



# THE REAL GAZA

## ANOTHER TRADEGY FOR THE REFUGEES

Seventy Five Per Cent of Gaza's 1.7 Million are Refugees

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## **ABSTRACT**

A core objective of Israel's policy in Gaza is to further fragment the Palestinian issue. This policy has been pursued with great success over the years. With Gaza the Palestinian issue has now been diverted to one about Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Israel has successfully changed the political debate from one centered around international law to one which pays little attention to the roots of the conflict and the core issues.

The developments in Gaza, from Israel's disengagement, the Siege, Operation Cast Lead and its aftermath and more broadly the rhetoric surrounding Gaza is symptomatic of Israel's policy to fragment the Palestinian issue further away from the core issues in order that Israel can stall facing up to its responsibility under international law.

Three quarters of the population in Gaza are refugees. Under international law they have a right to return to their lands from where they were expelled. The impoverished refugees in Gaza are the victims of an historical assault on the Palestinians which goes back to 1948. They have been corralled into a small stretch of land now described as an open prison.

Their conditions as documented by eye witness accounts, human rights organisations, international bodies and many senior officials, is desperate. The combination of war, siege and poverty has pushed the 1.7 million into conditions of acute vulnerability. The rights and freedoms to which they are entitled to under international law – including freedom of movement, life and security, essential services, employment, adequate standards of living, protection from displacement and the over-arching right to self determination - continue to be routinely violated, often with impunity. They also suffer physical and psychological abuse which is sure to have devastating consequences in the future.

The international community has failed to make a robust response. There is international outrage against the assault on Gaza and the international community has an opportunity to address the root cause of the human suffering in Gaza instead of simply treating Gaza as a humanitarian crises and a region of Islamist terrorism. It has an opportunity once and for all to redress the historic wrong which is the only sure way to see lasting peace and justice in the region.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Israeli assault on Gaza in December 2008 is a watershed moment in the Arab Israeli conflict. The global outrage has seen Israel enter the realm of a pariah state. Since then there has been an unprecedented level of interest and as a result a profusion of material on the unfolding crises. The materials invariably speak of Gaza

as a block by itself detached from its proper historical context. Consciously or unconsciously this reinforces the Israeli strategy to separate Gaza from the West Bank as an irreconcilable political block determined to destroy Israel.

Gazans were denied access to live, study and work in the West Bank without permission from Israel (which was rarely given, and only to favored applicants). Gazans were also forbidden to enter the West Bank via its border with Jordan. Friends and family live just 70 kilometers apart but Israel does not allow them to meet. Today, a Palestinian born in Gaza who lives in the West Bank without Israeli permission is considered an "illegal presence"<sup>1</sup>. Since Hamas's election victory in 2006 there has been further escalation of these policies to dissect the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause.

These policies are attempts to make key fundamental issues redundant and have always been a core tenet of Israeli policy. Part of that strategy has been to change facts on the grounds with the intention of changing the main focus of the debate and ultimately reframe the conflict to one that is in Israel's interest. This strategy has not only shifted the causal relationship of the violence and the overall problem but also hoodwinked the international community to address other secondary issues.

When a dam breaks, to draw a very simplistic parallel, it makes no sense to sure up ones home and other secondary problems and focus on putting sandbags around ones home and forget the source of the problem. New minor problems will continue to arise until the source of the problem is corrected. This is the tactic which Israel has deployed in its attempt to reclaim more and more land with as few Palestinians as possible and further deny Palestinians their basic human rights. Because Israel knows it cannot deliver on the key fundamental issues, which are the main source of the longest conflict in modern history; it seeks to create new problems and invent new scenarios to divert global attention away from its own failures to that of the Palestinians.

Israel's action in Gaza is a clear example of this hostile agenda. It behooves everyone who is engaged in this topic to revisit the central issues that have prevented peace even as we speak of the desperate and terrible situation in Gaza. Historically, until 1967, the refugee issue had been the most intractable and the major concern of the international community. During the first 20 years of the conflict, many observers perceived the refugee problem as the most crucial issue; thus major attention was devoted to it in the expectation that resolution of this problem would be instrumental in ending the conflict. Western policy makers continued to regard resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a major if not the most important, prerequisite for achieving political and social stability in the Middle East, and many regarded solution of the refugee problem as the key to peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors<sup>2</sup>.

As a political issue the refugee plight has been subdued under the weight of new problems and new realities. The attention has shifted to occupation and the question of Palestinian state and there has been less

emphasis on the long term prospect for resolving the plight of Palestinian refugees. Some unwisely believe that the establishment of a Palestinian state will automatically lead to a resolution of the refugee problem and therefore have taken the two state solution and the peace process built on that premise as a panacea for all the ills of the region. Tragically the failed diagnosis built on false assumptions has made matters worse as Palestinians stare into their future with a shattered and unviable peace process. Israel of course choose not to deliver on its responsibility to uphold international law and the refugees have been denied their basic human rights to return to their land and home. The focus then shifted to occupation as a new language and discourse began to emerge. After Oslo the language and the focus shifted further to one about a Palestinian state, taking us further and further away from the central issues.

Israel, during Oslo, was not willing to deliver on the key issues leaving it aside for final status agreements. The talks then shifted further away and a new discourse framed under the fight against international terrorism and Hamas developed while the erstwhile and extremely fundamental refugee problem remained unresolved and kept away from the political and media radar.

There was also naive optimism that Israel's unilateral disengagement plan in September 2005 from Gaza would allow the establishment of 'a democratic state in the Gaza' and open the door for democracy in the Middle East. The columnist Thomas Friedman stated that 'the issue for Palestinians is no longer about how they resist the Israeli occupation in Gaza, but whether they build a decent mini-state there – a Dubai on the Mediterranean; Because if they do, it will fundamentally reshape the Israeli debate about whether the Palestinians can be handed most of the West Bank<sup>37</sup>. This is the new wishful discourse in Palestine. In essence it's an inhumane experiment conceived to render fundamental issues obsolete, it's a policy of subversion designed to supplant a new reality that would ultimately reshape the Palestinian debate away from the fundamental to the peripheral.

The tragedy of Gaza is the result of six decades of neglect in addressing the core issue. Even though there was plenty of time and billions of pounds poured into the region the foundations of the dam had not been rebuilt allowing new and more disastrous problems to occur. It should be remembered that the vast majority of the people in Gaza are refugees who have been denied their basic humanity for over Sixty years. Although the naysayers would want us to believe the problem is Hamas or Islamic terrorism the refugee crises came first and they have for decades struggled to mend their shattered lives.

Crimes committed against the people of Gaza, which have been clearly documented by the highest authorities, are crimes against the Palestinians and above all crimes against the refugees. It is the refugees that continue to suffer, it is the refugees who are continually failed by the international system, and it is the refugees who are victims many times over of Israel's terror and violent onslaughts.

# 1. HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL SURVEY

## 1.1 Gaza: a human pen

During the period of Israel's formation in 1948, Palestinians were expelled through a number of exit points. Gaza was one of the areas which Israel used to corral the Palestinians. Although the vast majority of Palestinians were expelled after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 the pattern of forceful displacement and dispossession began before that period. 100,000 to 150,000 Palestinians were expelled under the British mandate.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century most Palestinians lived inside the borders of Palestine until the implementation of the Zionist project which led to five separate episodes of expulsion and forceful displacement. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the composition of Palestinians displaced by period of displacement.

Table 1

Year	Number of Palestinians Displaced/Expelled
British Mandate: 1922–1947	100,000 – 150,000
Nakba: 1947–1949	750,000 – 900,000
Israeli Military Government: 1949–1966	35,000 – 45,000
1967 War	400,000 – 450,000
Occupation, Colonization, Apartheid 1967-2009	Tens of thousands

Source: Badil (Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights): Survey of Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Person 2008-2009

As a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Zionists, now called Israelis, conquered 774 Palestinian towns and villages, depopulated totally 675 of them, while 99 remained under brutal military rule for 16 years to be replaced by second class citizen status<sup>5</sup>. Refugees flooded into neighboring areas including Gaza. Most were of peasant origin and comprised mainly of unskilled laborers and agricultural workers<sup>6</sup>. Gaza is home to a population of more than 1.7<sup>7</sup> million, covering an area of just 360 square kilometres and is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Three-quarters of the entire population in Gaza are refugees registered with UNRWA<sup>8</sup>. About half a million refugees live in Gaza's eight refugee camps.

The major events that lead to the expulsion of Palestinians, listed in Table 1 are well known. However what is less well known is the continuous displacement that takes place outside of any major war. After the Nakba in 1948 the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) expelled half of the inhabitants of Kfar Anan village, Gish village, Arabs of Galilee and Bedouin Arabs from Beersheeba<sup>9</sup>. In 1950 the IDF expelled 14,000 remaining inhabitants of

Majdal, who were the last substantial Arab population on Israel's southern coast. It trucked them to the Gaza border over a three week period and forced them to cross. The government then renamed the town to Ashkelon and Jewish immigrants moved there<sup>10</sup>.

