



PRESS PACK

December 31, 2009 - A historic milestone
in the Palestinian struggle for liberation

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PRESS RELEASE
November 2009

New Year's Eve Freedom March to lift Israel's siege on Gaza

WHO: The International Coalition to End the Illegal Siege of Gaza.

WHAT: A nonviolent march inside Gaza

WHEN: Dec. 31, 2009 (participants meet December 27 in Cairo for briefing and group travel to Gaza)

WHERE: Starting at Ezbet Abd Rabbo area in Gaza towards Erez crossing.

WHY: To end the illegal siege

Hundreds of people from an international coalition that includes retired U.S. Army colonel and former U.S. diplomat Ann Wright, Secretary-General of the Palestinian National Initiative Mustafa Barghouti and Pulitzer prize-winning author Alice Walker will join the Palestinian people on a non-violent march within Gaza on Dec. 31 to break Israel's illegal blockade of the Strip.

Backed by more than 200 organizations, many of them Jewish, hundreds of members of the International Coalition to End the Illegal Siege of Gaza plan to meet in Cairo on Dec. 27. They will travel to Egypt's Rafah border the next day with the intent of crossing into Gaza on Dec. 29. CODEPINK and other march organizers are calling on Egyptian officials to open the border crossing so they can take part on the march and visit the areas most devastated during the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

To mark the fact that it has been one year since the Israeli attack, the coalition has mobilized an international contingent for a nonviolent march alongside the Palestinians of Gaza on Dec. 31, towards the Erez border crossing with Israel, to break the illegal blockade.

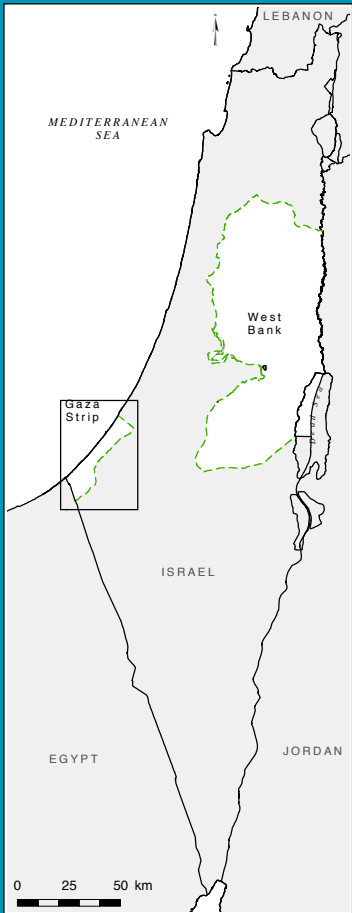
Last month the United Nations Human Rights Council endorsed a report by a UN fact finding mission on the Gaza conflict, which concluded that Israel has imposed a blockade, amounting to collective punishment, and has carried out a systematic policy of isolation and deprivation of the Gaza Strip.

The UN Mission headed by Justice Richard Goldstone, the former chief prosecutor for war-crimes tribunals on Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, said Israeli acts that deprive Palestinians in the Gaza Strip of their means of subsistence, employment, housing and water and that deny their freedom of movement, could lead the world court to find that the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, has been committed.

Details of Gaza press conference released closer to the time of the conference. To learn more go to: <http://www.gazafreedommarch.org/>



Gaza Strip
Area: 365 km²
Population: 1.5 million

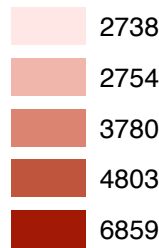


Mediterranean Sea

ISRAEL

EGYPT

**Population Density 2007
(persons per km²)**



Crossing Point

Governorate Border

Green Line

Khan Yunis
 106 km²
 Pop. 290,399

Rafah
 64 km²
 Pop. 177,632

Rafah
International terminal for passengers



Kerem Shalom

Sufa

Both used as alternative crossing point for commercial and humanitarian goods

Erez
Crossing point for people

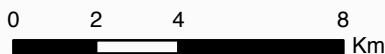
Gaza North
 61 km²
 Pop. 290,843

Nahal Oz
Crossing point for fuels

Karni
Crossing point for goods

Gaza
 76 km²
 Pop. 524,001

Middle Area
 57 km²
 Pop. 216,494



Look who's going!

