



CNEWA-Pontifical Mission

the papal agency for Middle East relief and development

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“Making Life Impossible” Gaza Situation Update and Emergency Appeal 2024

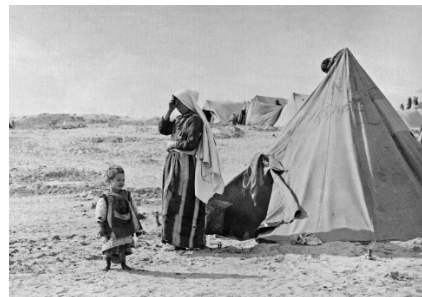
Overview of Gaza’s Humanitarian Situation¹

2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza are struggling to survive since the Israel-Hamas war erupted on October 7, 2023. Current fatalities are estimated at 28,775 while 68,552 have been injured². Intense Israeli bombardment from air, land and sea continues to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of civilian infrastructure. Throughout Gaza, there is insecurity and acute shortages of shelter, food, clean water, and medical care.

The UNOCHA OPT estimates that 1.7 million Gazans are currently displaced from their homes; the majority of the displaced are in Rafah. Over 650,000 people are estimated to have no home to return to as 70,000 housing units have been destroyed while 290,000 housing units are partially damaged. Many more will be unable to return home due to infrastructure damage, and risks posed by explosive remnants of war. The UN Shelter Cluster estimates that the amount of debris from the destruction of residential housing units will exceed 12,000,000 metric tons and will take over four years to remove, given Gaza's current capabilities.

The deteriorating situation and escalation of hostilities have caused significant damage to critical infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and water supply systems.

- Since 11 October 2023, the Gaza Strip has been under an electricity blackout, after the Israeli authorities cut off the electricity supply, and fuel reserves for Gaza’s sole power plant were depleted.
- Currently only 5.7 per cent of water is being produced from all the water sources in Gaza, compared to pre-war production levels. Safe drinking water and water for domestic use, including personal hygiene, remains very limited.
- Only 17 per cent of the 284 groundwater wells are operating with limited hours; some 39 wells were destroyed and 93 were moderately to severely damaged.
- Tens of thousands of tons of uncollected public waste are intensifying public health risks. The Municipality of Gaza city estimates that approximately 50,000 tons of solid waste remain unmanaged, exacerbating environmental and health concerns.
- Some 390 public, private and UNRWA schools (78.8 per cent of the total school buildings in Gaza) sustained damage, including 140 schools that sustained major damage or were fully destroyed. Combined, these schools previously served some 433,000 children and more than



Palestinian refugee family in Rafah, 1948
AP/UNRWA photo archive



Rafah, January 9, 2024, (Mohammed Zaanoun)

¹ Sources: UNOCHA Flash updates between February 6-16

² <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-120>

16,200 teachers. The North, Gaza, and Khan Younis governorates have been especially impacted, accounting for 76 per cent of all damaged schools. One quarter of directly hit and damaged schools are UNRWA-run schools. At least 55 per cent of schools in Gaza will either need full reconstruction or major rehabilitation after the war.

- 22 hospitals out of 36 hospitals in Gaza are no longer functional (3 hospitals minimal functioning and 11 hospitals are partially functioning).
- 11 bakeries throughout Gaza have been damaged.
- 3 churches and 184 mosques have been damaged or destroyed.

Gaza population is facing crisis levels of hunger and the risk of famine – the largest ever recorded globally, report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). The risk of famine in Gaza is increasing by the day, particularly for hundreds of thousands of people in northern Gaza who has been predominantly cut off from assistance and where food security assessments show the greatest needs, with many reportedly grinding animal feed to make flour.



Site of food donation camp in Rafah –
December 23, 2023, (Mohammed Zaanoun)

The following conversation was video recorded between a reporter and a hungry child:

R: Why are you angry?

C: There is nothing to eat, I am hungry – there is no shame in saying it, I need food to eat

R: What do you eat?

C: Nothing, we drink water. The bread is inedible.

R: Why? There is nothing to eat with it. (With the bread, Palestinians usually eat a variety of products)

C: No, we cannot eat the bread it is bitter, we eat leaves from trees. This is too much, we need food.

The UN estimates that 2.2 million people are at imminent risk of famine while 378,000 people are at Phase 5 (catastrophic level) or at extreme lack of food, starvation, and exhaustion of coping capacities and 939,000 people are at Phase 4 (emergency levels). In some areas of Gaza, food supplies are still available, but the prices have rocketed. In northern Gaza, biscuits sold at half a shekel pre-war, now sells for 4 NIS.

Between 7 October and 12 February, there were 378 attacks on health care across Gaza, affecting 98 health facilities and 98 ambulances, according to WHO. Some 65 per cent of these attacks were reported in Gaza and North Gaza governorates. Medicine (anesthesia, medicine for non-communicable diseases) is needed, medical supplies and blood and blood products in hospitals are needed for emergencies and medical procedures. The number of infectious diseases like Hepatitis A, gastroenteritis, diarrhea, smallpox, lice, and influenza are spreading. The risk of malnutrition among children, pregnant and breastfeeding women is increasing especially amid the lack of health and sanitation, and the deterioration of food security.