A key point that requires emphasis- a point which also explains the longevity of the plight of refugees as well as the different episodes of expulsion- is that the motives behind the organized violence and aggression visited on the Palestinians was not the consequence of war. Unlike other conflict, like the war in Bosnia, Bangladesh in 1971 or the various conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, refugees were a by-product of violence. This is not the case with Palestine. One of the primary (if not the primary) goals of violence was to expel Palestinians from their ancestral land. The Zionist project is inextricably linked to expulsion of Palestinians from their land and the creation of the refugee crises; one could not have existed without the other. As a result and unlike other refugee crises their resettlement and repatriation faces many obstacles.

The continuation of the Zionist dream requires sophisticated methods of expulsion and land expropriation. This explains why Palestinians have endured many different episodes of expulsion with improved methods of repression being developed. A new form of 'creeping colonialism' and expulsion has evolved over the years with more and more Palestinians being forced out of their land through various forms of deception. With feverish coverage and attention in the region, Zionist strategists are fully aware that mass expulsion will not be tolerated in the current global context.

The thirst for more and more land however is not satiated and the desire for more land is much stronger than the desire to affirm and uphold universal standards and international law among states. This has been the impetus in developing sophisticated and seemingly legal methods of appropriating Palestinian land. This is clearly visible in the vigorous Judaisation taking place in East Jerusalem, where under various legal ruse Palestinians are continually being expelled, in total disregard of every peace initiative in the region. This clearly demonstrates Israel's true intention considering that every serious peace proposal, addressing the creation of a two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict has included the establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

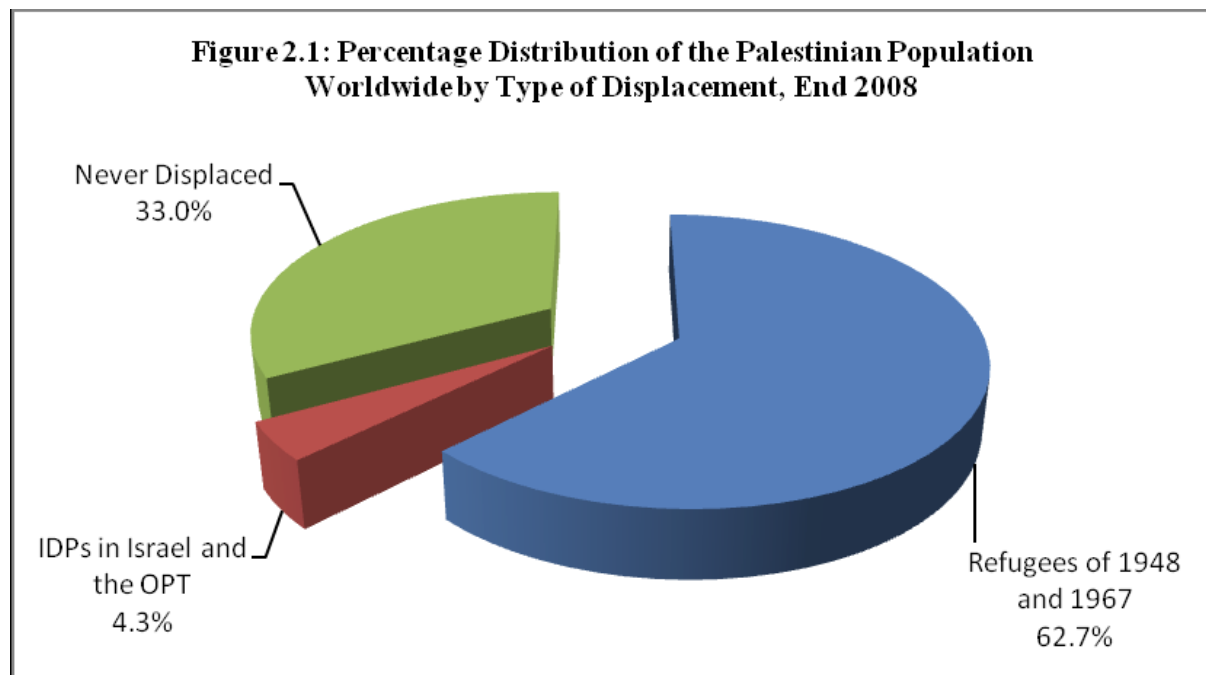
However, every Israeli government since 1967 has supported the growth of a vigorous ring of settlements around Jerusalem, designed to cut off East Jerusalem Palestinians from the West Bank, and has also encouraged the intrusion of Jewish settlers into the Arab quarters of the city itself. This policy goes against any serious claim that Israel wants peace. International law explicitly states that settlements are illegal and every serious peace process was undertaken on the basis of cessation and dismantling of all settlements. However every Israeli government continues to build more and more settlements. Peace within the ethical system of Zionism is but another means to secure further land and not an aspirational position.

Since 1967, Israel has developed a regime that combines occupation, apartheid and colonisation which acts as the root cause of contemporary forced displacement. Hundreds of thousands of additional Palestinians have been displaced on both sides of the Green Line, and forcible displacement is ongoing as a result of the policies and practices of Israel's government. Increased awareness of forced displacement of Palestinians amongst local and international organizations has led to the identification of a number its core 'triggers' including excessive and indiscriminate use of force, home demolition and forced eviction, violence by Jewish settlers and other non-state actors, revocation of residency rights, closure and segregation, confiscation and discriminatory distribution of land, and settler implantation<sup>11</sup>.

Secondary displacement of Palestinian refugees has continued in various countries of exile, most recently in Iraq and Nahar al Bared refugee camp in North Lebanon where in 2007 a further 27,000 Palestinian refugees were displaced<sup>12</sup>. Denied reparation and durable solutions based on their right to return, displaced Palestinians remain vulnerable to the impact of armed conflicts and human rights violations in their host countries<sup>13</sup>.

At the end of 2008, there were at least 7.1 million displaced Palestinians, representing 67 percent of the entire Palestinian population (10.6 million) worldwide. Among them were at least 6.6 million refugees and 427,000 IDPs<sup>14</sup>. Figure 2 below provides a graphic display of the distribution of Palestinian Population Worldwide by the type of displacement by 2008

Figure 2

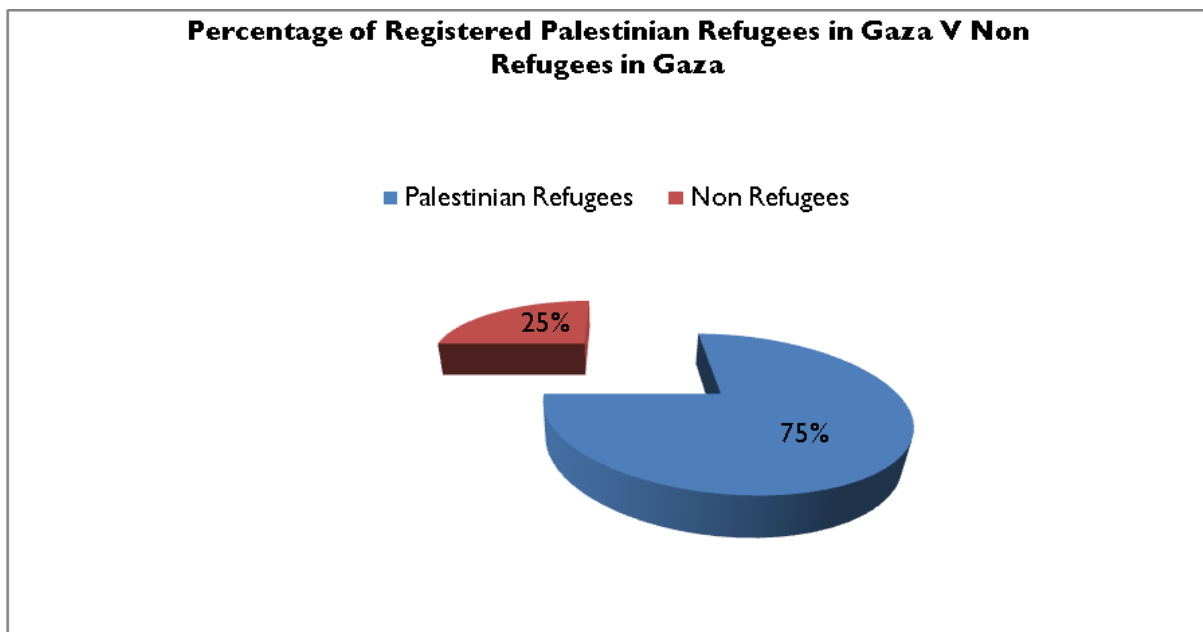


Source: Badil: Survey of Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009



The vast majority of displaced Palestinians remained in the West Bank and Gaza. The impact of the mass influx into Gaza was dramatic quadrupling its population<sup>15</sup>. Figure 3 below shows the percentage of registered refugees versus non refugees in Gaza based on the latest figures from UNRWA. Table 2 shows the distribution of 1948 Palestinian refugees by district and origin. A large majority of the refugees in the occupied Gaza Strip originate from the adjacent areas of the former Gaza District.

Figure 3:



Source UNRWA Emergency Appeal 2010

Table 2: Distribution of 1948 Registered Palestinian Refugees by District of Origin

District of Origin	Host Countries/Territories					Total (all fields)
	Jordan	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Lebanon	Syria	
Jerusalem	20	33	0.2	0.5	0.7	13.5
Gaza	17	7	66	0.1	0.4	22.5
Lydda	40	30	33	8.5	7.3	30
Samaria	4	12	0.2	0.1	0.1	3.5
Haifa	10	16	0.5	18.8	22	11
Galilee	9	2	0.1	72	69	18.5

**Source:** UNRWA, 2000. The six regions of the British Mandate period were Jerusalem (Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem); Gaza (Gaza, Khan Younis, Majdal, Isdud, Beersheba); Lydd (Jaffa, Ramle, Lod, Rechovot);

Samaria (Tulkarem, Nablus, Jenin, Natanya); Haifa (Haifa, Hadera, Shafa 'Amr); Galilee (Nazareth, Beisan, Tiberias, Acre, Safad).