- Naoto Amaki, former Japanese ambassador to Lebanon

"I think this trip to Gaza with the Gaza Freedom March will be the most memorable trip of my life, both during my diplomatic days and after I became an independent diplomat." A veteran Japanese diplomat who was the country's ambassador to Lebanon until August, 2003, Ambassador Amaki was fired after expressing his opposition to the US-led war on Iraq in two official telegrams to the Japanese government. Naoto Amaki sent the first telegram directly addressed to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi six days before the US-led forces launched their attack on Iraq on March 20. In that telegram, he said that Japan should continue to exhaust all its diplomatic efforts so as to avoid the war..."We must oppose the unilateral military action by the United States." But Koizumi's announcement of Japan's support for the war came just hours after the beginning of US airstrikes in Baghdad and Ambassador Amaki, feeling angry at what he called "arrogant and inhuman" US military action, sent another telegram to Tokyo, urging Koizumi to do something to end the war.

- Michael Ratner, President of Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)

"For too long, and I do not exempt myself, most of us have stood silently by or made only a marginal protests about the massive violations of Palestinian rights carried out by Israel." Michael Ratner is an attorney and president of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), a non-profit human rights litigation organization based in New York. He was co-counsel in representing the Guantanamo Bay detainees in the United States Supreme Court, where, in June 2004, the court decided his clients have the right to test the legality of their detentions in court. Ratner is also a past president of the National Lawyers Guild and the author of numerous books and articles, including the books "The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld: A Prosecution by Book," "Against War with Iraq and Guantanamo: What the World Should Know," and a textbook on international human rights.

- Duraid Lahham, renown Syrian comedian and director

Duraid Lahham is a leading Syrian comedian and director based in Damascus, Syria. Since the 1960s, he has been the most well-known actor in the Arab world, and is considered by some to be the finest Syrian actor of all time. He is famous for playing the character of "Ghawwar" in a number of movies and TV series. Lahham served as UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador to the Middle East and North Africa region from 1999-2004. In 2004, he visited districts of Southern Lebanon that had been liberated from Israeli occupation, and gave a speech at a press conference criticizing the policies of George W. Bush and Ariel Sharon. He was relieved of his duties shortly after. In addition, in 2000, Lahham received The Order of Merit of the Lebanese Republic, awarded to him by Lebanese President Émile Lahoud.

Lahham will participate in the march along with his wife, Hala Albetar. In his letter informing the Coalition of his endorsement and his plans to participate, he said he is "grateful for all of the marchers, especially the non-Arabs, because they demonstrate that humanitarianism has one religion and one color."

- Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Shomer Shalom Network

We invite people of faith to come together as a distinct affinity group walking with The Gaza Freedom March. As people of faith, we walk in prayer and pilgrimage to visit the Palestinians of Gaza and to call for open borders. Because the borders are closed, one third of the Palestinian children of Gaza walk amidst the rubble of war without shoes on their feet. Each person that walks with the Interfaith Gaza Satyagraha will carry an extra pair of shoes. As people of faith we believe we are commanded to love each other with radical love. As people of faith, we hear the cry of suffering and are called to respond in ways that affirm our common humanity. As people of faith we affirm the right of all people live without fear of violence. Open the borders. May peace and restorative justice be realized quickly in our day.

