



## **Gaza: One year since the ceasefire, the blockade goes on**

### ***November 2013***

On 21 November – after eight days of a military escalation that cost the lives of at least 165 Palestinians and six Israelis and caused tens of millions of dollars worth of damage to Gaza’s civilian infrastructure – the Government of Israel and Hamas signed what appeared to be a groundbreaking ceasefire agreement. As well as ending the escalation, the agreement also committed to “open the crossings and facilitate the movement of people and transfer of goods” in and out of Gaza.

One year later, despite some overall improvements in security, Israel’s blockade of Gaza continues. The promised improvements to the lives of Palestinian civilians have not materialized. The blockade has devastated the lives and livelihoods of Gaza’s population: 80 percent of people in Gaza receive international aid, 57 percent of households are food insecure, exports are virtually non-existent, many basic services are barely functioning, and unemployment is over 35 percent and rising.

Genuine long-term security for civilians in Gaza and Israel alike will only come if the blockade is lifted and economic development in Gaza is allowed.



*November 2013: Schoolgirls wade home through a flood of sewage, after one of Gaza's main pumping stations ran out of fuel. Over 35,000 cubic metres of untreated sewage flooded into the streets. Photo: Alun McDonald / Oxfam*

## Security: The quietest period for 10 years, but violations continue

Overall, the past 12 months have been the quietest period in 10 years, with the lowest numbers of rocket attacks from Gaza and of Palestinian casualties from Israeli incursions into Gaza. However, the ceasefire has been violated on numerous occasions. In the past year, Israel has carried out 19 airstrikes and over 300 incidents of border and naval fire, causing seven fatalities and at least 132 injuries. Palestinian factions have fired over 140 homemade rockets towards Israel, with no casualties reported.

For some civilians, security has worsened. So far in 2013, there have been over 150 incidents of Israeli naval fire against Gaza fishermen – a 40% increase over the past two years.

## Threats to fishermen and farmers in the “Access Restricted Areas”

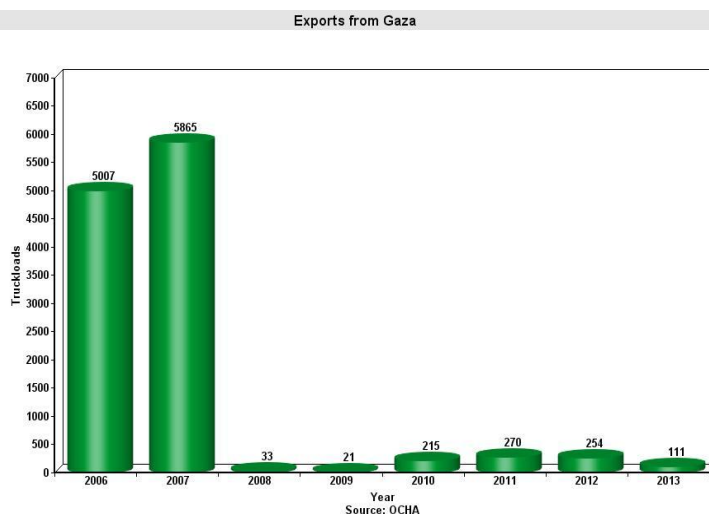
Following the November 2012 ceasefire agreement, the “fishing zone” – the area offshore where Palestinian fishermen are permitted to fish by Israeli authorities – was increased from three nautical miles (NM) to six. (Between March and May 2013 it was again reduced to three NM). However, this is still far below the 20 NM limit agreed under the Oslo Accords, and still outside the most productive fishing areas, which begin at eight NM and beyond.

The Israeli military regularly uses live fire against fishermen, in violation of international law – even within the six NM zone. Fishermen have reportedly been shot and arrested within the six NM limit.

The fishing industry has been severely affected by these restrictions. There are currently 3,500 registered fishermen in Gaza, compared to 10,000 in the year 2000, and the restrictions cost an estimated 1,300 metric tons of fish a year in lost catch. 95% of fishermen receive humanitarian assistance.

On land, access to the “buffer zone” on the perimeter of the Gaza Strip – where movement is restricted and which extends from between 300 metres to 1km into Palestinian territory – marginally improved in the months after the ceasefire. Before the ceasefire, up to 35% of Gaza’s agricultural land was effectively inaccessible. Today, some farmers are able to reach land closer to the fence for the first time in years. However, the actual limits remain uncertain, and contradictory statements by Israeli authorities on which area Palestinians can access has left many farmers unwilling to take the physical and financial risks of resuming farming on the land. Farmers still risk being shot at while working in the buffer zone.

## Stunting the economy: Restrictions on goods remain in place



Entrance of goods into Gaza via Kerem Shalom, the sole Israeli-controlled crossing, stands at around 50% of pre-blockade levels.

Exports from Gaza have fallen by half since last year’s ceasefire agreement and sales of goods from Gaza to its natural markets in the West Bank and Israel remain almost wholly banned. So far in 2013 (as of end-October), 111 commercial export trucks had left Gaza – compared to 254 trucks in 2012 and 270 in 2011. This year is on track to see the lowest level of exports since 2009.

Currently, exports from Gaza to third countries represent less than 3% of pre-blockade levels.