Table 3: Breakdown of Refugees Registered with UNRWA in Host Countries

Field of Operations	Official Camps	Registered Refugees in Camps	Registered Refugees
Jordan	10	338,000	1,951,603
Lebanon	12	222,776	422,188
Syria	9	125,009	461,897
West Bank	19	193,370	762,820
Gaza Strip	8	495,006	1,073,303
<b>Agency total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>1,373,732</b>	<b>4,671,811</b>

Source: UNRWA website

As table 3 shows not all the refugees reside in UNRWA Camps. Of the 7.1 million refugees 4.6 million are registered with UNRWA, 29.4 per cent of Palestinians resident in UNRWA refugee camps<sup>16</sup>. The largest camp population resides in the occupied Gaza Strip shown in table 4 (492,299 or 46 per cent of UNRWA registered refugees in Gaza, at the end of 2008), comprising about 36 per cent of all camp-registered refugees<sup>17</sup>.

Table 4: Population of Refugee Camps in Gaza

Gaza Strip		
Official Camps	Population	Year Established
Jabalia	107,146	1948
Beach	81,591	1948
Nuseirat	61,785	1948
Bureij	31,018	1948
Deir al-Balah	20,653	1948
Maghazi	23,730	1948
Khan Younis	67,567	1948
Rafah	98,660	1948
<b>Total</b>	<b>492,299</b>	

*Sources: UNRWA website: camp populations. Ali Sha'aban, Hussein, Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon – From Hosting Through Discrimination. [Arabic]. Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2002.*

## 1.2 New Face of Occupation

In hindsight it seems inevitable that Gaza would become the torch bearer of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation and terror; with more than three quarters of the population living on handouts from the international community and with no prospect of regaining a dignified standard of living and hope for the future. This became all the more apparent during the Second Intifada beginning in 2000 when Palestinians in Gaza experienced extremely brutal repression by Israel. Coinciding with the Palestinian Authorities weakness to negotiate any real progress, failure of the Oslo process, the death of Yasir Arafat and an almost absent international community to listen to the valid grievances and implement international law, the political climate changed dramatically; it led to an overwhelming victory by Hamas in the Palestinian Legislative Election in 2006.

In 2005 Ariel Sharon enacted his unilateral disengagement plan to great accolades from the international community. Under closer examination it was obvious that Israel had no intention of allowing Gaza to free itself from the shackles of Israeli control. The strategy behind the disengagement is that Israel sought to proclaim an end to the occupation of Gaza, ostensibly in order to absolve Israel of all legal responsibilities as an occupying power, whilst retaining military control. This is all the more obvious when we analyse the political developments and Israel's actions since the disengagement.

Gaza since 2005 remained an occupied territory under international law and the nature of the occupation was more aggressive and brutal. Israel continue to exercise effective control of the Gaza strip through the;

- Control of Gaza's land crossings.
- Control by the imposition of a "no-go" zone.
- Complete control of Gaza's airspace and territorial waters.
- Control of the Palestinian Population Registry<sup>38</sup>.

Since the September 2005 withdrawal, Israel has sharply limited the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza. This slowly evolved into a full blockade and siege that would wreak unprecedented pain and sorrow in the region.

Amnesty International, in its report 'Suffocating: the Gaza Strip Under Israeli blockade' has called the blockade of Gaza a "form of collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza, a flagrant violation of Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention." Human Rights Watch, in a report published in March 2009 called 'Rain of Fire' said the blockade is a "serious violation of international law." Former U.S.

president Jimmy Carter has said the people of Gaza are being treated "like animals," and has called for "ending of the siege of Gaza" that is depriving "one and a half million people of the necessities of life."<sup>19</sup>

A leading academic on Palestine, Sara Roy of Harvard University, said that the consequence of the siege "is undeniably one of mass suffering, created largely by Israel, but with the active complicity of the international community, especially the U.S. and European Union".<sup>20</sup> She further went on to argue in reference to the disengagement plan the following: 'embedded in these statements is the assumption that Palestinians will be free to build their own democracy, that Israel will eventually cede the West Bank (or at least consider the possibility), that Israel's 'withdrawal' will strengthen the Palestinian position in negotiations over the West Bank, that the occupation will end or become increasingly irrelevant, that the gross asymmetries between the two sides will be redressed. Hence, the Gaza Disengagement Plan – if implemented 'properly' – provides a real (perhaps the only) opportunity for resolving the conflict and creating a Palestinian state. It follows that Palestinians will be responsible for the success or failure of the Plan: if they fail to build a 'democratic' or 'decent mini-state' in Gaza, the fault will be theirs alone'<sup>21</sup>.

The Palestinian election of 2006 was the most fair and transparent election ever conducted in the Middle East according to UN officials and Former US President Carter<sup>22</sup>. After the election there began a shameful drive to punish the people for the democratic choice they made. Ex-president Carter went on to say that Israeli-US-EU Rejection of the overwhelming Hamas election victory was a criminal act, accusing them of dividing the Palestinians into two peoples.<sup>23</sup>

Following Hamas's victory the \$1 Billion annual aid had was suspended with severe consequences. Even in 2006 78 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza sunk into poverty. There then followed a conspiracy for regime change, a US-led dirty trick to support and train Abbas's security force in order to discredit and destroy the will of the Palestinian people<sup>24</sup>.

### **1.3 Bisecting Palestine**

On Tuesday, April 13 2010 Israel passed two different orders called prevention of Infiltration (Amendment No. 2) and the Order regarding Security Provisions (Amendment No. 112). Both orders are have been heavily criticised by human rights groups who also expressed their concerns over the potential to carry out mass scale expulsion. These orders are the modern manifestations of Israel's core objective which is the redemption of the land with as few of the indigenous people as possible. Since its birth this core tenet of Israel has been efficiently carried out through various means, from ethnic cleansing as documented by many new historians and also under many different legal pretexts. This explains why, even as rhetoric and politics change, expulsion and dispossession continue through various methods.

Its strategy commenced with a total denial of Palestinian as a people. Since then, Israel has developed and refined policies to disperse imprison and impoverish the Palestinian people, in a relentless effort to destroy

them as a nation. It has industrialised Palestinian misery through ever more sophisticated systems of curfews, checkpoints, walls, permits and land grabs. It has transformed the West Bank and Gaza into laboratories for testing the infrastructure of confinement, human resolve and the limits of human despair.

Israel's entire legal structure in the occupied territory is designed to serve this end. Since 1967, in order to control the occupied Palestinian population, Israel enacted more than 1,200 military orders and has altered the administrative and legal situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in violation of international humanitarian law.

In securing its aspiration and maintain Jewish privileges over the land Israel enacted the Law of Return (1950), the Law of Absentee Property (1950), the Law of the State's Property (1951), the Law of Citizenship (1952), the Status Law (1952), the Israel Lands Administration Law (1960), the Construction and Building Law (1965), and the 2002 'temporary' law banning marriage between Palestinians in Israel and Palestinians of the occupied territories. In consistent with this trend it enacted in April 2010 two further military orders, Order regarding Prevention of Infiltration (Amendment No. 2) and the Order regarding Security Provisions (Amendment No. 112).

This military order is part of a series of steps implemented by Israel to empty the West Bank of Palestinians, especially by removing them to Gaza. It has the potential for thousands of Palestinians to be deported from the occupied West Bank. There are tens of thousands of people at risk, who pose no security threat whatsoever; they're just trying to lead their lives. The order will turn Palestinians into criminals

The order classifies people without the right Israeli paperwork as "infiltrators". The wording of the order has been amended from the original order drawn up in 1969 which even back then was in contravention of international law. The definition of "infiltrator" was then: "A person who entered the area knowingly and unlawfully after having been present in the east bank of the Jordan, Syria, Egypt or Lebanon following the effective date (of the order being given)." Under the new order this is to be changed to: "Infiltrator - a person who entered the area unlawfully following the effective date, or a person who is present in the area and does not lawfully hold a permit."

The orders are worded so broadly which theoretically would allow the military to empty the West Bank of almost all its Palestinian inhabitants. The document itself does not specify exactly what is meant by "a permit" and leaves Palestinians at the mercy of Israeli hands.

Such an indiscriminate proposal is criminally indifferent to the composition of the Palestinian people. Since the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their land in 1948 the vast majority are forced to live as refugees in host countries across the Middle East and many have also been forced to flee to other parts of the world. The nature of Diasporas is such that people are forced to live under various different regimes with many different challenges and the community functions under extreme difficulty. Such challenges have not stopped Palestinians from returning to their land and living as Palestinians in Palestine.

This indiscriminate assault on the Palestinian family and the Palestinian community contravenes not just international law but basic humanity. The average Palestinian family has global ties and this military order is granted to separate Palestinian families. This will have huge implications threatening pain, anger and frustration to be vented on the streets.

