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## The Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza: Then and Now

Gaza used to be beautiful. It was a land filled with olive trees and vines, pervaded with flowering plants and trees, located along the Mediterranean Sea, which gifted an untiring supply of fish to the people along its waters. Undoubtedly, Gaza was of a land flowing with milk and honey. But in 1967, that began to change. Israel launched an attack on its neighboring countries, swiftly killing thousands and taking the Golan Height from Syria, the West Bank from Jordan, and the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza strip from Egypt, beginning the occupation in Gaza and the West Bank that is still to end, and destroying every aspect of the lives of the indigenous Christians, Jews, and Muslims who call themselves Palestinians.

It began with the occupation. For many years, the people in Gaza suffered the same fate as those in the West Bank: land dispossession, settlers, confiscation of resources, and the presence of military forces. According to the worldwide human right group Amnesty International, “Until 2005, more than 9,000 Israeli settlers were illegally residing in Gaza” ([Israel’s Occupation](#)). The justice system in Palestine has been called apartheid by groups even within Israel itself. Palestinians are tried under military court, which allows for them to be **arrested and held indefinitely without any evidence or cause**. And even *if* they are taken to court, they are not given the same rights as even the illegal settlers on their land, with the most basic things restricted, like access to lawyers. The most basic resources are lacking, with only 4% of water in Gaza uncontaminated and imports and exports of any resources

highly restricted by Israel to ensure that no real economy could ever be formed. These policies last until now in the West Bank, where a wall cuts deep into Palestinian territory, which along with “checkpoints, roadblocks and settler-only roads, as well as the overall permit regime, make simple daily tasks for Palestinians who are trying to get to work, school or hospital a constant struggle” ([Israel’s Occupation](#)). In 2005, Israel removed all military presence from within Gaza, as well as removing all settlers and demolishing the settlements. While this was a step in the right direction, international organizations, **including the UN**, still consider Gaza to be under military occupation as Israel controls all air and maritime space, all but one entry into the strip, the population registry, and utilities, including water, electricity and communications, and this control has been put to the most shocking of purposes in recent weeks.

That leads to the present. On October 7, Hamas, the military group that currently controls Gaza (it was elected by a slim majority in 2006; it never relinquished control), launched a rocket attack on Israel and a subsequent land attack that killed 1,200 Israelis, injured thousands more, and took over 240 hostage. Most of these people were civilians, and most of them were innocent. But nothing can justify the utter devastation Israel has brought upon the people of Gaza, the collective punishment that has led to, in the words of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres ([UN Press](#)), “hell on Earth”.

The disproportionate attack on the civilian infrastructure of Gaza began with swift brutality. Before, Gaza had survived the stifling occupation only through the 500 aid trucks that entered the Strip every day, as the pitiful economy Israel had allowed them to have was not enough to survive on ([500 trucks of aid](#)). This international aid was, of course, immediately ceased. On October 9th, Israel abused its control of Gaza’s resources to cut off all water, electricity, and fuel, which caused the sanitation system

to close and all hospitals and communications companies to resort to the backups they had prepared for such an event, which had enabled them to keep up vital services during previous attacks on the enclave. But Israel was intentional with its attacks, targeting gas tanks and solar fields citing their potential military usage by Hamas, leaving many critical services in ruin. Because what need is there for restraint when you are fighting “human animals” - the exact words of the Israeli defense minister, the man planning the destruction ([Human animals](#)). And it is clear that the IDF has exercised no restraint; the equivalent of two nuclear bombs has been dropped in little more than a month, more journalists have died than in any conflict in the past 30 years; schools, refugee camps, hospitals, homes, churches, mosques, and ambulances have been targeted; and hundreds of doctors and international aid workers have been killed – unsurprisingly, as UNRWA buildings are among those hit ([Force of bombs](#)) ([UNRWA schools hit](#)). Israel claims it has done all it can to minimize civilian casualties, including by dropping flyers over neighborhoods to be evacuated, but these evacuations are impossible, as the original evacuation area included northern Gaza, but now extends to many parts of the south too. And even if a family somehow manages to take the harrowing journey south, they encounter horrors along the “humanitarian corridors” defined by the Israeli military, including being stripped and beaten ([Death corridors](#)). But finally, after weeks of unbearable suffering, a “humanitarian pause” agreement was finally reached.

As the dust settled, the true extent of the destruction became clear. Over 45% of housing had been destroyed, over 10,000 Palestinians killed, at least 4,000 of them children, 18 out of 35 hospitals destroyed, tens of thousands injured without any hope of medical attention, no clean water, no food, no fuel for humanitarian aid, and the utter carnage wreaked by the indiscriminate bombing, the rubble and

corpses everywhere, the blood and terror and destruction ([Damage](#))([Deaths](#))([Hospitals](#)). The truce finally gave the people of Gaza time to breathe, to sleep, to search for lost family members and bury some of those who had died. However, many did not even get these few comforts, as Israeli soldiers prevented Gazans to head north to look for family or return to their homes, and Israeli authorities have even gone as far as to ban celebrating the return of Palestinian prisoners released as part of the hostage deal, as the Israeli National Security Minister says that “expressions of joy are a support for terrorism”, and that “celebrations of victory give strength to those same human scum.” ([Release of prisoners](#)).

After everything these people had suffered, mothers and sisters and brothers were prevented from celebrating the return of a loved one who, in most cases, was not even convicted, but held indefinitely under military law without trial or reason in brutal and inhuman prisons where even children are beaten and strip searched ([Condition in prisons](#)) .

But even this temporary reprieve was to come to an end, as after 7 days both sides refused to negotiate further blaming each other for the end to the truce ([End of truce](#)). As soon as the truce ended, Israel continued the bombing – bringing the death toll up to 15,000, 6,600 of them children – this time targeting the southern part of the Gaza strip, including many areas that they had previously marked as safe ([Attack on south](#)). For many of the 1.7 million internally displaced people of Gaza, this is not the first or even second time they have moved, as Israel is constantly changing which zones are safe, and many people are unable to even access the maps and warnings given by the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) because internet access to the strip is down ([Displacement, “Safe” zones](#)). And while the bombing has become even more intense than before the pause, the health, water, and sanitation systems in Gaza are in ruins, WHO has warned that there is not just a risk, but a certain health crisis ahead as thousands are

already beginning to suffer from the lack of sanitation and clean water ([WHO report](#))([Health risks](#)).

The spread of disease is also feared to increase as immune systems are weakened by poor nutrition and the coming cold weather and rains. Altogether, the outlook is dark for the people of Gaza, and dark for the future of Palestine in general. Farmers and villagers in the West Bank are being killed and driven from their homes and towns by increasingly aggressive settlers emboldened by a silent Israel and powerless Palestinian Authority, while Palestinians living in Israel and East Jerusalem are suffering from severe discrimination and odious censorship. Unless the West refuses to back Israel as they commit these atrocious crimes, this – in the words of Israeli Holocaust Scholar Raz Segal – “textbook case of genocide”, and force them into immediately allowing the unrestricted flow of humanitarian aid, the people in Gaza have a severe risk of being wiped out ([Textbook case of genocide](#)).