials in a clear violation of the right to adequate housing. As a result, there has been a delay in the reconstruction of damaged houses or construction of new houses to meet the population growth.

Delaying the Reconstruction of Houses Destroyed during the Israeli Offensive

The Israeli authorities still prevent the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip although a year have passed since the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip that left wide-scale damage in the infrastructure and all institutions and facilities. The main reason for delaying the reconstruction process whether by the competent authorities and donors or by civilians who lost their homes is the closure of commercial crossings and ban of basic goods, especially the construction materials.

The continuing ban imposed on the reconstruction process in the Gaza Strip is considered a flagrant violation of the right to adequate housing. On 12 October 2014, the international donors held a conference in Cairo, in which they pledged to offer financial aid for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. However, the donors

10. Al-Hadath Newspaper, 10 February 2015.

did not specify a starting date for reconstructing the Gaza Strip; they left it open until the crossings operate and construction materials are allowed in the Gaza Strip. This means that the situation remains the same without taking into account the suffering of the Gaza Strip population that experience harsh living conditions; these conditions become worse with every day passing without putting an end to this suffering.

Although the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism was announced on 16 September 2014, the construction materials allowed into the Gaza Strip were limited and designated only for those whose houses were partially destroyed. A year has passed since the latest Israeli offensive finished and 9 months since the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism entered into force and it became obvious that the mechanism has failed to fulfill the minimum level of the basic needs of Gaza reconstruction. According to Nabil Abu Mu'eileq, Head of the Palestinian Contractors in Gaza, 110,000 tons of cement were allowed to enter into the Gaza Strip and were divided into little quotas so that those whose houses were partially damaged benefited. However, these quantities do not meet the minimal needs of reconstruction requirements, which need 10,000 tons daily, and the entered quantity is only enough for 11 workdays. According to estimates by Palestinian contractors and construction companies, the Gaza Strip needs 5,000,000 tons of construction materials for the reconstruction, including 1,500,000 tons of cement; 3,000,000 tons of aggregate; 500,000 tons of construction steel and bitumen. These needs were initially estimated by the Palestinian contractors and construction companies. Abu Mu'eileq added, ***"If 50,000 tons of cement were allowed to enter at once for civilians whose houses were partially damaged, it would immediately solve their problem. To reconstruct Gaza, it needs the entry of a thousand truckloads of construction materials on daily basis."*** He also clarified that Israel bans five construction materials claiming that Palestinian armed groups would have access to these materials. Furthermore, Abu Mu'eileq considered this Reconstruction Mechanism useless and has nothing to do with development. He demanded putting an end to the Israeli closure and allowing the entry of construction materials via international organizations to meet the Gaza Strip needs, stop any direct communication between the Palestinian traders and Israel and allow all Palestinian contractors to work in the Gaza Strip.¹¹

The delay in reconstructing the completely destroyed houses (8,377 houses) resulted in a real tragedy for their owners, as these houses used to shelter 11,162 families, including 60,612 members, 30,835 of whom are children and 16,522 are women. Those families live in temporary houses, rented apartments, UNRWA schools and almost dilapidated houses and tents. They are unable to continue their life normally or enjoy a decent life, as they do not have access to potable water and their temporary houses lack secure sewage systems. In the meanwhile, the destruction of the infrastructure in the targeted areas, which still needs to be reconstructed, left serious consequences on the civilians' health due to the

11. The Palestinian Institute for Communication & Development in cooperation with the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN), a meeting with Nabil Abu Me'liq, Head of the Palestinian Contractors Union in the central Gaza Strip, as part of Media Observation for Reconstruction Transparency project on 19 May 2015.

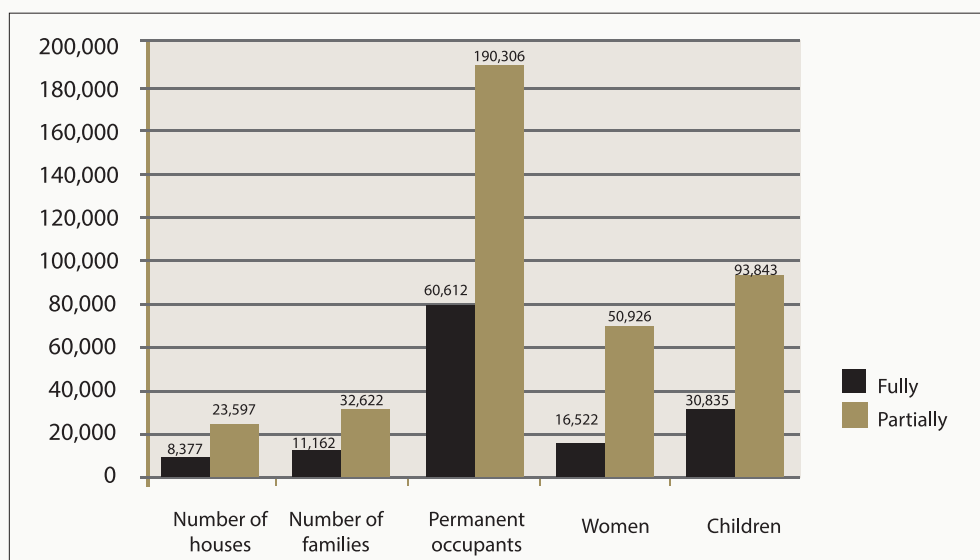
presence of rubble and dust around. According to Mofeed al-Hasaynah, the Minister of Public Works and Housing, about 70,000 civilians of those whose houses were destroyed have been staying at UNRWA schools.¹²