As many as ten different human rights group condemned these measure including Btselem and a number other Israeli ones. They've raised grave concerns over its future impact where tens of thousands of Palestinians can conceivably be thrown out of their homes. The human rights organisations have also mentioned its immediate impact, which will be felt by two distinct groups of Palestinains; those from Gaza and Palestinians and non Palestinians from other countries married to Palestinians in the West Bank. Suspected "infiltrators" could also be jailed for up to seven years under the new orders. Furthermore anyone being removed might also have to pay for the cost of their own deportation.

Implicit in the order also is Israel's effort to fragment the Palestinian cause and hasten Palestinian 'politicide'. Gaza and the West Bank are single entities and Israel has no jurisdiction and legitimate rights to alter that fact.

Palestinians in Gaza and Palestinians in the West Bank are all Palestinians just like British citizens in London and British citizens in Birmingham and there is no moral and legal authority to prejudice the rights of one over the other. Dividing the Palestinian people is a reckless attempt to dissolve the Palestinian cause into manageable units with the intention to prejudice and maybe even scupper final status negotiations.

Israel's policy of annexation known's no bounds. It continues to behave like a rogue state with wanton disregard for Palestinians and international law. The international community should not be surprised at this new development as this is just another manifestation of its core tenet coursing through human history and no doubt it will continue to exhibit many more of its ugly features in years to come.

These military orders belong in an apartheid state not in a so called democracy. They are products of a world view based on racist assumptions and not the values of human rights and human freedom.

## **2. GAZA UNDER SIEGE**

### **2.1 Gaza: Humanitarian Tragedy**

The combination of Siege and War has turned Gaza into a region of unbearable misery. The population density and lack of space compounded by extreme poverty are not just festering greater resentment but more importantly a glaring demonstration of the international community's failure to uphold its declared basic standards of human rights.

Gaza has the highest birth-rate in the region and the population grows by 3 to 5 per cent annually. Eighty per cent of the population is under 50 and 50 per cent of those are 15 years old or younger. Access to healthcare and education is rapidly declining. Half of the territory in which the population is concentrated has one of the highest densities in the world. In the Jabalya refugee camp alone, there are 74,000 people per square kilometre, compared with 25,000 in Manhattan.

According to the World Bank, Palestinians are currently experiencing the worst economic depression in modern history, caused primarily by the long-standing Israeli restrictions that have dramatically reduced Gaza's levels of trade and virtually cut off its labour force from their jobs inside Israel. This has resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment of 35 to 40 per cent. Some 65 to 75 per cent of Gazans are impoverished (compared to 30 per cent in 2000); many are hungry<sup>25</sup>. These are some of the gloomy descriptions of Gaza made by Sarah Roy in 2005 before the Siege, before the affects of aid suspension were visible, before 2006 bombardment and before Operation Cast Lead in 2008.

In a 2007 report sponsored by Eight leading NGOs including Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, Christian Aid and Save the Children, Gaza was described as a humanitarian implosion<sup>26</sup>. The report states that Gaza has suffered from a long-term pattern of economic stagnation and plummeting development indicators. The severity of the situation has increased exponentially since Israel imposed extreme restrictions on the movement of goods and people in Gaza. This report illustrates the gravity of the current situation across key sectors.

UNRWA delivers nearly all the assistance for the 1.1 million refugees in the strip<sup>27</sup>. Over the past ten years it has had to deliver more and more emergency programmes. In the last ten years UNRWA in Gaza has implemented emergency measures in response to security and economic crises caused by Israeli military actions and the ongoing closure regime:

- short-term job creation
- food and cash distribution
- shelter for refugees with damaged or destroyed homes.

Each month, more than 750,000 refugees receive basic food rations and 14,000 people receive short-term employment.

In Gaza, the destruction and devastation wrought by Operation Cast Lead has only aggravated already dire living conditions. In its 2010 appeal UNRWA states that there has been no significant relaxation of the embargo since the end of Operation Cast Lead. This is seriously hampering recovery and reconstruction efforts, including the recovery of thousands of homes and public infrastructure destroyed during Israel's three week bombardment. This has led to even greater aid dependency which further reinforces the cycle of poverty and violence.

## 2.2 Operation Cast Lead

Much has been said and written about Israel's three week bombardment. Initial alarms regarding indiscriminate killing and breaches of humanitarian law were raised by various human rights groups like Amnesty and Human Rights Watch. They accused Israel of various breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law. The UN carried out its own investigation with Richard Falk confirming these violations. Further to these accusations the UN commissioned Richard Goldstone to carry out a proper and thorough investigation of the actions and policies during the assault. The Mission concluded that Israeli armed forces violated customary international law<sup>28</sup>. Richard Goldstone also said 'These facts further indicate to the commission of the grave breach of extensive destruction of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly.<sup>29</sup> The mission concluded that there is evidence indicating serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law which were committed by Israel during the Gaza conflict, and that Israel committed actions amounting to war crimes, and possibly crimes against humanity.<sup>30</sup>

John Dugard, another a former UN rapporteur on human rights and a leading judge, carried out an investigation and his committee found that the IDF was responsible for the crime of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilians<sup>31</sup>. The committee also charged Israel with committing crimes against humanity. <sup>32</sup>Most disturbingly on the question of genocide it argued that the IDF aggression was an act of genocide. <sup>33</sup>

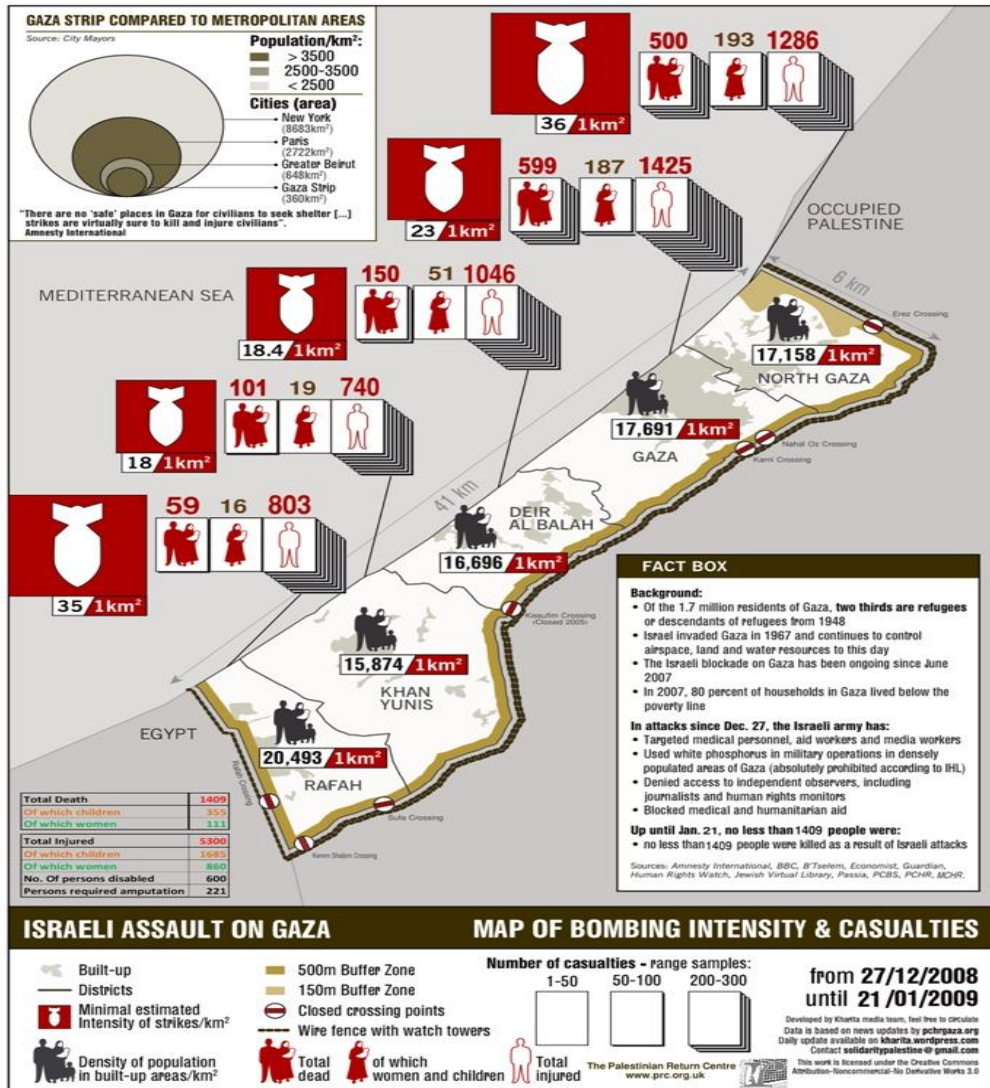
The indiscriminate bombing and onslaught wreaked carnage in the small strip whose mainly refugee population were trapped in this small territory. Figure 2 below provides some basic statistics on the assault. Noting Israel's response and the response of its supporters epitomises the total disregard for authoritative personalities and institutions and also the rule of law. Lord Goldstone was attacked as a traitor simply because he took an impartial view and looked at the conflict from a strictly legal point of view. The attacks against him, especially since he himself is a devout Jew, illustrate the high demand and expectation Zionists put on Jews worldwide that they should renounce all loyalties, including loyalties to international law in support Israel's self interest. This of course is a preposterous position but it highlights how brazen their demands are. Not everyone has the same determination and forthwith to stand against such appalling pressure and many cave in.

