



مجلس العلاقات الدولية - فلسطين  
Council on International Relations



# 16 Years of Gaza Siege

Figures and Facts

A Report by the Council on International Relations – Palestine  
December 2022



### **Council on International Relations - Palestine**

The Council on International Relations is a non-profit organization established in 2013, dedicated to establishing an effective network of relations at the international level to support the rights of the Palestinian people and their aspirations for freedom and independence through political, diplomatic and legal means. The Council on International Relations aims to create a global dialogue to promote mutual understanding between Palestinians and the world.

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## Introduction

The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with approximately 2.35 million people (47.3% of whom are children under 18) living in a narrow coastal enclave of only 360 km<sup>2</sup>. 71% of the total population are refugees who were displaced in 1948 and 1967 and now live in camps that lack the minimum necessities of a decent human life.

What makes life in Gaza even more tragic is the unjust siege imposed by the Israeli occupation since 2006, when the Palestinian Movement Hamas won the Palestinian elections. The disastrous effects of the siege is prompted the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross to call for considering the siege a flagrant violation of the international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and a form of collective punishment practiced by the Israeli occupation against the residents of the Gaza Strip.

The siege has had profound effects on the living conditions in Gaza, heavily impacting economic and social conditions, infrastructure, and health and education services. This report reviews the repercussions of the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip for more than 16 years by documenting a set of figures and facts that were monitored by governmental, local and international reports.



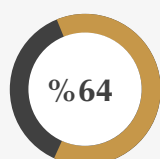
# 2.35

million people live the Gaza Strip, one of the most densely populated areas in the world

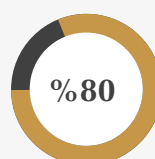
## First: Social Conditions

The restrictions imposed on Gazans as a result of the Israeli siege deepened the social crises in the Strip, as poverty rates increased dramatically, unemployment spread among the majority, especially young people, housing opportunities decreased, and psychological and social problems spread among all segments of society, especially women and children.

### Poverty



**Poverty rate in the Gaza Strip**



**of the residents of the Gaza Strip depend on aid and donations**

- + The poverty rate in the Gaza Strip reached 64%, which is more than twice that in the West Bank. 33.8% of Gazans live below the extreme poverty line.
- + %57 of families in Gaza suffer from food insecurity, i.e. nearly 6 out of 10 families in the Gaza Strip.
- + What exacerbates the food insecurity crisis is the large wave of high prices. According to the latest estimates for 2022, food prices have increased by 20-40% to date, an increase that is difficult for most citizens to bear.
- + About 80% of the population depend on humanitarian aid and donations provided by international organizations, UNRWA or the government.
- + The minimum wage in Gaza is 682 shekels (\$206.6), which is less than half of the minimum wage set by the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Finance, standing at 1,850 shekels (\$528.5)

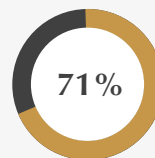




## Unemployment

# 51%

Unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip



Unemployment rate among the youth

- + Nearly half of the labor force is unemployed. The unemployment rate in Gaza is estimated at 51%, one of the highest in the world.
- + Unemployment rates among young people are catastrophic, reaching 71.1%.
- + After the second Intifada in 2000, the Israeli occupation reduced the percentage of workers who crossed from Gaza to work within the Green Line, to reach only 3% out of 150,000 workers.

## Housing

# 70%

of Gaza families are unable to build new housing units

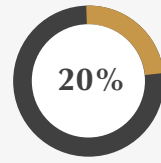
- + More than 70% of families are unable to build new housing units or rehabilitate existing ones without donor assistance.
- + The Gaza Strip needs to build more than 130,000 housing units to keep pace with the natural increase in the population.
- + %20 of Gazan families live in overcrowded housing units (more than 3 persons per room).
- + 75,000 housing units in the Gaza Strip are in urgent need of rehabilitation.



## Psychosocial Effects

# 61%

of the children of Gaza suffer from mental disorders



of the residents suffer from mental health challenges

- + The majority of Palestinians suffer from trauma, stress and other psychological problems, as the WHO estimates that 360,000 people - 20% of Gaza population - suffer from mental health challenges due to the siege.
- + 61% of Gazan children suffer from psychological disorders such as fear and anxiety. Studies indicate that 51% of children no longer have the desire to participate in any activities, 47% of whom are no longer able to perform school and family duties, and 48% of whom suffer from malnutrition.
- + Due to psychological and social pressures, Gaza recorded an increase in suicide attempts, and most of the suicide cases in recent years were among youth (87% of suicide cases were youth), especially those under the age of 30, more than half of whom are females.
- + Due to the unjust occupation policies that turned the lives of Gazans into an unbearable hell, many of whom were forced to emigrate in search of a better life. Reports indicate that more than 60,000 young men have left Gaza over the past years, and dozens of them have died on the way.
- + Thousands of young people in the Gaza Strip are no longer able to get married, as there has been a steady increase in their number. There was also an increase in divorce rates, which reached 20.7% of the total number of marriages in 2021.