Table (3): Number of destroyed houses and classification of their occupants

Damage	Number of houses	Number of families	Permanent occupants	Women	Children
Fully	8,377	11,162	60,612	16,522	30,835
Partially	23,597	32,622	190,306	50,926	93,843
Total	31,974	43,784	250,918	67,448	124,678

- Source: Joint documentation of 2014 offensive by PCHR and human rights organizations.

Diagram (3): Number of destroyed houses and classification of their occupants



No New Houses to Meet the Population Growth

The Israeli restrictions imposed on the entry of construction materials into the Gaza Strip are considered a clear violation of the Gaza Strip's population right to adequate housing. This negatively affected not only those whose houses were destroyed by Israeli forces, but also thousands of other families that need new houses as part of the natural population growth during the 8 years of the closure. According to Minister Mofeed al-Hasaynah, the Gaza Strip needed 75,000 housing units before the Israeli offensive; however, it needs 130,000 housing units following the offensive.¹³

The Israeli closure imposed on the Gaza Strip and restrictions imposed on the entry of construction materials and the construction of new houses violate article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his*

12. Statements made by Dr. Mofeed al-Hasaynah during his visit to Jordan on 03 March 2015.

13. Statements made by Dr. Mofeed al-Hasaynah during his visit to Jordan on 03 March 2015.

family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services". They also violate article 11 of the ICESCR, which provides that the States Parties to the present Covenant 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. Moreover, the States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right.

Deterioration of Economic Indicators

The international conventions addressed and stressed the economic rights due to their importance of these rights for individuals and how a person cannot have a decent life without enjoying the minimum level of these rights. Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations stipulates, *"The United Nations shall promote: a. higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; b. solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and c. universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."* Moreover, All Members pledge themselves in article 56 *"To take joint and separate action in co-operation with the United Nations for the achievement of the purposes set forth in Article 55."* In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 23 provides that everyone has the right to work and to join trade unions. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights addressed a number of economic rights, including *"Equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant"* in article 3; *"The right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts"* in article 6; and *"The right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work which ensure, in particular: fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value, a decent living for themselves and their families, safe and healthy working conditions, equal opportunity for everyone to be promoted in his employment, and rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay, as well as remuneration for public holidays"* under article 7.

Due to the ongoing Israeli-imposed closure and restrictions imposed on the entry of raw materials needed for production, in addition to the destruction of about 70% of the economic facilities during the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, the economic situation deteriorated. Moreover, all economic sectors were paralyzed as a result of the closure of commercial crossings, which unprecedentedly raised the poverty and unemployment rates.

Poverty Rate Increased

The deterioration of the economic situation in the Gaza Strip increased the rate of Palestinian families living under the poverty line to 38.8%, including 21.1% suffering from extreme poverty.¹⁴

14. According to a statement issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) on the World Population Day, 11 July 2014.

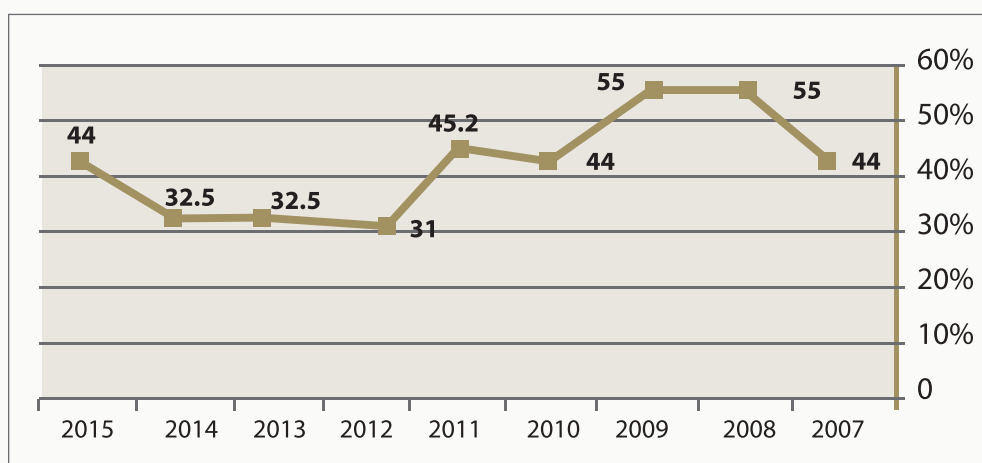
Unemployment Rate Increased

The number of unemployed persons in the Gaza Strip reached 195,000, an average of 44% of the workforce above 15 years old. The unemployment rates among men constitute 40% while among women constitute 57%.¹⁵

