

Situation Overview

Despite the 2010 Israeli announced easing of restrictions on imports and exports into the strip, many materials essential to construction, such as gravel, cement and steel bars, remain on Israel’s list of ‘dual use’ goods, and thus remain heavily restricted. These items can therefore only officially enter Gaza as part of international projects. However, bureaucratic procedures and limited capacity of the official crossings have made import of these goods for international projects expensive and time-consuming. The blockade has also decimated the private construction industry in Gaza, formerly the backbone of its economy and a major employer for estimated **75,000 – 120,000** jobs.

As a result, most construction items now enter Gaza unofficially through the tunnels at the border with Egypt. The Palestinian Federation of Industries estimate that approximately **2.25** million tonnes of aggregate, cement and steel bars entered Gaza in 2011 through the tunnels, while only **600,000** tonnes of the same goods entered for authorized projects through official crossings with Israel. Since the last week of 2012, Israel started allowing **20** trucks a day of aggregate through official crossings for the private construction sector. Overcrowding and natural population growth in the Gaza strip has resulted in a need for **71,000³** extra housing units to meet current needs. Based on this, the current increase in trucks can not address the gap, with a shortfall of approximately **4,000** tonnes/day if all materials came through official crossings.

The new influx also does not include cement or steel and does not address the requirements of international humanitarian projects for the most vulnerable, particularly female headed households, families with members with severe disabilities and financial hardship cases.

Pre Cast Lead Figures		
Damage Type	Status	Number
Totally Destroyed	Total Case Load	2,900
	Completed	1,827
	In Progress ¹	733
	Pending ²	340

Cast Lead Figures		
Damage Type	Status	Number
Totally Destroyed	Total Case Load	3,481
	Completed	1,700
	In Progress	500
	Pending	1,281

November 2012 escalation	
Totally Destroyed	184
Major Damage	198
Minor Repair	10,000

Case Load	Number of currently displaced families	Number of individuals
Pre Cast Lead	340	2,108
Cast Lead	1,281	8,056
November Escalation	382	2,439
Total	2,003	12,603

Note: All displaced families as a result from totally destroyed or major damage houses.

Data source: Shelter Sector Gaza – Unified Shelter Sector Database (USSD) <http://www.sheltergaza.org>

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March 2013

¹ For all categories ‘In Progress’ is defined as the case load which has received funding and has secured access to construction materials, but reconstruction has not yet been completed.

² For all categories ‘Pending’ is defined as the case load which has either not received funding or secured access to construction materials. No reconstruction is taking place.

³ Shelter Sector – Gaza , Assessing Housing Needs in Gaza June 2007 – December 2011

November 2012 escalation

After months of escalating hostilities on both sides, on 14 November 2012, the Israeli Air Force launched an airstrike that targeted and killed the acting chief of Hamas' armed wing Ahmed Al Jabari, which marked the start of the Israeli military operation "Operation Defensive Pillar". The escalation lasted eight days and resulted in the deaths of 101 Palestinian and 4 Israeli civilians⁴.

Three hundred and eighty two housing units in Gaza were destroyed or sustained major damage, while another estimated 10,000 houses sustained minor damage. Two hundred and eighty six schools sustained damage; 26 with major damage. One hundred and seven of these buildings had been damaged during Cast Lead and subsequently repaired.

During the November escalation more than 15,000 individuals in the Gaza strip fled their homes, with approximately 12,000 seeking refuge in emergency shelters set up in 14 UNRWA and two government schools.

Following continued diplomatic efforts, a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas was signed on 21 November 2012. Following the declaration most displaced families returned home, but 2,439 people living in rented accommodations or housed with relatives.

The 382 families whose homes were totally or majorly damaged received quick cash assistance grants from shelter sector members for rent and emergency supplies.

The November escalation has only compounded an existing chronic housing crisis with previous shelter damage still unaddressed due to Israel's restrictions on essential building materials.

Access Restricted Areas

As part of the 1994 Gaza-Jericho Agreement and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza, also known as the 1995 Oslo II Agreement, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation agreed to a delimiting line within the Gaza Strip which would create a security perimeter. This Access Restricted Area (ARA) was determined to be a 'No-Go' security perimeter, 50 meters from the Security fence between Gaza and Israel. After the 2000 second Intifada, Israel increased this to 150 meters and, in 2010, Israel announced a 300-meter range (from the fence) as a new restricted area where access is totally prohibited and enforced through use of deadly force. In practice Israel has enforced this up to 1500 meters from the security fence through live fire, land levelling and property destruction. Many of the houses destroyed during and after Operation Cast Lead are located within this ARA and therefore, even with availability of materials, cannot be rebuilt due to safety and security considerations for both the owners and humanitarian agencies wishing to offer assistance. Furthermore, COGAT has not approved international humanitarian projects for any agency wishing to build housing projects proximate to ARA.