Partial list of endorsers

- Ali Abunimah, author and co-founder, Electronic Intifada
- Ramsey Clark, former US Attorney General
- Philip Andrews, Liberal Democrat, House of Lords, UK
- Luigi De Magistris, Member of Parliament, Italy
- Mairead Maguire, Nobel peace laureate
- Gore Vidal, author
- Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize-winning author
- Hedy Epstein, Holocaust survivor and lecturer
- Arun Gandhi, founder, Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence
- Christopher Hedges, best-selling American author
- Ronnie Kasrils, former South African government minister
- Tariq Ali, British author
- Mustafa Barghouti, deputy, Palestinian Legislative Council
- Tony Benn, former British parliamentarian and president of the UK Stop the War Coalition
- Sir Geoffrey Bindman, British lawyers and human rights advocate
- Noam Chomsky, linguist and author
- Baroness Helena Kennedy, British lawyers, broadcaster and Labor Party member of the House of Lords
- Sara Roy, senior research scholar, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University
- Dr. Eyad Sarraj, head of the Gaza Programme for Mental Health and president of the International Campaign to Break the Siege
- Bill Scheurer, editor, PeaceMajority Report
- Avi Shlaim, warden, St. Anthony's College, Oxford University
- Norman Solomon, author
- Baroness Jenny Tonge, former MP for the Liberal Democrat Party – UK
- Gianni Vattimo, Member of Parliament, Italy
- Father Louis Vitale, Franciscan priest, Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service
- Judith Weisman, Jewish Women to End the Occupation
- Howard Zinn, historian and author

Full list of endorsers on our website: www.gazafreedommarch.org

GAZA BASIC FACT SHEET

- Total population: 1.5 million
- Total number of children: 793,520, or 56% of the population
- Total number of refugees: 1.1 million, or 74% of the total population
- Average age: 17.2 years
- Poverty: 80% of residents live on less than \$2 a day

BACKGROUND

- 1948: Establishment of State of Israel creates the world's largest refugee population today.
- 1967: Israel begins military occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem, and begins illegal settlement activity (8,000 Israeli settlers to Gaza and 462,000 to the West Bank).
- 1970-2005: 8,000 illegal Israeli settlers in Gaza dominate over 1.5 million Palestinians by controlling 40% of the fertile land and the lion's share of scarce water resources, effectively creating an apartheid structure.
- 2005: Israel withdraws its illegal settlers from Gaza and places the territory under siege, restricting movement of people, food, medicine, and fuel - effectively creating a concentration camp.
- 2006: Palestinians under occupation participate in democratic elections and choose Hamas to head the government. Israel and US reject the election, despite Hamas' acceptance of Israel within its 1967 borders. Isolation of Hamas and the people of Gaza begins, setting the wheels in motion for a humanitarian crisis.

CRISIS IN GAZA

- June 19, 2008: Israel and Hamas agree to cease-fire.
- Nov. 4, 2008: Israel violates cease-fire by killing 4 Hamas members, and Hamas retaliates.
- Dec. 27, 2008: Israeli military attacks Gaza (one of the most densely populated areas on earth) with the intent to forcefully remove Hamas.

FATALITIES:

- From September 29, 2000 to December 26, 2008, more than 3,000 Palestinians in Gaza were killed, according to figures compiled by the Israeli human rights group B'tselem.
- In 2005-7 alone, the Israeli army killed 1,290 Palestinians in Gaza, including 222 children.
- During "Operation Cast Lead" (December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009) Israel killed 1409 Palestinians, and injured over 4,500
- 355 children and 111 women killed, and more than 1,200 children critically injured during the offensive

WATER & POWER:

- 1 million people, including 560,000 children, have shortages of running water or power.

EDUCATION:

- 16 schools in Gaza hit by Israeli missiles during "Cast Lead"
- Israeli siege bans badly needed school supplies such as pens and books from reaching Gaza's schools

HEALTH CARE:

- 4 hospitals, 3 clinics, and 3 ambulances in Gaza hit by Israeli missiles during Cast Lead, and 6 medical personnel killed.
- Most hospitals in Gaza are dependent on back-up generators, which run on scarce fuel supplies. Hundreds of patients denied medical treatment outside Gaza left to die.

Reference: Houston Coalition of Justice and Peace in Palestine

Fact-Sheet: Nonviolent Palestinian Resistance

April 1918 – Muslim-Christian Societies were established in most major cities to challenge British and Zionist attempts to create sectarian rifts based on religion.