Table (4): Unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip during the closure years

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Unemployment	44%	55%	55%	44%	45.2%	31%	32.5%	32.5%	44%

Diagram (4): Unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip during the closure years



The International Labor Organization (ILO) classified the conditions of Palestinian workers in the Gaza Strip during the closure years as *“The worst in the region and world”*, pointing out that the unemployment rate is considered as the highest in the region. A report published by ILO clarified that the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip jumped to three times the regional average. Therefore, ILO called for taking prompt steps to solve this problem especially in light of the *“very worrying”* situation, stressing that the young persons in Gaza, whose number is growing, have the right to get better opportunities, as they need proper jobs, the minimum level of social protection and respect for their basic rights to enjoy a decent life. ILO also demanded drawing attention to the young persons by offering them vocational training and good job opportunities in light of the fragile labor situation in occupied Palestine.¹⁶

Violation of the Right to Education

The right to education is one of the basic human rights that is guaranteed by all international and regional conventions and treaties. It was mentioned in several articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ICESCR, Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other provisions of the international law and human right law.

15. PCBS, a review on Palestine's workforce in 2014 on the International Workers' Day, 29 April 2015.

16. Statement issued by ILO, 07 September 2012.

The importance of education lies in the role of the right to education played in supporting and promoting other rights. Without sufficient and efficient education, a person cannot identify his basic rights, would not address human rights violations or defend those rights.

The right to education was provided in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was issued by the United Nations' General Assembly. Article 26 of the Declaration stipulates, *"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit"*. Article 13 of the ICESCR provides, *"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace"*. Moreover, articles 28 and 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 10 of the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women ensured the right to education.

The closure policy imposed by Israeli forces goes in violation of the Gaza Strip's population right to education. This is clear through the delay in reconstructing the schools that were destroyed during the Israeli operations, including the elementary, preparatory and high schools, in addition to higher education institutions. Furthermore, thousands of the Gaza Strip students were prevented from joining universities abroad, including universities of the West Bank.

Reconstruction of Educational Institutions Delayed

The latest Israeli offensive launched on the Gaza Strip resulted in serious damage to the educational institutions in the Gaza Strip, as some of them were completely destroyed and others were partially or seriously damaged. The Israeli direct or indirect attacks resulted in damaging 64 schools, 7 of which were completely destroyed and 57 others were partially damaged. Moreover, 52 kindergartens were damaged whether by direct attacks or due to targeting nearby houses or institutions. Eight of them were completely destroyed and 44 were partially damaged. The large-scale attacks also targeted higher education institutions, which were directly targeted during the offensive. Six universities and colleges were targeted, one of which was completely destroyed and the five others sustained partial damage. These attacks constitute a flagrant violation of the international law provisions for their severity and dreadfulness. Besides, the principles of distinction, proportionality and military advantage were not taken in consideration as they prohibit targeting such institutions because they are part of the protected civilian objects.

During the Israeli offensive also, schools were turned into shelters for thousands of civilians, especially residents of the northern and eastern border areas of the Gaza

Strip. These civilians were obliged to leave their houses and resort to schools to be safe because the Israeli attacks became more aggressive and the land incursion started. According to PCHR's follow-up, over 300,000 Palestinian civilians left their houses due to the military operations that left huge damage in the residential buildings in all neighborhoods, villages, refugee camp and cities all over the Gaza Strip or fearing that their houses or houses around would be targeted. After the military operations finished, the majority of displaced families left schools and only hundreds remained there because they had no other place to go to. This resulted in disorder at schools for the scholastic year 2014/2015. Therefore, some schools were obliged to take three shifts because the displaced families were staying in many classrooms.

The Israeli offensive coincided with the continuing closure over the Gaza Strip. Israeli forces continued in the aftermath of the offensive to impose restrictions on the entry of construction materials for the reconstruction of damaged educational institutions. As a result, the educational sector suffered from a real crisis that basically suspended the construction of new schools to keep up with the natural growth of students or the reconstruction of schools damaged during the offensive although the designs and lands were available. Because of that, we could find 49 students in a single classroom in some schools, which negatively affected the students' comprehension. To sum up, about 85% of the Gaza Strip schools used the two or three shifts, whereas 15% used one shift.