## Second: Services and Infrastructure

The siege and repeated aggression on the Gaza Strip led to the deterioration of municipal services and the infrastructure. The ability of the municipalities to function decreased to 20%. Israeli warplanes bombed the only power plant in Gaza and restricted the entry of the fuel needed to operate it. This caused a large deficit in energy supplies and led to deep crises in the electricity, water and sanitation sectors.



### Electricity

**12 to 20** hours of power outages daily

- + Hours of power outages per day range between 12-20 hours in most areas of Gaza, due to fuel shortages and damaged or destroyed electrical infrastructure.
- + The Gaza Strip is experiencing an acute crisis in the supply of electricity as a result of the bombing of the only power plant in 2006. Since then, the power generated from the power plant and additional lines is only about 45% of the actual needs of the Strip.
- + This crisis exacerbated further in the aftermath of the Israeli aggression in May 2021, which led to the destruction of 31 electrical transformers, 9 main lines, and more than 79,000 meters of cables.
- + Since 2010, at least 29 people – including 24 children - have died in Gaza due to fires or suffocation related to power outages.

## Water

# 90%

of groundwater in Gaza is not suitable for drinking

- + More than 90% of the groundwater in Gaza is not suitable for drinking, and most of the groundwater wells contain high levels of chloride and nitrates, posing a threat to the health and safety of the population. As a result of the salinity of water, increasing numbers of Gazans are suffering from kidney failure.
- + %30 of the population of Gaza (more than 800,000 people) suffer because water does not reach them regularly as a result of the continuous power outages.
- + Most families in Gaza receive tap water only once every four days for a period of (6-8) hours only, and there is a possibility of losing this if the electricity is cut off as they are unable to operate the household pumps used to fill the water tanks.
- + As a result of water pollution, most of the Gaza population depend on treated water supplies (which are expensive and of low quality) due to the desalination plants operating at a low capacity, equivalent to only 15% of their capacity.





## Sewage

**30%** **only of wastewater is treated**

- + Approximately 108 million liters of raw or partially treated sewage are discharged into the Mediterranean every day, due to the inability of sewage treatment plants, which treat only 30%.
- + The Israeli occupation is preventing pumps, concrete, welding supplies, pipes, water purification chemicals, and other materials needed to maintain the water and sanitation infrastructure into the Gaza Strip.

### Third: Health Conditions

Over the years of the siege, the Gaza Strip has suffered from an acute shortage of medical supplies, including medicines and basic medical equipment. This led to a decline in health care services at a rate of 66%, ambulance and emergency services at a rate of 23%, dialysis at a rate of 42%, cardiovascular surgery at a rate of 66%, and orthopedics at a rate of 13%. The health situation is also plagued by a crisis of lack of fuel to operate generators in hospitals, primary care clinics and health centers. As a result, many health services have stopped. The non-governmental health sector has also deteriorated and UNRWA health services have declined, in addition to many highly qualified medical cadre leaving the Gaza Strip, which undermines the capacity of the health sector, which is based on a fragile structure.

#### Chronic Medical Conditions



**70%**  
Anemia rate among children

- + Because of the difficult economic conditions resulting from the siege, the rate of anemia among Gazan children reached about 70% and among pregnant women 40%.
- + The siege has severely limited patients' ability to reach hospitals in the West Bank and the occupied territories to receive treatment there. The average number of patients who were not allowed to travel abroad for treatment was approximately 56%, especially cancer patients, whose number clearly increased in the Gaza Strip.
- + Cancer death rates in Gaza are higher than the global average, and what makes it worse is the occupation's refusal to allow the import of equipment and devices necessary for early detection of tumors. The Gaza Strip records 1,800 cancer cases annually, and more than half of them are in urgent need of traveling abroad to receive chemotherapy and radioactive, which is not available in Gaza.