Slow entry of aid into the Gaza Strip is limited as bureaucratic processes are complicating procurement. According to the UNOCHA OPT, between 1 January and 12 February, 51 per cent of missions planned by humanitarian aid groups to deliver aid and undertake assessments to areas to the north of Wadi Gaza were denied access by the Israeli authorities. During the same period, 25 per cent of missions planned to areas assessed as necessitating coordination to the south of Wadi Gaza were denied by the Israeli authorities. In Rafah, aid distribution for the sheltered and displaced is according to a prepared list; those that are not on the list will not receive aid.

CNEWA – Pontifical Mission reports similar difficulties of people displaced in Rafah who have been unable to receive aid because they are not on the list. A Gaza engineer and his family who was displaced in Rafah told CNEWA-PMP staff: “I have money but there is [no food] to buy”. He asked for help to find an NGO that would add his name to the list.

Update on Gaza’s churches, cultural heritage sites and the Christian community:

The destruction of homes, businesses, schools, and the institutions threaten the existence of the Gaza Christian community. Gaza Christians may very well leave the Gaza Strip as soon as the situation allows, according to local sources. There are currently around 800 Gaza Christians in Gaza, most of whom have sheltered in the two Churches, Church of Saint Porphyrius and the Holy Family Church, since October 7th. Since the war began, 30 Christians have died including 17 people from the strike on the Greek Orthodox parish compound and two women who were killed by snipers in the Latin Parish - Holy Family Church³. Others who have sought shelter in the Churches have died from chronic illnesses that couldn’t be treated.

Almost all of the Church institutions in Gaza have sustained moderate damage or have been destroyed. Reports from the Rosary Sisters say that its school in Tel el-Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City has been so badly damaged. Likewise with the Holy Family School of the Latin Patriarchate. The YMCA – Gaza also sustained severe damage. A Baptist Church was severely damaged by an Israeli tank shell a day after Christmas. Al-Ahli Hospital was severely damaged by an explosion in October. Significant Christian heritage sites have also been damaged or destroyed such as the Byzantine Church of Jabalia, built in 444 and located in northern Gaza, was completely destroyed in October 2023. The Monastery of St. Helarion, which dates back to about 340 consisting of five churches, a burial site, a baptism hall, and ancient baths, and was added to UNESCO Tentative World Heritage list in 2012, was damaged. The Green Shrine in Deir Al-Balah – the first Christian monastery built in Palestine during the Byzantine era, was also partially damaged. At least 100 cultural heritage sites throughout Gaza have sustained damage or have been destroyed.

CNEWA – PMP Gaza Emergency Relief Efforts:

PMP assessed the needs on the ground in Gaza, coordinating with community members and iNGO partners to procure and deliver emergency supplies to those in urgent need. From October – December 2023, CNEWA-Pontifical Mission provided several weeks’ worth of food for hot meals for hundreds of displaced Christians sheltering at both churches. The generous donation was made by CNEWA and contributions from the local community which has enabled hundreds of displaced people including families with children, elderly people, and others, have hot meals, medicine for those with chronic illnesses and diseases, hygiene kits and diapers, fuel and cooking gas for both cooking and heating, water, and cleaning materials. The supplies have lasted till the present day which has helped the community survive during this perilous time.

In early February, PMP ensured funds were available to deliver hot meals and emergency supplies that reached 450 Muslim families in the neighborhoods of Al-Darraj, Shija’ia and areas around Al-Ahli Arab Hospital. So far, PMP disbursed a total of \$133,505.00 for emergency aid in Gaza.

CNEWA – PMP’s Emergency Appeal – Hot Meals for Gaza City Families:

As the Israeli military has moved out of Gaza city into the southern vicinity of Khan Younis and Rafah, there is more freedom of movement for the people in Gaza city. It is estimated that there are over 100,000 Gazans still residing in the north of Wadi Gaza.

³ Catholic News Agency Article, February 14, 2024

Nearly 3 dozen Christians have died in Gaza Strip amid Israel-Hamas war, aid group says.

There is a severe shortage of food, as northern Gaza has been almost completely cut off from humanitarian aid since the war began. Virtually all Palestinians in Gaza are skipping meals every day while many adults go hungry so children can eat, according to the WHO. Food supplies are perilously low in Gaza city and there is the threat of dehydration, child-wasting and malnutrition, and chronic diseases among the population, especially children and the elderly. The people in Gaza city are unable to move out of the area due to military closures.

CNEWA – PMP is coordinating efforts through its network of local community leaders and partners on the ground in Gaza city, to procure food supplies from local businesses that will prepare hot meals to feed 900 Palestinian families in Gaza city for a total of \$20,000. Each family is on average around 6-8 people, and each family requires two hot meals which is \$22 per family (\$11 per meal). In addition, \$60,000 is required to continue to provide fuel, food, medicine, winter clothing and other needs for people in need.

CNEWA-PMP is requesting urgent emergency aid from its donors totaling **\$80,000**, to procure food and non-food items.

*Joseph Hazboun
Regional Director*