Students Banned from Resuming their Education Abroad

The Gaza Strip population's right to education was mainly violated by denying thousands of the Gaza Strip students education opportunities in the West Bank universities, especially fields that are not available in the Gaza Strip universities. As a result of this policy that was put into force by Israeli forces in the 90s, students from the Gaza Strip were completely prevented from studying in higher education institutions in the West Bank after the Gaza Strip students used to constitute 26% of students joining higher education institutions in the West Bank. Therefore, hundreds of students were forced to change their specializations and to join higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip or travel abroad, especially to Egypt.

The Gaza Strip students studying in the West Bank used then to travel to their universities via Beit Hanoun crossing, but because of the Israeli measures taken during the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, the crossing was gradually closed until it was declared as an international crossing on 16 February 2007, whereas the Gaza Strip population has been prevented using it, including students studying in the West Bank. Although limited categories were allowed to move through the crossing under complicated measures, students were not included among these categories. The Israeli authorities did not consider the students as part of the humanitarian cases, due to which their future has become at stake. Thus, thousands of the Gaza Strip students have lost education opportunities in the West Bank, while other hundreds, who were already joining universities in the West Bank, could not continue their education there. The number of the Gaza Strip students, which used to be over 3,000 before 1994, became zero.

The Gaza Strip students depend in their university education especially the rare and unavailable fields in the Gaza Strip on universities in the West Bank and abroad; because of the lack of vital and important bachelor programs needed in the Gaza Strip especially modern medical and engineering sciences. In addition, the Gaza Strip universities do not grant PhD programs in any field, they only grant MA in certain fields. The Gaza Strip universities also lack expertise, because Israeli forces prevent academics from the West Bank from working in the Gaza Strip universities and on the other hand deny academics from the Gaza Strip travelling abroad whether to participate in conferences, enhance their skills or exchange experiences with other universities in the West Bank.

The Israeli denial of the Palestinian students' right to education is a flagrant violation of the human rights' principles adopted by the International Bill of Human Rights and international humanitarian law. Everyone has the right to education and "higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" under article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, article 13 of the 1966 ICESCR included the recognition of the States Parties to the present Covenant of the right of everyone to education. Because the Israeli occupying authority is party to the covenant, it is obliged to fulfil it in text and spirit.

Israel, as an occupying power, is fully accountable for denying the Gaza Strip students the right to study abroad. In spite of the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip in September 2005, the Israeli occupation has been de facto and de jure present in the Gaza Strip. Israeli forces have been seizing control over the air and border crossings on the Gaza Strip. According to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, the occupation is defined in terms of the actual control over the civilians' life; therefore, the situation on the ground unveils the full Israeli control over the Gaza Strip civilians and all political, economic and social aspects of life.

Violation of the Right to Health

The right to health is stipulated in several international declarations and conventions, as article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides: *"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, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."*

Moreover, this obligation was also referred to in article 12 of the ICESCR, which states, *"Everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."* In the general comments of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the ICESCR, General Comment No. 14 gave a broader definition of the right to health, as it is not only limited to offering medication to a patient. The same General Comment detailed the measures ensuring the full application of this right, including availability, accessibility, ac-

ceptability and quality.

The Israeli-imposed closure on the Gaza Strip since 2007 resulted in more deteriorating health conditions of 1.8 civilians in the Gaza Strip, especially patients suffering from chronic and serious diseases. During the reporting period, health conditions continued to be deteriorated, due to which, the civilians have suffered due to their right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health being violated. Israeli forces continued to impose restrictions on the movement of Palestinian patients transferred to receive medical treatment at hospitals in the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, Israel or abroad. The reporting period witnessed also lack of many types of medicine and medical supplies in different periods, especially basic and necessary types.

Hundreds of Patients Prevented from Traveling for Medical Treatment Abroad

In the Gaza Strip, the most prominent violation of the right to the highest attainable standard of health is denying hundreds of patients the necessary medical treatment they need whether abroad, in the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, or in Israel, due to the closure policy imposed by Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip and the ongoing closure of Rafah International Crossing Point.

Due to the closure of Rafah International Crossing Point on the Palestinian-Egyptian borders and banning the Gaza Strip patients from traveling abroad or to Egypt for medical treatment, patients have no other option left but Beit Hanoun crossing. However, Israeli forces imposed additional restrictions on the movement of persons, including patients, via this crossing.