## Health Facilities

**1.4** beds are available in hospitals for every 1,000 people

- + The number of available hospital beds in Gaza per 1,000 people is approximately 1.4 beds, as the percentage has decreased by more than half compared to 2005, when it was 3 beds per 1,000 people..
- + Due to frequent power outages, hospitals provide limited services as they relied on generators, which produced a weak electrical current that could damage sensitive medical equipment. For example, as of January 2014, more than 300 broken medical devices have accumulated in Gaza hospitals, including the only MRI machine in the Gaza European Hospital.
- + The electricity crisis forced hospitals to postpone non-emergency surgeries, thus increasing the estimated waiting period for patients to 16 months as of 2021, compared to 3 months in 2005.

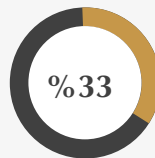




## Medicines and Medical Supplies

**47%**

shortage in drug stocks



shortage in medical disposables

- + The shortage rate in drug stocks reached 47%, including basic medicines that include cancer and blood diseases, while the deficit rate in 2005 was only 16%. In addition, nearly 40% of medicines and medical consumables are completely missing from the Ministry of Health's stores.
- + The shortage rate of basic consumables reached 33%, including consumables for operations and emergency departments.
- + The shortage in laboratory and blood bank requirements reached 60%.

#### Fourth: Economic Conditions

As an indicator of the catastrophic effects of the siege on the Gaza economy, Gaza's GDP has shrunk by 50% since 2007, and the average income is now at least 31% lower than it was in 1994, according to the UNCTAD report of 25 November 2020. The economic cost of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip during the past decade was estimated at \$16.7 billion, which means that per capita economic losses as a result of the siege amounted to about \$9,000, caused by the long-term closure and the military operations that Gaza was subjected to during the siege. The siege also led to the reluctance of investors, limiting the growth of the national economy, and reducing the gross national product. Over the past three decades, the contribution of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian gross national product decreased from 36% to only 18%, according to 2021 statistics. The siege also caused the complete collapse of the tourism sector, due to the severe restrictions imposed on movement to and from the Gaza Strip.

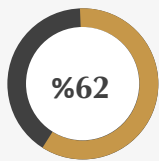


The average daily wage for a worker decreased to reach

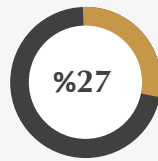
3\$



## Imports and Exports



decrease in the monthly average number of trucks exporting from Gaza compared to 2005



decrease in the monthly average number of trucks entering Gaza compared to 2005

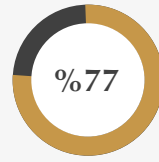
- + All commercial crossings of Gaza are now completely closed, except the Karm Abu Salem crossing with the Israeli occupation, and the Rafah land crossing with Egypt.
- + The occupation, under the pretext of the "dual use policy," prevents the import of many raw materials necessary for the production process, and imposes severe restrictions on industrial and agricultural exports.
- + Gaza suffers from a severe shortage in imports. For example, the number of trucks loaded with goods that entered the area during the first five months of 2022 reached nearly 8 thousand trucks per month, which is 27% less than the monthly average of the number of trucks in 2005 before the siege was imposed, knowing that the population of Gaza has increased by more than 50%.
- + Exports also reached low levels. For example, 316 trucks left Gaza on a monthly basis through Karm Abu Salem commercial crossing in 2020, while the number of trucks leaving the Strip in 2005 was approximately 835 trucks.



## Industry

# 95%

decline in the number of factories



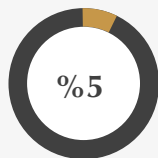
of workers in the industrial sector have been laid off

- + The number of Gaza factories decreased by more than 95%. About 70% of workers in the industrial sector were laid off, as a result of the siege, the closure of crossings, and the prevention of the entry of raw materials.
- + Most of the factories are still producing operate at 50% of their capacity, and some operate at lower rates, due to the electricity crisis and the weak purchasing power of the Gazan citizen, as well as the occupation's prevention of exporting most products from Gaza.
- + The garment industry accounted for 17% of Gaza's GDP in 2007, but due to the siege, 87% of garment factories have closed down.
- + The Israeli aggression, in May 2021 alone, destroyed more than 1,641 economic facilities, and slowed down economic growth.