The Goldstone Report looked specifically at war crimes committed by both Hamas and Israel during operation Cast Lead; the investigation was premised on the notion that the 2008 assault on Gaza was in fact war. Some have argued that if there is to be criticism of the report it is the premise that the assault was actually a war. Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister, said Israel is engaged in a "war to the bitter end" against Hamas in



Gaza. In response Chris Hedge , articulated ' Israel uses sophisticated attack jets and naval vessels to bomb densely crowded refugee camps and slums, to attack a population that has no air force, no air defence, no navy, no heavy weapons, no artillery units, no mechanized armour, no command and control, no army, and calls it a war. It is not a war. It is murder.'<sup>34</sup>

Figure 2:



Source: Developed by Kharita Media Kharita.wordpress.com and updated by PRC

### 2.3 House demolitions, forced eviction and displacement

This is the perennial story of Palestinian refugees. Their life is one of continued displacement and expulsion and over six decades on it remains unabated. During Operation Cast Lead, almost 60,000 Palestinian homes, i.e. around a quarter of all housing stock in Gaza, was damaged or destroyed by the IDF, with the homes of over 3,500 families destroyed and over 50,000 sustaining various degrees of damage. As many as one in three

Gaza households were displaced at some point during the war, and an estimated 20,000 persons have been unable to return home.

The destruction wrought during the recent operation was an extreme case of effective and continuous Israeli demolition activity in Gaza since the start of the *Al Aqsa Intifada* in 2000, an estimated 9,400 shelters destroyed in Gaza during military operations over the past nine years or otherwise unfit for habitation need to be rebuilt. This includes 6,700 refugee homes - 2,300 destroyed during Cast Lead, 1,400 from pre-Cast Lead destruction and 3,000 homes in camps that are derelict and unsanitary and require reconstruction; tens of thousands more are awaiting repair. Due to the shortage of materials, no reconstruction has taken place since the assault on Gaza, forcing thousands of displaced families to live in precarious conditions and rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their minimum shelter needs.

## 2.4 Employment

In Gaza, the period since the imposition of blockade has seen dramatic increases in unemployment. Core productive sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing and construction, have slumped, contributing to a sharp contraction of the private sector, of almost 25 per cent during 2008. Job losses would have likely been even more precipitous were it not for expanded emergency job creation efforts by UNRWA and others, the growth in the tunnel economy and - in the immediate aftermath of Operation Cast Lead - large scale post-war cleanup activities. In the longer term, the widespread destruction of public infrastructure during the war has significantly deepened the economic and labour market crises facing Gaza. Unemployment rates are far higher than when the economic and political siege was intensified in mid-2007 and will remain so until it is lifted<sup>35</sup>.

Labour force results for 2008 reflected the first full-year effect of the heightened siege on Gaza that began in mid-2007. This period, leading up to the most destructive military operation in Gaza's history, witnessed dramatic increases in unemployment in a territory where rates of joblessness were already amongst the very highest in the world. Both refugees and non-refugees were affected, with the latter hardest hit. Indeed, during 2008 non-refugees were more likely to be out of work than their refugee counterparts, reversing the results of the 2007 labour force surveys<sup>36</sup>.

Overall, the adjusted broad unemployment rate<sup>2</sup> in Gaza rose to 49 per cent from about 38 per cent in 2007, with the refugee rate growing from 38.8 per cent to 48 per cent<sup>3</sup> and the non-refugee rate increasing from 36.4 per cent to 50.2 per cent. The core (ILO) unemployment rate in the Middle East and North Africa region in 2006 was about 12 percent, the highest of any region in the world. This compares to a core unemployment rate of about 40.6 percent in Gaza in 2008<sup>37</sup>.

Labour market conditions in Gaza in 2008 were arguably the worst in its history. The intensified Israeli siege on the territory choked off economic activity, especially in the private sector. The rise of unemployment and

the drop in real wages were sharp and dramatic and reflect a full year's impact of the Israeli siege. The rapid increase in women's labour force participation is also indicative of the degree to which households are exerting efforts to stem the decline in incomes<sup>38</sup>.

Perhaps the worst year in economic terms in Gaza's history ended with the most destructive military assault ever experienced in the territory. The ensuing death and destruction has broadened and deepened the economic and labour market crises by destroying physical productive capacity of businesses and farms, including farmland and livestock. This displaced employment and has delayed the recovery of the affected enterprises over the short and medium terms<sup>39</sup>.

As the severity of the Israeli siege has increased, the acquisition of imported inputs and the export of outputs remain severely constrained and the high levels of private sector unemployment documented in this briefing paper are likely to persist. The situation is made worse to the extent that it dissuades local businesses from maintaining investment levels<sup>40</sup>.

According to the World Bank, Palestinians are currently experiencing the worst economic depression in modern history, caused primarily by the long-standing Israeli restrictions that have dramatically reduced Gaza's levels of trade and virtually cut off its labour force from their jobs inside Israel. This has resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment

In 2004, a Harvard study concluded that by 2010 the increase in Gaza's population would require the 'creation of some 250,000 new jobs to maintain current employment rates at 60 per cent and the establishment of an additional 2000 classrooms and 100 primary healthcare clinics annually to bring access to education and public health services at par with the West Bank'<sup>41</sup>. Yet the Disengagement Plan states that Israel will further reduce the number of Palestinians working in Israel and eventually bar them altogether. The same Harvard study predicted that within a few years Gaza's labour force will be 'entirely unskilled and increasingly illiterate'. Between 1997 and 2004, the number of teachers per student declined by 30 per cent, with 80 students per class in government schools and 40 per class in UNRWA schools. Test scores for Palestinian children are well below the pass level, and the majority of eight-year-olds fail to advance to the next grade.

## **2.5 Food Security**

According to UNRWA poverty and food insecurity rates amongst refugees remain high. Consistent with deteriorating labour market conditions and the devastating impact of Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, initial results of a recent poverty survey conducted by UNRWA have highlighted a serious decline in living conditions there. An estimated 325,000 refugees, or around one-third of the total registered population, are believed to be below the abject poverty line, and *unable to meet their basic food needs*, with a further 350,000 now below the official line and therefore *lacking some of the basic requirements for a minimally dignified life*<sup>42</sup>. UNRWA appeal also states that 60.5 per cent of the population in Gaza are food insecure and therefore lack adequate

access to safe and nutritious food. In Gaza residents of rural areas were most affected, likely due to the widespread destruction of agricultural land and infrastructure during Operation Cast Lead and the imposition of a buffer zone in farm land abutting the border.

In its budgetary demands for 2010 UNRWA estimates it will need to distribute four rounds of food assistance to 675,000 poor refugees (135,000 families), meeting 76 per cent of the daily caloric needs of 325,000 refugees living in abject poverty and 60 per cent of the daily caloric needs of 350,000 refugees below the absolute poverty line. It will be further required to provide food for all 207,000 pupils in UNRWA schools through a school feeding programme

Food aid has become increasingly significant as food sources from agricultural areas in the occupied West Bank (Qalqilya, Tulkarem, and the Jordan Valley) and the Gaza Strip have been affected by Israel's indiscriminate and excessive use of force during military operations and the policy of closure and segregation. From 2000 to 2007, for example, Israel destroyed 2,851 dunums of land, 13,147 dunums of vegetables and 14,076 dunums of Palestinian field crops. During the last five years, Israel has destroyed 455 wells, 37,929 dunums of irrigation network, 1,000 km of main pipelines, 1.9 km of irrigation pools, 930 agricultural stores and 1,862 of animal barns and stables. In the same period 1.6 million Palestinian trees were uprooted, further jeopardizing Palestinian food production. In early 2007, food insecurity and vulnerability were approximately 40 per cent and 12 per cent respectively among refugees in the OPT. The refugee population living in camps had the least food security, which also indicates that food insecurity was highest in the Gaza Strip<sup>43</sup>.

In early 2009, 63 per cent of Palestinian households interviewed in the Gaza Strip stated that their economic situation had deteriorated as a result of Israel's most recent military operation. 60 per cent of Palestinian households were in need of assistance and 25 per cent were in need of psycho-social support. The most pressing needs identified by these households were cash assistance (39 per cent), cooking gas (20 per cent), house repair (16 per cent), and food (12 per cent)<sup>44</sup>.

66 per cent of chronically ill persons in the occupied Gaza Strip were in need of medical care during operation Cast Lead. Of those, 53 per cent received adequate health care, 27 per cent received inadequate care, and 20 per cent did not receive any health care. 30 per cent of those who did not receive care, did not do so because it was too dangerous to try to reach health facilities and hospitals<sup>45</sup>.