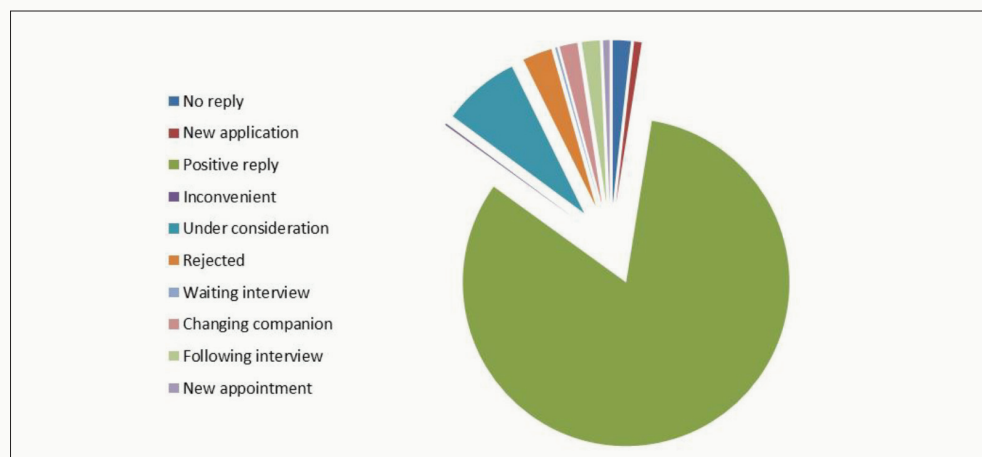
The delay or denial of treatment abroad for patients suffering from serious and intractable diseases during the years of closure resulted in the death of dozens of them. In 2014, following the Israeli alleged easing of the movement of patients; Israeli forces obstructed the travel of 3,188 patients from the Gaza Strip referred to Israeli or West Bank hospitals according to the Liaison and Civil Coordination at the Palestinian Ministry of Health. They also attributed the rejection of 529 patients for security reasons, asked 320 patients to change their companions, delayed replies to 323 patients that obliged them to wait for new appointments while 2,016 patients were awaiting an Israeli reply following security interviews. While heading for the security interview, summoned patients experienced harsh and degrading treatment; in addition, some of them were arrested or blackmailed. It is worth saying that the number of patients, who obtained permits to travel to hospitals in Israel, Jerusalem and the West Bank via Beit Hanoun crossing, used to reach about 20,000 annually before 2007.

Table (5): Total number of patients who applied for medical treatment abroad in 2014 and those who faced troubles and were denied medical treatment

	Number	Percentage
No reply	323	1.78%
New application	135	0.74%
Positive reply	14,953	82.43%
Inconvenient	28	0.15%
Under consideration	1,376	7.59%
Rejected	529	2.92%
Waiting interview	37	0.20%
Changing companion	320	1.76%
Following interview	322	1.77%
New appointment	118	1.77%
Total	18,141	100%

Source: Liaison and Civil Coordination at the Palestinian Ministry of Health

Diagram (5): Total number of patients who applied for medical treatment abroad in 2014 and those who faced troubles and were denied medical treatment



Lack of Medicine and Medical Supplies

During the reporting period, the Gaza Strip witnessed shortage in many types of medicine and medical supplies. In June, July and October, hospitals, medical centers and clinics witnessed acute shortage in medicine and medical supplies especially those necessary for nurseries, operation rooms, endoscopic surgeries, intensive care units, orthopedic surgeries, ECG Childbirth Monitor paper, urinary catheters, eye surgeries, CT scan films, other types used in anesthesia and ventilators, plasters and injections.

Third: Isolation of Areas in the Gaza Strip Declaring them Security Areas “Buffer Zones”

Following disengagement from the Gaza Strip in September 2005, Israel unilaterally and illegally established a so-called “*buffer zone*”, an area prohibited to Palestinians along the land and sea borders of the Gaza Strip. The precise area designated by Israel as a “*buffer zone*” is not clear and this Israeli policy is typically enforced with live fire. The establishment of the “*buffer zone*” is illegal under both Israeli and international law.

Preventing Palestinians from accessing their lands and fishing areas violates numerous provisions of international human rights law, including the right to work, the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health. Enforcing the “*buffer zone*” through the use of live fire often results in, inter alia, the direct targeting of civilians and/or indiscriminate attacks, both of which constitute war crimes.

The “*buffer zone*” whether in land or sea is unknown; therefore, risks increased regarding the safety of Palestinian civilians and their property in the border area. In an online statement on 25 February 2013, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) declared that fishermen could now access the sea up to six nautical miles offshore, and that farmers could now access lands in the border area up to 100 meters from the border fence. However, both references have since been removed from the statement. This clearly reflects the Israeli retreat on the ceasefire agreement following the 2012 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip. On 21 March 2013, Israeli authorities announced re-reducing the fishing area allowed for Palestinian fishermen from 6 nautical miles to 3 nautical miles and increasing the border area up to 300 meters. However, following the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip (08 July - 26 August 2014), a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Palestinian armed groups was brokered by the Egyptian government, which allowed fishermen to sail up to 6 nautical miles. However, the Israeli naval forces have not allowed fishermen to sail up to this limit as all Israeli attacks have taken place within the 6-nautical-mile fishing area. Moreover, Israeli forces did not abide by the 300-meter “*buffer zone*”. Israeli attacks against civilians took place anywhere up to approximately 2 kilometers away from the border fence.

“**Buffer Zone**” Along the Land Borders

This area includes the best arable lands in the Gaza Strip, in addition to the best water wells. People reach these areas under big threats, as Israeli forces impose restrictions on the entry of these lands. The safety of people, who cultivate these lands for their subsistence, is threatened. Civilian houses and facilities were destroyed during the continuous Israeli incursions and shelling of the area. As a result, the Palestinian families living close to that area were displaced.