January 1919 – Muslim-Christian societies formed a more centralized organization, paving the way for the first Palestinian Arab Congress, which called for the education of youth, encouraging national development and protecting individual and national rights.

11 March, 1920 – Demonstrations were held in all major Palestinian cities against the Balfour Declaration. As the uprising spread, mass resignations, protests and strikes continued throughout the spring. During the 1920s Palestinians used the simplest and most basic nonviolent methods of protest and persuasion: statements, declarations, petitions, manifestos, assemblies, delegations, processions, marches and motorcades.

1923 – The Palestine Communist Party was founded on a platform of coexistence and began organizing Arab and Jewish workers to challenge political Zionism.

March 1925 – A Palestinian general strike was called in protest against Lord Balfour's visit to Jerusalem.

1929 – The first Arab Women's Congress of Palestine was held, stimulating the formation of women's societies and unions across Palestine.

16 May, 1930 – Palestine Day was declared with a call for a general strike on the same day.

15 April, 1933 – Palestinian organizations boycotted the visit of Lord Allenby and Lord Swinton in protest against British Mandate policies, while leading women organized a silent demonstration in Jerusalem.

May 1936 – A conference of all National Committees in Jerusalem, attended by 150 delegates from all sectors of the population in Palestine, voted to withhold taxes; a general strike was called demanding the suspension of Jewish colonization, the prohibition of the transfer of the ownership of Palestinian land to colonists and the establishment of a democratic government.

July 1936 – Solidarity campaign committees were formed in Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo and Beirut as British authorities imposed martial law and special night squads of Zionist and British soldiers attacked villages.

November 1936 – The general strike was called off after an appeal by the leaders of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Transjordan.

1967 – The very act of remaining in Palestine after Israel occupied Palestinian, Egyptian and Syrian land constituted nonviolent resistance to the occupation as it prevented Israel from establishing a state in the whole region, including the West Bank and Gaza.

1970s – Numerous Palestinian political parties were formed and the emergence of Palestinian NGOs laid the foundations for the massive nonviolent social mobilization

that, a decade later, would characterize the first intifada.

30 March 1976 – After years of military rule, Land Day in 1976 was the first act of mass resistance by the Palestinians inside Israel against the Zionist policy of internal colonialization, a systematic process of expropriation that reduced Palestinian land ownership from around 94 percent of all territory in pre-1948 Palestine to less than 3 percent in what is now considered to be Israel. March 30 became recognized as Yaum-al-Ard, or Day of the Land, to highlight the land-grabbing policies the Zionist government, and later Israel, would systematically apply.

1987-1993 – Resistance during the first intifada was popular, massive in scale and consisted primarily of civil disobedience, including burning Israeli-issued identification cards and permits, refusing to pay taxes to the Israeli government or buy Israeli products, and opening schools despite military-imposed curfews and orders to close them.

1988 – The Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence was established by Dr. Mubarak Awad in Jerusalem. The center organized small, nonviolent actions in the West Bank, such as planting new trees when olive groves were uprooted by Israeli armed forces. Dr. Awad was later deported after being jailed for organizing resistance.

1988 – Beit Sahour residents planted back-yard gardens and set up a dairy farm to avoid buying Israeli products. They also refused to pay taxes. Israel responded by confiscating \$2 million worth of valuables, including furniture, from the tax resisters.

March 2005 – Bil'in residents began to organize almost daily direct actions and demonstrations against the Apartheid Wall that cuts their village in half. Gaining the attention of the international community with their creativity and perseverance, Bil'in has become a symbol for popular resistance. Weekly Friday protests continue.

January 2007 – The Holy Land Trust, a Palestinian NGO based in Bethlehem, began organizing weekly nonviolent demonstrations against the occupation and construction of the wall over Palestinian land and farms. Despite the nonviolent nature of the demonstrations, Israeli soldiers routinely respond violently with arms, truncheons and tear gas.