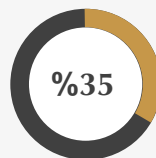




## Agriculture



**%5** is the share of agriculture in Gaza from the gross domestic product



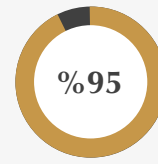
**%35** of the arable land is prohibited from work

- + The share of agriculture in Gaza in the GDP has fallen to its lowest level, reaching only 5%.
- + The restricted access areas "buffer zone" imposed by the Israeli occupation forces along the eastern and northern borders of the Gaza Strip amounted to a depth of about 1.5 km, or about 35% of the arable land of Gaza. The occupation forces prevent farmers from accessing their agricultural lands in this area in whole or in part, and target them periodically, whether by arrest, shooting, or even direct killing.
- + Occupation aircraft continuously spray pesticides on the Palestinian lands along the border, causing damage to agricultural crops, even in areas that are more than 300 meters away from the fence. As a result, about 13,730 dunums of agricultural crops were damaged by 2018, and 70% of the livestock grazing in the buffer zone were affected. This threatens the only source of livelihood for Gazan farmers.
- + Because of the repeated closure of the Karm Abu salem crossing (the only commercial crossing) and the impossible conditions the occupation imposes, Gaza farmers face serious challenges in exporting their agricultural products, which leads to damage to their crops and consequently they incur heavy losses.

## Fishing

# 64%

decline in the number of fishermen since 2000



of fishermen in Gaza live below the poverty line

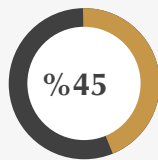
- + Due to the siege and the repeated Israeli aggression against fishermen, the number of registered fishermen in Gaza decreased from 10,000 in 2000 to 3,600 in 2022, and 95% of whom live below the poverty line.
- + The occupation imposes restrictions on fishing areas, which range between 2-6 miles, and 12 miles at best, and it also prohibits the import of fishing tools and equipment.
- + The occupation warships continue to attack fishermen. In 2020, for example, 308 shooting incidents by the Israeli navy were recorded at fishing boats coming from Gaza. In the same year, the occupation navy arrested 10 fishermen, wounded 12 others, confiscated 4 boats and destroyed fishermen's equipment in 12 incidents.



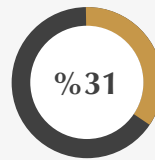
## Fifth: Educational Conditions

The reality of education in Palestine showed positive indicators, unlike other sectors that were severely affected by the occupation and the siege in particular. In general, illiteracy rates in Palestine reached their lowest levels in the world at 2.3% for 2021. Although the Gaza Strip is the poorest in the Arab world, according to many studies, the percentage of educated people is the highest among Arabs, at a rate exceeding 97%. However, the siege imposed over the past 16 years has left profound effects on students, academics, the educational process, and school and university facilities.

### Students Conditions



of university students are unable to pay tuition fees



of Gaza families are unable to meet basic education needs

- + It is estimated that more than 160,000 children in Gaza require ongoing psychosocial support; and this greatly affects their academic achievement.
- + Due to the scarcity of financial resources resulting from the siege, about 31% of families in Gaza face difficulties in meeting basic educational needs, such as school fees and books.
- + The students who are unable to pay tuition fees or who are unable to register in various universities is 49% of the total number of male and female students.





## School Facilities

**68%** of the schools in Gaza operate on a double shift

- + Schools in Gaza suffer from severe overcrowding, as 70% of UNRWA schools and 63% of schools run by the Ministry of Education operate on double shift, and there are schools operating on 3 shifts per day.
- + Overcrowding has reduced the number of teaching hours available, created difficulties for students to focus on their lessons, increased levels of violence in schools, and affected the time available for reinforcement learning and support for students who are slow learners.
- + Gaza needs 20 new schools annually as a result of the natural increase in the number of students, which is estimated at 15,000 students annually.
- + From time to time, the Israeli occupation deliberately bans the import of basic school supplies into Gaza, including textbooks, pencils, laboratory equipment, computers, and paper.
- + Due to power cuts, schools often operate without electricity; this leaves students in the dark and makes many educational activities impossible.

## Sixth: Mobility and Travel

Movement and travel are among the basic rights stipulated in international laws and regulations, but for the Palestinians in general and the Gazans in particular, it is a distant dream, in light of the siege, which has turned the tiny enclave into an open air prison.

- + The Israeli occupation prevents the residents of Gaza from traveling or moving to the West Bank and Jerusalem, and prevents the residents of the West Bank and Jerusalem from entering or moving to Gaza, in flagrant violation of the rights of Palestinians to move between the territories of the Palestinian Authority.
- + The number of travelers through the Rafah land crossing with Egypt has been reduced, as monthly arrivals and departures through it amounted to about 15,000 passengers in 2021, compared to 40,000 travel cases in 2005.
- + %28 of patients' permit requests to travel through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing were accepted in 2020, compared to 97% in 2005.
- + During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifada, the occupation destroyed the Gaza International Airport and stopped work at the Gaza port. Thus, the residents of Gaza were deprived of freedom of movement. Even Muslim and Christian worshipers were prevented from visiting the holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.
- + The imposed restrictions prevented the exchange of academics, experts, and medical teams between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The siege also limited the ability of Gazans to continue their education or attend specialized training programs abroad, which negatively affected the quality of human resources available in the coastal enclave.