The buffer zone on land constitutes 35% of the total farmlands in the Gaza Strip, a total of 27,000 dunums, in which different crops used to be planted for exportation or for marketing in the local market. These crops are citrus, almonds, apples,

strawberries and different types of flowers. This area also has the biggest water aquifer in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, this area is also well known for its abundant production of livestock, in addition to dozens of home pens.

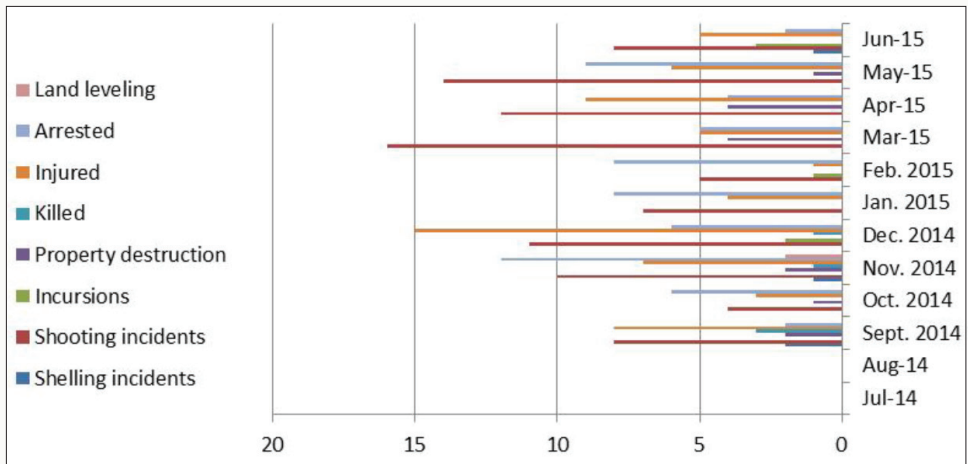
As a result of establishing the buffer zone, the farmers are denied access to their lands to transport their products. Besides, the farmers were unable to plant the crops specified for exportation, as 40% of the agricultural exports of the Gaza Strip are planted in farmlands that are included in the buffer zone. Therefore, the agricultural sector lost one of the main factors to improve the agricultural sector, which is considered one of the sources of the national income. Thousands of farmers were prevented from practicing their work inside the buffer zone, due to which, they were frustrated for their several attempts to re-plant those lands, whereas Israeli attacks continues resulting in material damage.

During the reporting period, the serious violations committed by Israeli forces against civilians in the buffer zone, whether by targeting them from the watchtowers or by incursions, resulted in killing 5 and wounding 63 civilians. Additionally, 62 Palestinians were arrested, 14 civilian facilities were destroyed and 2 pieces of land were levelled as well.

Table (6): Classification of attacks in the “buffer zone” from July 2014 to June 2015

Month	Shelling	Shooting incidents	Incursions	Property destruction	Killed	Injured	Arrested	Land leveling
July 2014	This period witnessed the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, due to which the “buffer zone” witnessed massive destruction							
August 2014								
Sept. 2014	2	8		2	3	8	2	
Oct. 2014		4		1		3	6	
Nov. 2014	1	10		2	1	7	12	2
Dec. 2014		11	2		1	15	6	
Jan. 2015		7				4	8	
Feb. 2015		5	1			1	8	
March 2015		16		4		5	5	
April 2015		12		4		9	4	
May 2015		14		1		6	9	
June 2015	1	8	3			5	2	
Total	4	95	6	14	5	63	62	2

Diagram (6): Classification of attacks in the “buffer zone” from July 2014 to June 2015



The Naval Blockade

Israeli violations against Palestinian fishermen constitute a grave violation of the international humanitarian and human rights law, especially the provisions relevant to the protection of civilians’ lives and respect for their rights, including the rights to work, to life and to safety and security of person, according to article 30 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 6 of the ICCPR to which Israel is a state party. These violations were committed while the Palestinian fishermen posed no threat to the Israeli naval forces, yet the fishermen were practicing their work.

Israeli forces continued to impose the naval blockade on the Gaza Strip waters and limiting the areas allowed for fishing. As a result, the Palestinian fishermen were denied access to areas in which fish breeds, due to which fishermen lost 85% of their income. Israeli forces were not committed to the cease-fire agreement between the Palestinian armed groups and Israel that was brokered by Egypt on 26 August 2014. The agreement stipulated, inter alia, allowing the Palestinian fishermen to sail within 6 nautical miles. PCHR documented several Israeli attacks in the allowed fishing area, which means that the Israeli forces’ policy aims to imposing additional restrictions on fishermen and their source of income.