October 2009 – Gaza residents demanding that the frontier be opened to ease the blockade imposed on the territory by Israel breached the border fence with Egypt in several places and hundreds crossed the frontier.

31 October 2009 – Hundreds of people took part in Friday prayers and a demonstration against the expansion of the Apartheid Wall as part of the continuing struggle in the threatened village of Ni'lin. The event was also held in solidarity with Jerusalem.

31 December 2009 – The Gaza Freedom March will bring hundreds of activists from more than 40 countries to Gaza, with the object of breaking the illegal siege. With almost complete endorsement by Palestinians, Gaza is mobilizing for the march, which will be a historical milestone in the history of the Palestinian struggle.



THE GAZA BLOCKADE: CHILDREN AND EDUCATION FACT SHEET

THE NUMBERS: More than half the population of Gaza – 780,578, or 53% – is under the age of 18¹.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION: There are 640 schools in Gaza – 383 government schools, 221 UNRWA schools and 36 private schools, which together serve a total of 441,452 students².

The inability of university and post-graduate level students to travel to pursue academic studies in specialized fields is stifling the intellectual advancement of young adults in Gaza. Between July and September 2008, only 70 students managed to exit Gaza via Erez while hundreds more remained trapped owing to a newly instated diplomatic escort requirement mandated by Israeli authorities.

More than 1,000 Gazan students apply to universities around the world each year but as there is no official body or channel to coordinate their requests or exits, it is difficult to know how many students want to study abroad this coming year.³

OVERCROWDING: Around 88% of UNRWA schools and 82% of government schools operate on a shift system to accommodate the high number of students. Blockade restrictions have made it difficult to invest in building new schools or repair damaged schools.

In north Gaza, 9,000 students from 15 damaged schools were accommodated in 73 schools in the same area. 4,000 of them were squeezed in two schools. Some 1,200 secondary students in governmental schools in north Gaza run the risk of not being accommodated in the 2009/2010 school year⁴.

DECLINING ACHIEVEMENT: In governmental schools, school attendance and performance have declined as a result of ageing education infrastructure, overcrowding, and frequent disruptions caused by military operations.⁵ In the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, only 20% of 16,000 sixth graders in Gaza passed standardized exams in Math, Science, English and Arabic.⁶

¹ Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, 2009. Total population in Gaza is 1,486,816.

² [UNRWA](#) and Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE)

³ Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, “Obstacle Course: Students Denied Exit from Gaza,” July 2009.

⁴ Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2009

⁵ Save the Children UK, 2008 Child Rights Annual Review.

⁶ MoEHE

IMPACT OF ISRAELI OFFENSIVE:

Infrastructure: Operation Cast Lead had devastating consequences for the education system already weakened as a result of the blockade. During the military offensive, at least 280 schools and kindergartens were damaged/ severely damaged, including 18 schools were destroyed (8 government, 2 private and 8 Kindergartens). Six of the destroyed government schools are in North Gaza alone, affecting almost 9,000 students who had to relocate to other schools.⁷

Six university buildings were destroyed, and 16 were damaged.

Teachers and Students: According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), 164 students and 12 teachers from its schools were killed during the Israeli military offensive; 98 of the students killed were from north Gaza. A further 454 students and 5 teachers were injured. A total of 86 children and 3 teachers who attend UNRWA schools were killed, and a further 402 students and 14 teachers were injured. Schoolchildren, thousands of whom lost family members and/or their homes, are still suffering from trauma and anxiety and are in need of psycho-social support and recreational play activities.

Displacement: At the peak of the offensive, almost 51,000 individuals, among them approximately 28,560 children, had sought refuge in 44 UNRWA schools across Gaza⁸, causing considerable wear and tear on classrooms, sanitation facilities and furniture.

MATERIALS TO RECONSTRUCT: According to Ministry of Education and Higher Education, it needs to build 105 new schools to cater for yearly increase in student population. Construction materials needed includes items such as 25,000 tons of iron bars, 40,000 tons of cement.