62%

The rate of decline in the number of passengers traveling through the Rafah crossing since 2005

## Seventh: Israeli Attacks

Over the past 16 years, the Gaza Strip has been subjected to five major rounds of Israeli aggression. As a result, thousands were killed or wounded, and the civilian infrastructure and residential homes were destroyed, and the economic and living conditions significantly deteriorated. Three military major attacks launched by the Israeli occupation forces on the Gaza Strip in 2008, 2012, and 2014, in which 3,920 Palestinian citizens were killed and 17,700 injured, and resulted in economic losses of about \$6 billion, the complete destruction of 16,300 housing units, and the partial destruction of 179,500 residential units.



### 2008-2009 Aggression

The first attacks began on December 27, 2008 and lasted for 21 days, ending on January 18, 2009. Over the course of three weeks, Israeli forces dropped about one million kilograms of explosives on Gaza, killing 1,436 Palestinians and injuring about 5,400 others, including a large number of women and children, and about 4,100 homes were destroyed and 17,500 others damaged.

### 2012 Aggression

An Israeli attack took place on November 14, 2012, and lasted eight days until November 21, 2012. Israeli strikes killed 162 Palestinians, injured approximately 1,300, and completely destroyed about 200 homes, and 1,500 homes were partially destroyed.

## 2014 Aggression

The longest and deadliest Israeli assault on Gaza began on 8 July 2014, lasted 51 days - and ended on 26 August 2014. The number of attacks totaled approximately 60,664 Israeli land, air and sea attacks, killing 2,147 Palestinians (in some cases entire families were wiped out) and wounding 10,870 others. 17,123 homes were damaged, of which 2,465 homes were completely destroyed.



## 2021 Aggression

The aggression in May 2021, which lasted for 11 days, left more than 250 martyrs, most of them women and children. It also caused unprecedented destruction in the economic and social sectors, as the cost required to rebuild the Gaza Strip due to the repeated attacks is estimated at more than \$3.882 billion. The aggression also led to the destruction of 1,689 housing units, of which only 45% have been reconstructed so far.

## 2022 Aggression

On August 5, 2022, the occupation forces launched an aggression that lasted for three days, leaving 49 martyrs and more than 360 wounded, completely destroying 26 housing units, and causing severe damage to 2,054 other units. Until this moment, none of these units have been rebuilt. This is in addition to the 1,302 completely destroyed housing units that were not rebuilt from previous attacks, and more than 75,000 units that were partially damaged.