UNRWA and some smaller agencies provide occasional assistance to households suffering new/recent damages as a result of Israeli or militant activities in the ARA. This is normally in the form of Non Food Items or alternative shelter assistance outside of the ARA.

In February 2012, NRC completed a telephone survey contacting all refugee and non-refugee households with shelters totally demolished during 'Operation Cast Lead,' (approximately 2,700 families out of the target 3,481 responded). The information collected included data about the person's demolished shelter and their current place of residence, current source of income, vulnerability, disability and status of ownership. The survey revealed new data previously unknown as to the number of shelter units in the ARA. The main findings were:

- 319 (12%) of 'Cast Lead' totally demolished shelters were located in the ARA. Consequently, these families are facing long term displacement problems with no reconstruction possibilities in the near future.
- Out of the 12% of the population whose demolished shelters were located in the ARA, about 61% were located in the 501-1000m range from the fence. Another 23% of shelters were located in the 301-500m range. The other 16% were located in the 51-300m range.

⁴ OHCHR - Gaza Protection Cluster

Self Help approach in Gaza

Plans to reconstruct housing damaged or demolished as a result of the conflict remain largely stagnant as a result of lack of access to raw building materials. In response shelter providers in the Gaza strip have utilised an owner-driven approach to reconstruction, referred to as a “Self-Help Approach.” Through this approach agencies have given beneficiaries conditional financial assistance and technical support to facilitate homeowners’ ability to rebuild their houses themselves. Projects funded by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and others led by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MoPWH) have led the way in completing the majority of the Cast Lead case load in this way, starting at the beginning of 2009.

The IDB, in its capacity as Coordinator for the Program of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Reconstruction of Gaza, initiated a reconstruction process that was dependent on the Self-Help Approach (Owner-Driven Reconstruction). The IDB gave beneficiaries conditional financial assistance through staggered payments equal to the reconstruction cost (US\$260-US\$300/sq meter), accompanied by regulations and technical support aimed at ensuring that houses were built back better. This initiative addressed some significant major housing needs, using materials available in the local market sourced from the tunnels between Gaza and Egypt.

The advantages of the “Self-Help Approach” have been assessed to be:

- It mobilizes households to take an active role in rebuilding, which speeds recovery from war trauma and decreases social dependency;
- It tends to involve the local building industry, which contributes to the restoration of the local economy and livelihoods;
- It leads to the higher beneficiary’s satisfaction.
- It is more cost effective.

My Name is Nafez al Souriki,

I’m an engineer in Gaza municipality; I live in Tal al Hawa neighborhood.

In January 2009 the Israeli forces demolished our house in an airstrike, our house was totally destroyed, and we did not know why our house was attacked. That was a very sad and hard day for us, losing the house that I worked 25 years to build, our dream house.



Nafez al Souriki – Tal al Hawa - Gaza City

The hardest thing was having your own house, where you feel safe and protected, and waking up the next day to find it gone, all the furniture, the clothes and the kids' books.

At the beginning we lived for one month with my wife's family, after that we rented a small apartment, and started buying furniture slowly. We faced financial troubles, it was hard to manage with my salary to pay US\$300 for the rent and buy the electronics and furniture, UNRWA helped us with a monthly rental cash assistance of US\$100.

When we used to go to UNRWA and ask about aid, they replied us that there were no construction materials due to the blockade.

We stayed in the first rented apartment for one year. Then the owner asked us to move because he needed the apartment. We found another apartment in a new neighborhood, but it was far from the kids' school. We lived there for a while and then decided to move again to be closer to the school.

UNRWA suggested building us a house made of mud, we agreed because we knew there are no construction materials and we wanted to have a solution. But when we received the plan I found out that the house will be very small, so I dropped the offer.

After three years of continuous suffering I heard about the Islamic Development Bank program⁵, which was going to build 200 houses. I was lucky that I registered early. When I was selected I knew that the plan is to give the family money in 4 stages, (40%, 30%, 20% and 10%) and we could build our house the way we want. I was so happy about the project, all I wanted was to have the chance to rebuild my house the way it was. This is not a temporary house; this is the house that I want to raise my kids in.

Recommendations

1. **Israel** should lift restrictions on commercial import and export of goods, including relating to international humanitarian construction projects.
2. **COGAT** should work towards completely ending the approvals process for construction materials for humanitarian agencies by January 2014. As interim measure COGAT should streamline simplify and reduce the approval coordination, monitoring and reporting requirements for international humanitarian projects in the Gaza Strip.
3. **Israel** should guarantee security for humanitarian workers reconstructing in ARA.
4. **The international community** should press Israel to end the approvals process for construction materials for humanitarian agencies.
5. **The international community** should support and fund projects that utilize self-help as the preferred model for delivering assistance in the Gaza Strip.

⁵ UNRWA project funded by IDB.