### Trapped on all sides: Restrictions on movement

Restrictions on movement of people remain largely unaltered. Fewer than 6,000 people a month are currently able to use the Erez crossing to travel from Gaza to the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israel. In comparison, over half a million people exited through Erez every month in the year 2000. This decrease has severed countless economic, educational, familial, cultural and social ties.

Given these restrictions, the Rafah crossing into Egypt became Gaza's main gateway to the world, with 20,000 people crossing monthly. However, after the recent political changes in Egypt, tightened restrictions at Rafah mean fewer than 4,000 people a month are currently allowed through. Thousands of people – including students registered in foreign universities and professionals working in third countries – find themselves stranded in Gaza.

### The closure of the tunnels, and a worsening power crisis

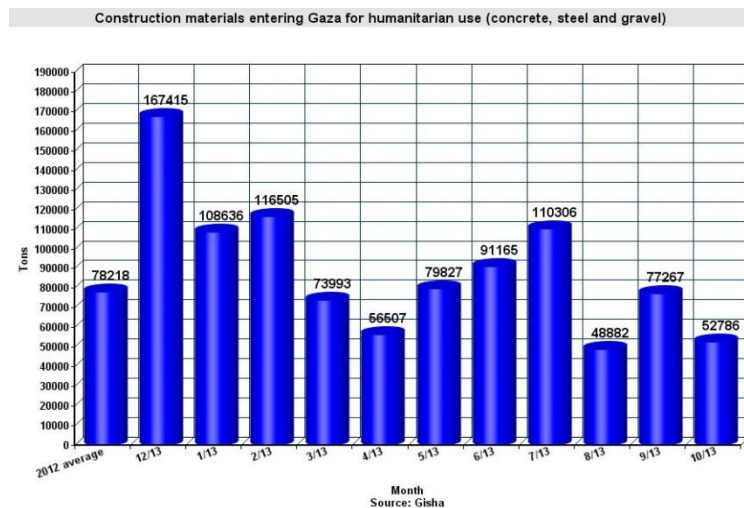
The Israeli blockade of Gaza left people with little alternative but to use tunnels from Egypt to bring in affordable goods, food and fuel. During the first half of 2013 over 50% of total imports entered Gaza through approximately 300 tunnels. Since July 2013 the Egyptian government has destroyed most of the tunnels – as of mid-October only 10-20 tunnels were reportedly operating.

One of the biggest impacts has been on the availability of affordable fuel. One million litres a day of Egyptian fuel used to come through the tunnels – the amount required to run Gaza's power plant, hospitals, water treatment units, other basic services and household needs. Today, Egyptian fuel is almost non-existent in Gaza. Although fuel is available through Israel, only 3-400,000 litres a day (40% of what is needed) is currently entering through Kerem Shalom. The Israeli fuel is twice the price of Egyptian fuel, pushing it beyond the reach of many families, businesses and service providers.

The fuel shortage is having a severe impact on the provision of basic services and an already vulnerable economy. Power cuts of 12-16 hours a day are now routine, and Gaza's only power plant temporarily closed. In November 2013, several streets in Gaza were flooded with sewage as one of the main pumping stations ran out of fuel. Two thirds of Gaza's population now receives clean water supply only once every three to four days. Shops and businesses that cannot afford fuel for generators are operating in near-darkness, with many owners worried they will be forced to close in the coming months. Many students are forced to work by candlelight, and perishable foods risk spoiling due to lack of refrigeration. The situation may worsen as energy needs increase as winter approaches.

### The impact on Gaza's construction industry

The construction sector is one of the biggest industries in Gaza, employing around 70,000 people and one of the only areas of the economy to grow during the blockade. Since 2008, Israel has banned the import of construction materials for commercial use and



allowed only limited materials for humanitarian projects.

The ban has left the sector particularly reliant on the tunnels to bring in supplies, and the closure of the tunnels has had a big impact. Since July 2013, there are reports that over 20,000 construction workers have lost their jobs. In October 2013, Israeli authorities briefly allowed some commercial construction materials to enter from Israel, but this was reversed after two weeks and the ban remains in place.

Immediately after the ceasefire agreement there was an increase in the entry of materials for humanitarian use. In December 2012, 167,415 tons of cement, steel and gravel was allowed in – the largest amount for two years (although still below the average amount used in Gaza before the blockade). However, over the following months this has decreased again, and in August 2013 it hit the lowest level for nearly two years. Monthly entry is currently lower than the average in 2012.



*Ibrahim Zayed has run a small shop in northern Gaza for the past 11 years. Like many shopkeepers in Gaza he is worried that he may soon be forced to close his business:*

"Life is worse than a year ago. We just want to make a living but it's now almost impossible. The electricity is off most of the day, and the fuel is so expensive I can only afford to turn the generator on for 30 minutes at a time. The dairy and meat products in the refrigerator are all going bad. Then when the electricity comes on, the water goes off! Last year I'd get 200 customers a day but now it's less than half that. Most people here don't have any work since the tunnels closed and they have no money to spend. My outgoings have gone up while my profits have gone down.

"The crisis affects every part of our lives – last week my daughter had a chest problem and needed an examination. I drove around looking for an open health centre, but everywhere was closed because they had no power. We had to drive all the way into Gaza City to find one open."