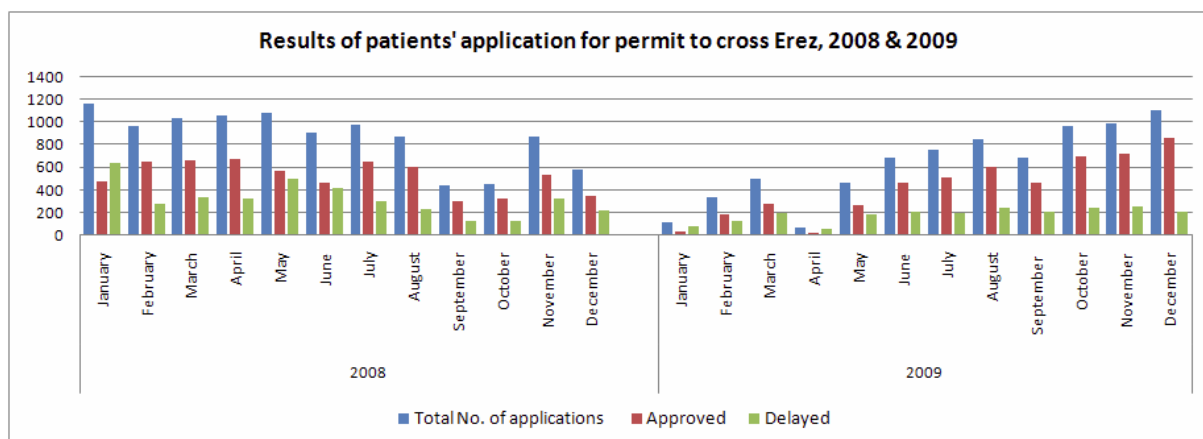
About 42 per cent of Gazans are now categorised by the World Food Programme (WFP) as 'food insecure' – i.e. lacking secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development; in five areas of Gaza, the figure exceeds 50 per cent. An additional 30 per cent of the population is 'food vulnerable', i.e. under threat of becoming food insecure or malnourished

## 2.6 Environment and Health

According to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA): "The closure of the Gaza Strip puts at risk the health of people in Gaza and undermines the functioning of the health care system."

Efforts to upgrade Gaza's eroded environmental infrastructure have been hamstrung by the blockade, resulting in reduced efficiency of water production and distribution and solid waste disposal operations along with declining access to safe and adequate water and sanitation services for the population. Up to 80 million litres of untreated and partially treated sewage is pumped into the sea off Gaza each day, posing major environmental and health risks. Ten months on from the end of the assault on Gaza, around 10,000 persons in northern Gaza still lack access to running water due to a lack of materials for maintenance and repair, whilst the rest of the population only has intermittent supplies resulting in overall consumption levels that fall far below acceptable international standards.<sup>46</sup>

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>47</sup> report many specialized treatments, for example complex heart surgery and certain types of cancer, are not available in Gaza and patients are therefore referred for treatment to hospitals outside Gaza. But many patients had their applications for exit permits denied or delayed by the Israeli Authorities and have missed their appointments. Some have died while waiting for referral. It is estimated that 1103 applications for permits for patients to cross Erez were submitted to the Israeli Authorities in December 2009. Around 21 per cent had their applications denied or delayed as a result of which they missed their hospital appointments and had to restart the referral process. Figure 3 shows the number of applicants who requested access and those who were accepted and those denied.



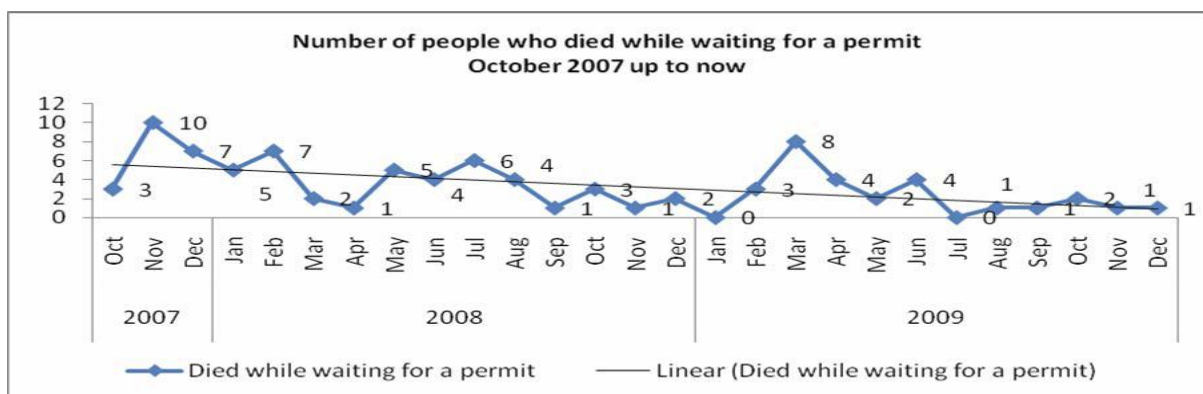
Source: WHO, Gaza Health Fact Sheet 20 January 2010

Figure 3 shows below the trend in the number of people that died while waiting for permit. Health professionals in Gaza have been cut off from the outside world. Since 2000, very few doctors, nurses or technicians have been able to leave the Strip for training to update their clinical skills or to learn about new medical technology. This is severely undermining their ability to provide quality health care. An effective health care system cannot be sustained in isolation from the international community.

During the health strike from end August to end December 2008, an estimated 1750 doctors, nurses and non-clinical staff from hospitals and health clinics went on strike and many of their jobs were filled by new people recruited by the government. Many of the staff who went on strike have not returned to their jobs.

In August 2008, two thirds of hospitals in Gaza had no maintenance staff. All Gazan hospitals – except the two in Rafah - now have engineers and technicians in post. But three quarters of technicians surveyed by WHO West Bank and Gaza in May 2009<sup>1</sup> had been in post for less than one year. Whilst half of the engineers had been trained in medical equipment maintenance, only one in four technicians had had any specific training.

Figure 3:



Source: WHO, Gaza Health Fact Sheet 20 January 2010

A report by UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) indicated that miscarriages increased by 40 per cent during Israel’s assault on Gaza. The report also pointed to an increase in caesarean sections at the al Shifa Hospital, Gaza, during the attack, standing at 32 per cent in December 2008 and 29 per cent in January 2009 of total deliveries during these months. According to the Palestinian Family Health Survey of 2006, the average rate of caesarean sections in normal situations was 15 per cent. The report also pointed out an increase in the number of births in January 2009 registering an increase of 1000 births - 5000 births in January 2009 compared to 4000 monthly births per month before the war. The increase is largely as a result of the increase in premature births<sup>48</sup>.

## 2.7 Psycho-social Impact

In addition to well documented physical and material impacts, Operation Cast Lead has had profound mental health impacts on the population of Gaza, who were already suffering as a result of the protracted conflict and blockade. Assessments carried out in the wake of the assault have highlighted a number of psycho-social problems, including fear and depression amongst adults and insomnia and bed wetting amongst children. A survey conducted by the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme immediately after the attack found that the overwhelming majority of children were exposed to traumatic events that could be seriously damaging to their mental health. These include witnessing death of family members, the physical destruction of homes, forced detention by Israeli soldiers or being trapped inside their homes during bombardment<sup>49</sup>.

In an interagency statement comprising 14 different agencies and institutions including the UN, UNICEF and Save the Children, set out to highlight key issues related to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in the response to the Operation Cast Lead . These guidelines are based on the IASC ( Inter Agency Standing Committee) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) guidelines and highlight those aspects of the guidelines that are particularly relevant for the current situation in Gaza. These organisations endorse the IASC MHPSS guidelines, together with the relevant national guidelines as the comprehensive policy and planning framework for the Gaza emergency response<sup>50</sup>.

The psychological trauma felt by women is alarming. In a report produced by the Culture and Free Thought Associations (CFTA) funded by United Nations Population Fund, a list of worrying findings were made amongst which was Women's physiological difficulties during the Gaza assault. It was described that;

- The war affected the entire Gaza population, men, women, and children, and resulted in immediate psychological problems such as fear, anxiety, panic attacks, feeling of insecurity, sleeping and eating disturbances, depression and sadness, and expecting death any minute.
- All women who were interviewed experienced extreme feelings of fear and still feel this fear even after the declaration of a truce and end to hostilities. Women feared more for the lives of their loved ones such as husband, children, family, etc. more than they fear for their own lives. This is attributed to the social structure which makes women think that the others are the real reason for their existence, and that their lives have less value without their families.
- Women ranked fears for their own lives only second. They expected to die any minute be it through gun fire or, indirectly, through lack of access to health services, particularly those women with pre-existing conditions. i.e. one cancer patient feared she would not be able to buy drugs during the assault.
- Women also feared what they thought would even be worse than death, to become disabled and, thus, dependent on others in their daily lives. This could be used as an excuse for their husbands to

leave them. A young man also expressed his preference to die fast rather than dying the “slow death” of a disabled person.

- For everybody in Gaza, night time was the worst due to electricity cuts and the intensive military operations.
- Women, just like men and children, lost all sense of security and protection. No place was safe be it inside the house or outside. The random bombing of houses and the utilisation of phosphoric bombs further exacerbated the feeling of insecurity.
- As such, women felt helpless and embarrassed for not being able to provide protection for their children. The feeling of inability to play the role of care-giver contributed to the psychological suffering of women, especially married women. One woman reported the reversal of roles whereby her nine year old son kept reassuring her that everything will be fine when he saw her crying.
- Women became very nervous when dealing with their children, screaming at small children with or without reason and sometimes ending up by beating them<sup>51</sup>.

In a separate study carried out by university of Michigan on the psychological trauma it concluded that the loss of socio economic resource as a result of the forced displacement lead to widespread depression in Gaza. The paper, "The Psychological Impact of Forced Settler Disengagement in Gaza: Trauma and Post-traumatic Growth, further concluded that the effect of disasters on mental health causes prevalence of depression and in Gaza this is about twice the baseline of what you'd expect<sup>52</sup>.