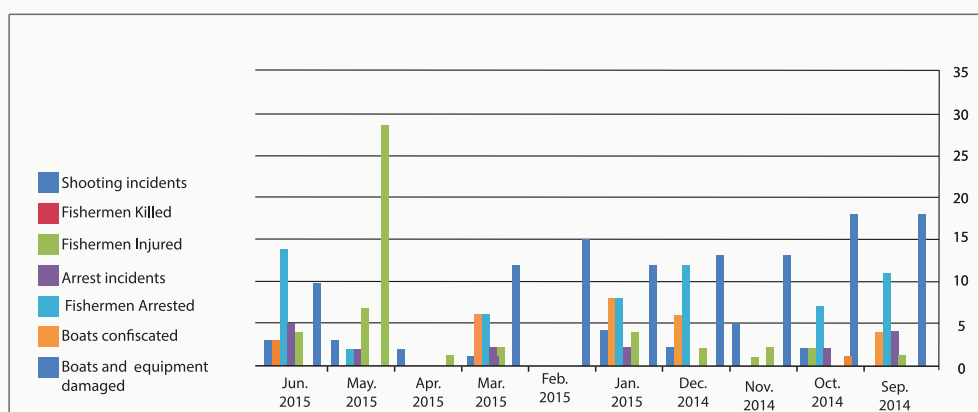
In another development, Israeli forces announced through loudspeaker on 07 March 2015 that the allowed fishing area was reduced to 4 nautical miles and warned the fishermen against exceeding that limit in the Gaza Strip waters. The Fishermen Union in the Gaza Strip announced in return stopping fishing in the Gaza Strip waters for 3 days in protest against the Israeli forces’ decision.

During the 8th year of closure, Israeli violations continued against fishermen, as they were frequently being killed, wounded, chased, searched and/or insulted and their boats were confiscated, drowned or destroyed within the allowed fishing area. During the reporting period, PCHR documented about 440 violations against fishermen in the Gaza Strip sea, including 155 shooting incidents that resulted in the killing of a fisherman and wounding of 24 others. Moreover, PCHR documented 17 chasing incidents that resulted in the arrest of 60 fishermen, confiscation of 40 fishing boats, the damage of 143 fishing boats or equipment.

Table (7): Israeli violations against fishermen from July 2014 to June 2015

Subject	Shooting incidents	Fishermen Killed	Fishermen Injured	Arrest incidents	Fishermen Arrested	Boats confiscated	Boats and equipment damaged
July 2014	This period witnessed the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, due to which the «buffer zone» witnessed massive destruction						
August 2014							
Sept. 2014	18		1	4	11	4	
Oct. 2014	18		1	2	7	2	2
Nov. 2014	13		2				5
Dec. 2014	13		2	1	12	6	2
Jan. 2015	12		4	2	8	8	4
Feb. 2015	15						
March 2015	12	1	2	2	6	6	1
April 2015	15		1				2
May 2015	29		7		2	1	3
June 2015	10		4		14	3	3
Total	155	1	24	17	60	40	143

Diagram (7): Israeli violations against fishermen from July 2014 to June 2015



According to joint documentation done by PCHR and other human rights organizations, the latest Israeli offensive from 7 July to 26 August 2014 aggravated the situation for Palestinian fishermen and resulted in material losses in the fishing sector. Israeli forces directly targeted the fishing sector and caused massive losses at harbors and fishing tools, especially Gaza harbor that was directly raided by Israeli warplanes. As a result, the harbor and 8 fishing boats were destroyed, 2 boats were damaged, a number of engines for fishing boats and all fishing tools and equipment were damaged as well due to the destruction of 36 rooms at Gaza harbor. The attacks directly carried out by Israeli gunboats caused the destruction and damage of 20 boats at the harbor in the northern Gaza Strip, 30 boats at the harbor in the central Gaza Strip, 3 rooms used to store fishing equipment, 18 boats and the fish market at the harbor in Khan Yunis and 4 boats at the harbor in Rafah.

Due to the Israeli attacks, 3,800 Palestinian fishermen were prevented from sailing and fishing during the 50-day Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip. As a result, the financial and living conditions were negatively affected. The financial losses due to the naval blockade during the offensive were estimated at US\$ 3 million, as it 300-400 tons of fish were expected to be fished in spite of the Israeli restrictions in the Gaza Strip waters.