BRAIN FOOD: Around one-fifth of school children are iodine deficient.⁹ The prevalence of anaemia among children 9 - 12 months old of age is 61.6%; and prevalence among pregnant women is around 29%,¹⁰ and 22% of children 12 - 59 months old lack Vitamin A.¹¹

⁷ UNICEF, UNRWA, MOEHE

⁸ OCHA

⁹ Nutrition Department / MoH / PNA, 2007

¹⁰ Nutrition Department / MoH / PNA; Nutrition Surveillance System Report, 2007

¹¹ MoH / PNA and MARAM Project, 2004

Background to the Present Moment

It is 2009. It has been 61 years since the establishment of the state of Israel and, concurrently, the *Nakba* (or ‘catastrophe’) that saw, in the words of Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, much of historic Palestine ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian Arab majority. Between 1947 and 1949, some 700,000 Palestinians, reflecting their well-founded fear of violence following the indiscriminate murder of some 240 Arabs at the hands of Jewish-Israeli forces in the village of Deir Yassin in April 1948, fled or were forced out of their former homes in what is now Israel. Many of these original refugees and their descendants, as well as those displaced by the Israeli military’s occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem following its victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, remain refugees, residing both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in neighboring Arab-majority countries. Indeed, currently numbering over 4 million individuals, Palestinian refugees represent the single largest national refugee group in the world.

Today, Israel continues to occupy and control the Palestinian territories it gained in 1967. In violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Israel has for many years promoted the settlement of the West Bank by Jewish Israelis. Some 500,000 such settlers currently reside in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. To further this settler-colonial project, the Israeli government has, since 1967, demolished about 18,000 Palestinian homes, erected over 500 checkpoints, and constructed hundreds of kilometers of settler-only road infrastructure in the West Bank. Furthermore, since 2002 it has been building a separation barrier on Palestinian land within the West Bank. The Israeli human-rights organization B’Tselem estimates that the barrier will ultimately extend roughly 700 kilometers. Standing, at points, 8 meters high, it divides many Palestinian communities from their neighbors or farmlands, and has in many cases prevented Palestinian access to necessary medical services. The International Court of Justice, in 2004, found it to be illegal under international law. Amnesty International points out in a recent report that 80 percent of the water taken from the West Bank’s Mountain Aquifer is consumed by Israelis, leaving the 2.3 million West-Bank Palestinian residents the remaining 20 percent. This same report finds the per capita consumption of water among Palestinian Arabs to be far below the World Health Organization’s recommended 100 liters per day. Recent estimates place the percentage of Palestinians living in poverty at over 50 percent in the West Bank, 80 percent in the Gaza Strip.

In Gaza, Israel, since 2006, has carried out collective punishment on the people living in Gaza by restricting the entry of food, fuel, medical supplies, and other necessities into the Gaza Strip through Israeli border-crossings. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, in March 2009, estimated the resultant food-insecurity rates among Gaza residents at about 67 percent. The situation has worsened dramatically since Israel’s prosecution of Operation Cast Lead in December 2008 and January 2009. Much that was then destroyed has yet to be rebuilt.

Some can’t be. The IDF killed some 1400 Gazans, including over 100 women and nearly 300 children during Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, a military campaign putatively launched to defend Israeli citizens from Palestinian rocket attacks--attacks that followed the Israeli violation of the previously intact cease-fire agreement. In addition to the deaths, some 5000 Gazans were injured during the 22 day assault. Israel attacked schools, hospitals, mosques,

sewage-control systems, and food-distribution centers in Gaza during the violence. It seems that the Israeli military indiscriminately employed white phosphorus and flechette and D.I.M.E. weaponry, perhaps illegally.

The September 2009 Goldstone report prepared by the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict finds the Israeli military to have severely violated international human-rights law in its behavior during Operation Cast Lead, and to have committed war crimes, possibly rising to crimes against humanity. According to the Goldstone report, Israel is guilty of having “willfully caus[ed] great suffering” to the people of Gaza. In its recommendations, the report suggests that the case be referred to the International Criminal Court for investigation and prosecution.