## DISCUSSION

Operation Cast Lead and the Siege on Gaza are not random isolated incidents but instead a systematic attempt to implement Zionist policy even if it denies Palestinians their basic human rights. It is the continuation of the same policy that has brutalised Palestinian lives and Palestinian society for over six decades. The massacre in Gaza last year is only one of many atrocities that have been perpetrated against the Palestinian people. The list is too long to document but we all know about Deir Yassin, Sabra-Shatilla, Jenin, and now Gaza.

Operation cast lead reinforces the previous assertion that Israel seeks to separate Gaza from the West Bank and reconfigure the international political debate on the historical conflict. By doing so it will freeze the peace process and any effective political process with the Palestinians. The plan to turn Gaza into an isolated Ghetto with endemic misery was conceived many years earlier and the siege and war that followed were the natural outcome of Israel's attempt to fragment Palestinian politics and Palestinian land.



In a briefing paper produced in 2006 by Geisha, Centre for the Legal Protection of Freedom of Movement concluded that 'Israel has acted to separate the Gaza Strip from the West Bank by restricting access between the two territories and establishing a domestic legal framework apparently aimed at sealing off Gaza from Israel and from the West Bank'. Those efforts contradict Israeli commitments, in signed agreements and in military orders, to treat Gaza and the West Bank as a single territorial unit<sup>53</sup>. It further commented on the detrimental effect of this policy by stating 'severing Gaza from the West Bank threatens the viability of economic, cultural, and social life in the Occupied Territories, especially in Gaza, and it undermines Palestinian institutions, including the Palestinian educational and health systems, which are spread throughout Gaza and the West Bank'<sup>54</sup>.

This is also apparent in the routine deportation and prevention of movement between the two regions. The Guardian on 12 November 2009 reported that a 20 year old student, Berlanty Azzam, was seized by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint in the West Bank in October 2009. Bound and blindfolded, she was forcibly deported to the Gaza Strip. The problem was that she had an ID card registered in Gaza, and the Israeli occupation, in the words of the human rights organisation, B'tselem, "almost completely forbids the movement of Palestinians between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip". Bethlehem University has had "continuous problems" getting Gaza students the requisite permission from Israel, according to communications officer Stephanie Rhodes. "We are a Palestinian university and these are Palestinian students. The West Bank and Gaza Strip are supposed to be treated as one territorial unit, but that's not what's happening."<sup>55</sup>

Restricting Palestinian students' freedom of movement has been just one element of Israeli measures that deepen the separation between the Gaza and the West Bank. While the bitter split between Fatah and Hamas has led some to talk about two different Palestinian "states", the physical division is one that Israel has created over a number of years. Severing ties between Gaza and the West Bank is part of a deliberate fragmentation policy that not only defies international law and human rights, but is also designed to render genuine Palestinian independence and self-determination impossible. It follows a better known Israeli strategy in the 1950s by senior Israeli Minister officials 'if you can't solve the problem then dissolve' it<sup>56</sup>.

Gaza is the continuation of Sixty Years of aggression, countless violations of international law, and the daily dehumanisation of Palestinians. Gaza is further confirmation of the scourge that has blighted Palestinians for generations. Gaza has to be seen from this historic perspective; it has to be put into context with broader considerations. The policy of disengagement in 2005 and Israel's supposed cessation of occupation have to be seen for what they really are, a ruse to legitimise further acts of aggression and expropriation of land. This colonial logic is not bounded to any universal logic, it does not conform to a logical and an ethical structure built around equality of human beings, compassion, pluralism, justice and human rights. It is an ethical system that is forged from time honoured colonial practice and its assumptions are at complete odds with the modern international system and the rule of law and human rights. It can only survive through the abuse of

power and the use of force; it cannot function amicably within the new enlightened global system but has to appropriate language and institutions to force its view of the world on the rest of humanity.

Israel's disengagement and continual fragmentation of the Palestinian issue, particularly the right of return is part of a strategy to dispel claims regarding Israel's responsibility for the historical conflict and for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. This is not a new strategy as Israel continually denied any responsibility for the plight of refugees, even when confronted with incontestable facts revealed by Israeli historians. Even though the accepted position to the origins of the refugee crises as well as Israel's obligations under international law is incontestable Israel remains its posture of denial, hoping it would go away as new realities are fashioned in the region. This strategy is a part of Israel's culture of denial which has prevented proper assessment of Gaza and its severe challenges. It assumes that Gaza's suffering is a recent phenomenon born of the intifada and Religious Fundamentalism. It mockingly assumes that the return of the land taken up by military installations and settlements – anywhere from 15 to 30 per cent of the territory-should be gratefully accepted by the Palestinians to be used for building institutions for a future state. It assumes that the removal of 9,000 Israeli settlers will soon redress the situation and allow Gazans to create a Dubai in Palestine.

If one wasn't aware of Israel's historical sin against the Palestinians such aspiration would be deemed as utter nonsense. But it's obvious to the discerning eyes that Israel is calculated in its application and that the primary goal of its strategy in Gaza is to subvert the historical narrative of expulsion, the plight of refugees, violent occupation, denial of basic human rights, and suffocation of the Palestinian economy. With one stroke it sought to make extinct the true composition of Gaza; a population of mainly refugees, surviving on international handouts, coping with challenges for basic subsistence and faced with a crippled economy. Palestinians over night are expected to transform a desolate region heaped in misery to develop a prosperous and vibrant society as a test case for their sincerity to live in peace with Israel.

There is no doubt that the destruction wrought by Israel – the demolition of homes, schools, roads, factories, workshops, hospitals, mosques, the razing of agricultural fields, the uprooting of trees, the imprisonment of the population and the denial of access to education and health services as a consequence of Israeli roadblocks and checkpoints – has been ruinous for Palestinians, especially those in the Gaza Strip. As a result, when the border was closed in 1993 after the Oslo talks, self-sustainment was no longer possible. The thirty-year process of integrating Gaza's economy into Israel's had made the local economy deeply dependent. Decades of expropriation and deinstitutionalisation had long ago robbed Palestine of its potential for development, ensuring that no viable economic or political structure could emerge<sup>57</sup>.

The damage – the de-development of Palestine – cannot be undone simply by 'returning' Gaza's lands and allowing Palestinians freedom of movement and the right to build factories and industrial estates. Enlarging its sliver of land – or Palestinian access to it – won't solve Gaza's myriad problems when its growing population is confined within it. Density is not just a problem of people but of access to resources, especially labour markets. Without porous boundaries allowing workers access to jobs, something the Disengagement

Plan not only doesn't address but in effect denies, the Strip will remain effectively a prison without any possibility of establishing a viable economy. Yet, it is the opposite idea – that with disengagement, development is possible – that Israel is trying to promote, in the hope that this will absolve it of any responsibility for Gaza's desolation, past or present<sup>58</sup>.

As stated previously, since 1948 Israel has consistently denied any moral responsibility for the creation of the refugee crises. Since their expulsion, Israel, rather than allow repatriation and or compensation as required by international law, has sought all means of resettlement and rehabilitation in the Arab states. In 1950s one key slogan which has become a key strategy coined by a senior Israeli Foreign Minister was 'if you can't solve it dissolve it'<sup>59</sup>, meaning if you can't solve the refugee problem you should dissolve the problem through various economic means and employment tactics. Since then there followed many initiatives to dissolve the refugee crises. The fragmentation of Palestinian politics is yet another method to dissolve a major political issue which after 1967 had been occupation and national self determination. By presenting Gaza as a failed project where Palestinians are unable and unwilling to build institutions for a state Israel was hoping to demonstrate that occupation was not the hindrance, rather the Palestinian people especially those in Gaza are the problem. In this logic it was hoped that the world will see that Israel is willing to give Palestinians their freedom but the Palestinians cannot use their freedom for peace and nation building.

Gaza is a victim of Israel's ongoing attempt to fragment and dissolve core tenets of the Palestinian crises namely refugees, occupation and expropriation of land. With Gaza Israel has managed to take the focus of the Quartet away from the key issues. Palestinians were subjected to countless forms of aggression many years before Hamas they were denied their basic human rights decades before any rockets were launched; Palestinians were denied their basic human rights and their dignity even before the PLO was formed and Arafat came on to the political scene. Palestinians were suffering long before any Palestinians mobilized against the systematic violence and expulsion perpetrated by the Zionist state.

The more interesting question I think is why this supposed belligerence and extremism of Hamas needs to reaffirmed by Israel? The idea that Hamas is the problem to a two state solution or any solution is extremely disingenuous. Israel denied Palestinians their rights even before Hamas. Then as now it was the PLO and Yassir Arafat who were 'terrorists'. We can recall the assault on Arafat before he passed away in 2004 and the kinds of rhetoric that was used; 'Arafat is a terrorist', 'Israel has no partner for negotiations' etc, If this were true then what about the previous four decades before Hamas?

The fact of the matter is it's not that Israel doesn't have a partner or Israel wants a partner it actually cannot have a partner for negotiation. Having a partner would pose a serious threat to its aspirations for more land without the indigenous population. A legitimate peace process based on justice and fairness, one which is acceptable in the eyes of the international community, is a compromise which no Israeli government can deliver. Even though Israel is built on 71% of mandate Palestine it cannot even make simple concessions like halting settlements which it is required to do under international law.