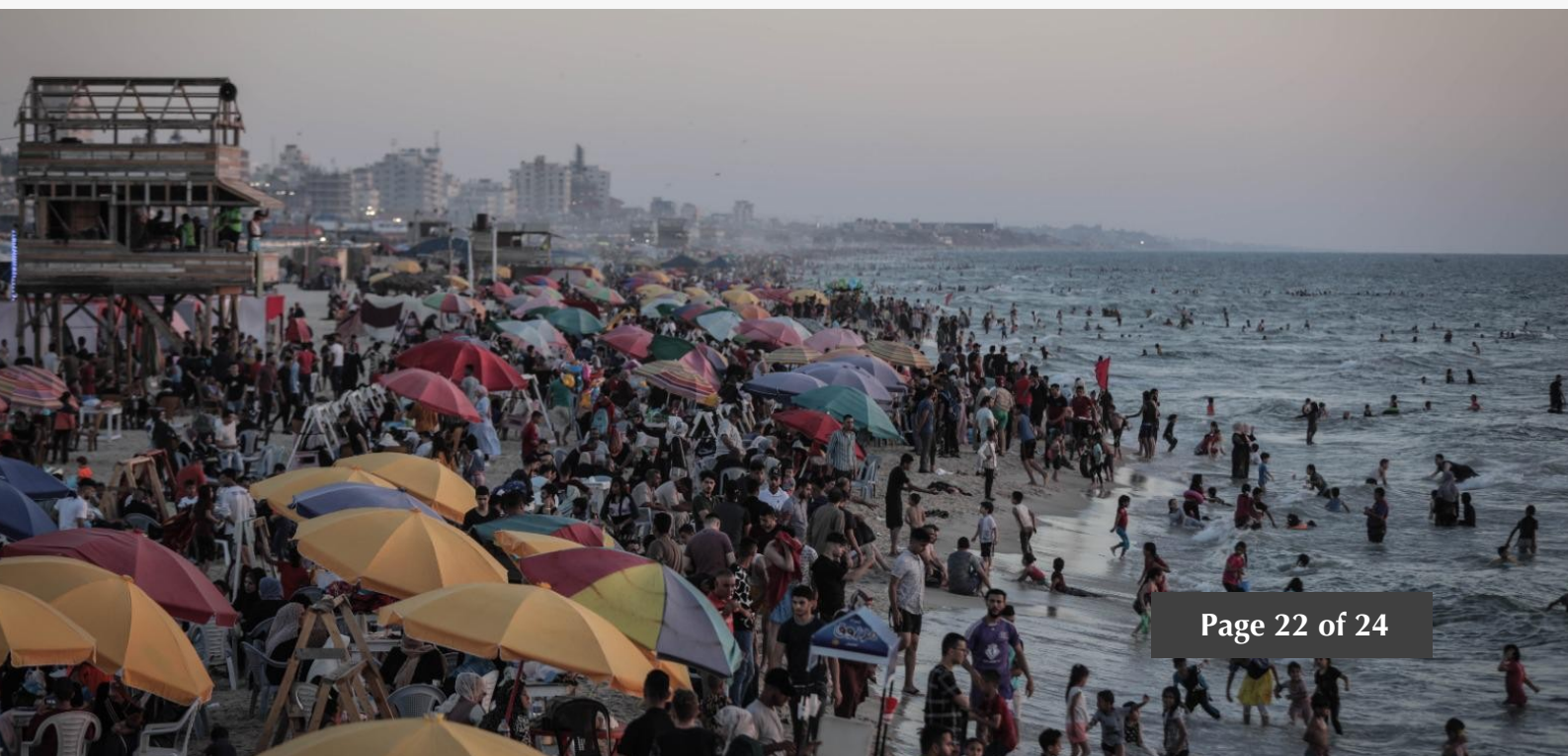


## Conclusion

The effects of the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip were not limited to the monumental suffering inflicted on people and the destruction of infrastructure only, but also extended to negatively affect the internal Palestinian political scene. The occupation's practices have contributed to fomenting the Palestinian division and disrupting the democratic process, which has led to putting the Palestinian political system in limbo and disrupting the work of public institutions. In light of these practices, the international community is still watching the scene without taking serious steps to protect Palestinian human rights.

On the contrary, many European and American parties continue to show unconditional support for the occupation and its interests. As for the practices of the occupation towards the Palestinians, in particular the right to self-determination and return, the international positions, especially the western ones, do not go beyond superficial statements and remarks in the absence of complete actions aimed at limiting the occupation measures and policies and stopping the Israeli crimes and ongoing aggression.

This situation created an overwhelming feeling of distrust among the Palestinians in the international community and its institutions, as they are fully convinced that these bodies and parties are biased towards the occupier at the expense of the victim. On the other hand, the continuous Israeli attacks and the repeated military escalation against the residents of Gaza created a permanent feeling of personal insecurity among the Gazans, which contributed to the creation of a generation of Palestinians who lost hope in a secure and just future.



The siege on the Gaza Strip and the closure of its crossings constitute a violation of the international humanitarian law, and collective punishment prohibited under the rules of international legitimacy for human rights, and a number of international agreements and treaties, including the Fourth Geneva Convention for the Protection of Civilians in Time of War of 1949, which refers to the legal obligations that Israel has as an occupying power towards civilians and it also prohibits collective punishment and reprisals against civilians. This siege is considered a "genocide crime" in the form of "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part," according to Article 4, item (c) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and this is confirmed by legal experts who described the Gaza Strip as the 21st Century Concentration Camp. In this regard, the absence of international accountability for the Israeli occupation for its actions contributes significantly to the exacerbation of the disastrous humanitarian conditions suffered by the residents of Gaza.

Therefore, it is the duty of the international community, especially the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to intervene immediately and exert serious pressure to immediately lift the siege, open all crossings, and end the suffering of the Gaza Strip. The concerned international and UN institutions must also take all necessary measures to pressure the Israeli military occupation to stop the ongoing policy of collective punishment against the residents of the Gaza Strip. The time has come to write the last chapters of the longest unjust siege in the modern era.



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