Recommendations

PCHR calls upon the international community, especially the High Contracting Parties to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, to:

- To exert pressure on the Israeli authorities immediately to reopen all the Gaza Strip's commercial crossings and those designated for the travel of persons to enable 1.8 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to live in dignity and enjoy their political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights;
- To promptly and urgently intervene to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to put an end to the deterioration of living conditions across the Gaza Strip;
- To compel Israel to put an end to measures of collective punishment against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, including the tightening of the closure of Gaza's border crossings, that resulted in a serious deterioration in their economic and social rights;
- To remind the State of Israel, the Occupying Power, of its obligations towards the civilians of the Gaza Strip, under Article 55 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates that, "To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate. The Occupying Power may not requisition foodstuffs, articles or medical supplies available in the occupied territory, and then only if the requirements of the civilian population have been taken into account." The High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must fulfill their obligation under Article 1 of the Convention by ensuring the implementation of the Convention's provisions by the State of Israel, in order to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip;
- Stress that the Israeli-imposed closure is in violation of the international law. This means that increasing the goods allowed to enter the Gaza Strip in spite of banning the entry of basic commodities, especially construction materials, does not legalize the closure policy, which violates Israel's, as an Occupying Power, legal obligations (Article 43 of the Hague Regulations and Peace Operations and Articles 56, 55 and 33 of the fourth Geneva Convention) and the international conventions relevant to human rights, which Israel is part of, such as the ICCPR.
- Remind that the right solution to end the serious consequences of such arbitrary policy against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip is to immediately declare the end of the closure and not by declaring claimed facilitations and partially lifting the closure.
- Remind that dealing with the Gaza reconstruction issue should start when the international community, especially the UN, recognize that the Israeli comprehensive closure imposed on the Gaza Strip is illegal and part of the collective punishment policy imposed on civilians. Thus, this requires pressurizing, with all legal means, the Israeli authorities to lift the unjust closure immediately so construction materials would be easily entered to reconstruct what was destroyed during the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip;

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- Work on removing all restrictions imposed on the entry of construction materials to allow the entry of not less than 10,000 tons daily in order to avoid the deterioration in humanitarian conditions, getting back to normal life, pushing forward the wheel of economy and employing thousands of unemployed persons to reduce the rate of poverty.
 - Call on the donors to fulfill their financial obligations they pledged to offer in Cairo Conference relevant to the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, because the delay in sending money to the affected persons contribute to a delay in the reconstruction process. Therefore, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating. It should be noted that it is important to remove all obstacles that would raise the donors' concerns, the most significant of which is the ongoing closure, the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, which is unclear, the internal split and the Israeli ongoing threats to launch a new offensive on the Gaza Strip.
 - Reminds that the international community's failure throughout the past 8 years to support the application of the international humanitarian and human rights laws has disappointed everyone, especially the victims of human rights' violations in the Gaza Strip, who experienced 3 offensives launched on the Gaza Strip in less than 6 years, and in view of the economic and social impacts of the Israeli-imposed closure.

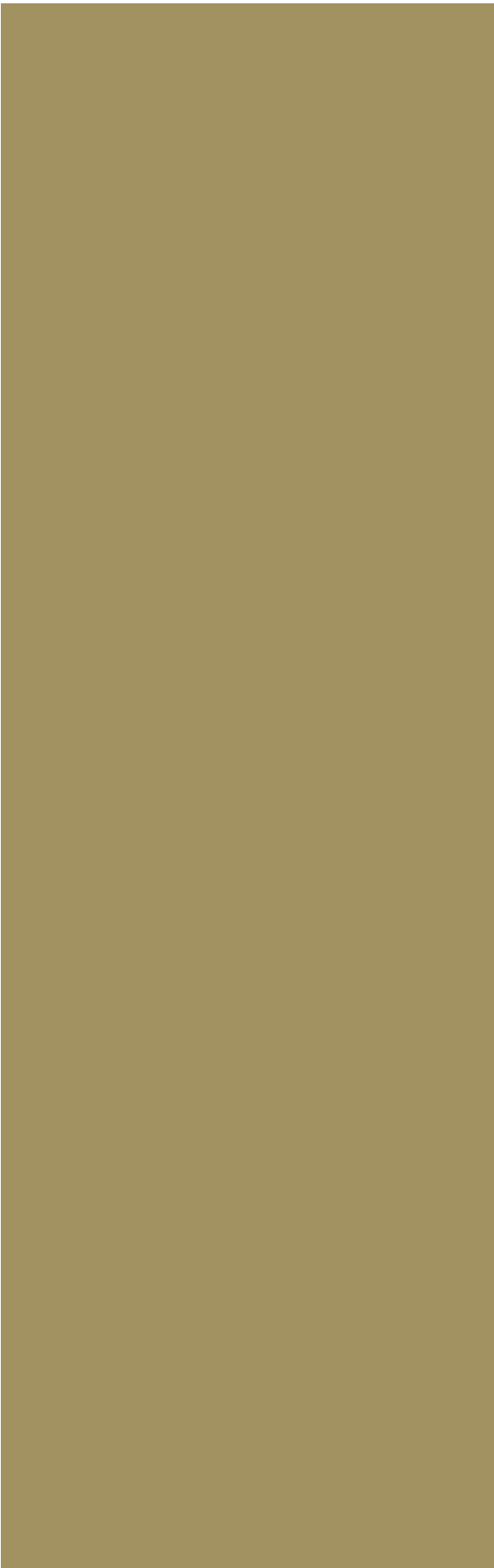
Tables and diagrams

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