When only semblance of statehood was given to Palestinians during the Oslo process, which failed to guarantee even the most basic rights of the Palestinians, Yitzak Rabin who signed the accord was murdered by a Jewish extremist. One can only conclude that politics in Israel is such that it is extremely difficult to deliver on a deal based on international law, which guarantee human rights of the Palestinians and supports Palestinian self determination; and this has been the case for many years. Therefore it is easier to derail talks through demonization of the Palestinians by reframing the conflict through singling out extremism and terrorism with the purpose of avoiding global spotlight that would expose Israel's inherent contradictions, weaknesses and most important of all its lack of will and sincerity to uphold international law and justice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has tried to put the events in Gaza into a proper historical context. When understood in its historical context, Gaza is not an accident but a continuation of a strategy that stems from a deep seated desire within Zionism to expropriate more and more Palestinian land without its indigenous population. This is clearly visible in the recent developments in Gaza which has been physically and politically stripped away as a separate entity altogether from Palestine. Gaza has been removed from the historical narrative to a new narrative of post disengagement and post settlements. Ultimately we could see that Gaza is further distanced from the authentic Palestinian discourse which includes expulsion, displacement, refugees and the right of return.

Israel's strategy has always been to create a pretext for denying the basic human rights of the Palestinians and at the same time making new and impossible demands on them. Israel has failed in its obligations and the international community has failed to enforce the rule of law. Instead of addressing this dilemma new demands are made on the Palestinians, demands that simply address new realities instead of resolving the roots of the problem. Instead of working towards a just solution, based on fundamental principles and the rule of law, which already exists, the international community has diverted its attention. The international community seems obsessed about a peace process that is based on political demands of one party and not on the rights and principals of international law. This does nothing but delay implementation of international law and further denies Palestinians their due rights. This is a failed policy and will continue to fail while Palestinians suffer miserably.

It is with these considerations and the detailed humanitarian crises in Gaza that we make the following recommendations:

- The international community must put more pressure on Israel to lift the siege which has devastated the region the effects of which will be felt for many decades.

- Many humanitarian problems have been alluded to in this report and the PRC calls on all governments, international bodies and NGOs to provide relief and address the specific problems.
- The psychological problems mentioned in this report are endemic and will cause immeasurable damage for the future of the region. More needs to be done to help ensure Palestinian children in Gaza are not left mentally scarred for the rest of their lives.
- The international community and in particular the Quartet must not compromise universal rights
- All parties must address the roots of the problems not just in terms of Gaza but the conflict that has ravaged the region for six decades and address the central issues.
- No principal issue should be subsumed by secondary issue and the right of return, Palestinian self determination and the cessation of settlements are fundamental principles and are not conditional on Israel's new and changing demands.
- The conflict has very clear historical reasons and very precise and explicit legal requirements that need to be addressed. The international community's failure to enforce them does not mean they can be compromised. The legal rights are founded on universal ethics and international law, and must not be compromised by the demands of one party.
- The international community needs to return to the formula for justice that exists and has existed since 1948. It is premised around the right of return and Palestinian self determination, and redressing the wrong committed against the Palestinians. Yet the international community makes different demands on the Palestinians as a condition for establishing rights and principals based on international law in order to accommodate Israel's changing needs above Palestinian rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Amira Hass Gazas Separation from West Bank is Israels Great Triumph April 26 2009. <http://sudhan.wordpress.com/2009/04/27/gazas-separation-from-the-west-bank-is-israels-great-triumph/>

<sup>2</sup> Don Peretz. *Palestinians, Refugees and the Middle East Peace Process*. 1993. Page 3

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Roy, A Dubai on the Mediterranean, *London Review of Books*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2005

<sup>4</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009*

<sup>5</sup> Figures taken from a lecture by Salman Abu Sitta titled Back to the Roots, Al Awdas 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference 16<sup>th</sup> July 2006

<sup>6</sup> Beryl Cheal Refugees in the Gaza Strip Operational Report of AFSC. <http://www.palestine-studies.org/enakba/exodus/Cheal,%20refugees%20in%20the%20Gaza%20Strip.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> This figure is from Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=64>

<sup>9</sup> John Quigley. *The Case for Palestine*. Page 97

<sup>10</sup> John Quigley. *The Case for Palestine*. Page 97

<sup>11</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009*. page 2

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=73>

<sup>13</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009*

<sup>14</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009* Page 57

<sup>15</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009*

- <sup>16</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009*
- <sup>17</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009*
- <sup>18</sup> A full discussion on this is provided available in the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundations publication *Disengaged Occupiers The Legal Status of Gaza 2007*
- <sup>19</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8102631.stm>
- <sup>20</sup> Sarah Roy, *A Dubai on the Mediterranean*, London Review of Books. 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2005
- <sup>21</sup> Sarah Roy, *A Dubai on the Mediterranean*, London Review of Books. 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2005
- <sup>22</sup> Article by Jimmy carter published in [http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/03/09/colonization\\_of\\_palestine\\_precludes\\_peace.php](http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/03/09/colonization_of_palestine_precludes_peace.php)
- <sup>23</sup> Cross Cultural Understanding. News June 2007
- <sup>24</sup> The Guardian Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008
- <sup>25</sup> Sarah Roy, *A Dubai on the Mediterranean*, London Review of Books. 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2005
- <sup>26</sup> The Report is called *The Gaza Strip A Humanitarian Implosion*
- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=64>
- <sup>28</sup> Goldstone Report– Para 38
- <sup>29</sup> Goldstone Report – Para 32
- <sup>30</sup> <http://www.unhchr.ch/hurricane.nsf/0/9B63490FFCBE44E5C1257632004EA67B?opendocument>
- <sup>31</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dugard/post\\_356\\_b\\_258206.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dugard/post_356_b_258206.html) para 21
- <sup>32</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dugard/post\\_356\\_b\\_258206.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dugard/post_356_b_258206.html) para 27
- <sup>33</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dugard/post\\_356\\_b\\_258206.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dugard/post_356_b_258206.html) Para 29
- <sup>34</sup> Chris Hedges, who covered the Mideast for The New York Times for seven years. He spoke at a Revolution Books Town Hall Meeting at Ethical Culture Society January 13, 2009 condemning Israel and US complicity in Israel's murderous destruction of Gaza
- <sup>35</sup> UNRWA. Emergency Appeal 2010 p9
- <sup>36</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C39157C9919C5D87852576BA00632087>
- <sup>37</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C39157C9919C5D87852576BA00632087>
- <sup>38</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C39157C9919C5D87852576BA00632087>
- <sup>39</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C39157C9919C5D87852576BA00632087>
- <sup>40</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C39157C9919C5D87852576BA00632087>
- <sup>41</sup> Sarah Roy, *A Dubai on the Mediterranean*, London Review of Books. 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2005
- <sup>42</sup> UNRWA. Emergency Appeal 2010 p10
- <sup>43</sup> FAFO and UNFPA, 2009. "Life in the Gaza Strip Six Weeks after the Armed Conflict of 27 December 2008 – 17 January 2009; Evidence from a Household Sample Survey."
- <sup>44</sup> FAFO and UNFPA, 2009. "Life in the Gaza Strip Six Weeks after the Armed Conflict of 27 December 2008 – 17 January 2009; Evidence from a Household Sample Survey."
- <sup>45</sup> FAFO and UNFPA, 2009. "Life in the Gaza Strip Six Weeks after the Armed Conflict of 27 December 2008 – 17 January 2009; Evidence from a Household Sample Survey."
- <sup>46</sup> OCHA special focus August 2009 Locked In: The Humanitarian Impact of Two Years of Blockade on the Gaza Strip
- <sup>47</sup> World Health Organisation, Gaza Health Fact Sheet, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010
- <sup>48</sup> Badil. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009*
- <sup>49</sup> See: Death anxiety, PTSD, Trauma, grief, and mental health of Palestinians victims of War on Gaza, GCMHP, available at: [www.gcmhp.net](http://www.gcmhp.net).
- <sup>50</sup> Interagency Statement on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Gaza in 2009: Principles and Response
- <sup>51</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/50205F1E9F475273852575680059D75A>
- <sup>52</sup> <http://www.ns.umich.edu/htdocs/releases/story.php?id=6358>
- <sup>53</sup> [http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications\\_english/Disengagement%20Danger%206%20feb%2006.pdf](http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications_english/Disengagement%20Danger%206%20feb%2006.pdf)
- <sup>54</sup> [http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications\\_english/Disengagement%20Danger%206%20feb%2006.pdf](http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications_english/Disengagement%20Danger%206%20feb%2006.pdf)
- <sup>55</sup> <http://www.bethlehem.edu/Berlanty/media-coverages/2009-11-12%20UK%20Guardian-Fragmenting%20Palestinian%20land.pdf>
- <sup>56</sup> Nur Masalha, *The Politics of Denial*, Pluto 2003, page 67
- <sup>57</sup> Sarah Roy, *A Dubai on the Mediterranean*, London Review of Books. 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2005
- <sup>58</sup> Sarah Roy, *A Dubai on the Mediterranean*, London Review of Books. 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2005
- <sup>59</sup> Nur Masalha. *The Politics of Denial*. Page 69