

# The devastation of Gaza

By Jean Shaoul  
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*In the year since the August 24, 2014 ceasefire ending Israel's war against Gaza, Palestinians have endured an almost unparalleled decline in living standards. (See "One year since the war on Gaza").*

Some 100,000 Palestinians in Gaza are living with relatives, in temporary accommodation or in tents close to their bombed-out homes.

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), no homes were rebuilt in the first 10 months following the war because Israel and the Palestinian Authority disagreed over how much construction material was needed to rebuild each square metre.

Gisha, an Israeli NGO, estimates that although 23 million tonnes of construction materials are needed to repair Gaza, its homes and infrastructure, less than 6 percent of this has come in since the ceasefire, mostly from Qatari donations circumventing the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. Gaza's impoverished inhabitants have sold whatever they could on the black market just to put food on the table or keep the landlord at bay.

There are electricity blackouts for 12 to 16 hours a day, and this is set to worsen. People have had to resort to generators that are far more expensive and have led to injuries from burns and electric shocks.

The shortage of electricity has affected the most basic necessities: water, sanitation, agriculture and health care. According to various United Nations sources, 95 percent of the water from Gaza's sole aquifer—soon to become unusable—is unfit for human consumption. One third of Gazans have access to water only six to eight hours a day, every four days. Water-related diseases account for more than a quarter of all illnesses and are the primary cause of child morbidity. The infant mortality rate has started to rise for the first time in five decades.

Forty percent of homes are not connected to sewerage services and most of the sewerage goes untreated, with

100 million litres being dumped into the sea every single day.

The UN's Mine Action Service estimates that at least 7,000 unexploded devices and munitions still lie buried beneath the rubble of the 100,000 homes, offices, shops, schools and hospitals damaged or destroyed during the war.

Earlier this month, four members of the same family were killed and at least 35 injured, including four in a critical condition, from the detonation of just one of the Israeli bombs that did not explode at the time. So far, only 50 tonnes of unexploded missiles have been defused.

This is in addition to the six people, including an Associated Press journalist and his Palestinian translator, killed in other such explosions. Another three people were injured during a media event showing how Palestinian police defuse unexploded Israeli ordnance.

According to a recent report by Handicap International, half of Gaza's 1.8 million people express daily anxiety about unexploded bombs.

The physical suffering has taken a particularly heartbreaking toll on children's mental health. The UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that more than 370,000 children have been left shell-shocked by the war. They are subject to crying fits, nightmares, hallucinations, bed-wetting, violent outbursts against other children, self-harm and attempted suicides. Some are no longer capable of going to school and need powerful but expensive anti-psychotic drugs for post-traumatic stress disorder. UNICEF has been able to provide support for only about one third of those traumatised by the war.

According to Save the Children, "Homelessness and repeated exposure to violence, coupled with soaring unemployment for parents and limited mental health support, have prevented children from recovering from

the mental trauma of war.”

CEO Justin Forsyth said, “Many children in Gaza have now lived through three wars in the past seven years, the last one notable for its brutality. They are emotionally and, in some cases, physically shattered.”

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