



AFEDJ

American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Bearing Witness

A Journey with Holy Land Christians

GETTING TO KNOW THE HOLY LAND

Gaza

Gaza

"If there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza."

—UN General Assembly, Secretary-General António Guterres

Everyday Life and Challenges

Since 2007 when the Hamas party came to power in Gaza, a blockade by the Israel Defense Force has completely isolated and walled off the Gaza Strip from the world. Concrete walls and razor wire fences run the entire land border with Israel and Egypt. And there's a blockade along its entire Mediterranean coastline. No one enters or leaves without permission from Israel. The people of Gaza suffer from conditions that we would call unlivable – no clean drinking water, raw sewage polluting the water and land, youth unemployment at 60 percent and for most families, just 4-6 hours of electricity every day. And innocent Gazans – and Israelis – are victims of the ongoing violent clash between Israel, Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad.

Palestinian refugee camps

Palestine refugees are defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period June 1, 1946 to May 15, 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are also eligible for registration as refugees.

- 8 recognized Palestine refugee camps are in the Gaza Strip
- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was established following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war to provide direct relief for Palestine refugees. In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the UN has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate, most recently extending it until June 2023

Website

Map of towns and refugee camps

<https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>



- UNRWA provides education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance, and emergency assistance to all Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East (not just in Gaza)
- Lack of basic infrastructure such as sanitation or roads
- Electricity is only available on an inconsistent basis; during times of crisis camps will go without power for months
- Overcrowding leads to serious health effects: poor mental health, and chronic or acute illnesses

Economy

- Movement of any goods and agricultural products to and from Gaza is subject to Israeli control.
- Israeli barriers cover some of the region's best farmland. As a result, Gaza's agricultural sector has been greatly diminished.
- Fishing has also been reduced with a fishing limit to about 6 miles offshore, imposed by Israel in 2014; most of the best fishing areas lie farther out in the Mediterranean Sea. Once Palestinian fishermen were able to earn more than \$500 a day fishing. Now it is an extremely good day if they can make \$30.



Geography:

- Until the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Gaza referred to the city of Gaza. After the 1948 war Gaza was expanded to what we now call the Gaza Strip, a narrow strip of land on the Mediterranean Sea.
- Bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Egypt to the south, and Israel to the north and east
- Flat, coastal plain
- 25 miles long and 3-5 miles wide

GAZA



ISRAEL

EGYPT

Population:

- 2 million
- About 40% of the population of the Gaza Strip live in Gaza City
- Third most densely populated area of the world
- Over 66% of the total population (1.3 million) are Palestinian refugees living in refugee camps
- 64% of the population is food insecure
- Considered by many international human rights groups to be the largest open-air prison in the world.

	Built-up area
	Refugee camp
	Crossing point



Yasser Arafat International Airport
inoperable since Jan 2002

Kissufim
closed Aug 2005

Rafah

Rafah

Khan Yunis

Abasan al-Kabera

Deir al-Balah

Gaza

Jabalia

Beit Lahia

Beit Hanoun

Nahal Oz

Karni

Erez

Sufa

Kerem Shalom

- Large numbers of people are unemployed (50%) because businesses can get very few of their products out of Gaza to sell and people don't have much money to buy things.
- For employed Palestinians, the average daily wage in 2018 was about \$18.00.
- The poverty rate is at 53%.

Religions

- 96.5% Muslims (Sunni)
- 1,100 Christians¹ (mostly Greek Orthodox)

Education

- While 97% of Palestinians are literate, access to education is under constant pressure.
- More than 90% of the schools run what is known as “double shifts” (one set of students comes in the morning with another set in the afternoon), leading to large class sizes of more than 40 students.
- There are 11 operating universities and higher education training centers in Gaza. These institutions are at full enrollment. Young Gazans pursue higher education at very high rates, but there are few employment opportunities when they graduate. The unemployment rate for Gazans under 30 is 60%.

Travel

- There is no working airport.
- Israel views Gaza as a security risk and controls its borders, thus the entire region is dependent on Israel for its water, electricity, telecommunications, and other utilities.
- Israel controls its coastline and all the entry and exit crossings into Israel.
- Egypt has also imposed travel restrictions; before that border was closed in 2014, the World Health Organization calculated about 4,000 people traveled every month to Egypt for healthcare. This is no longer possible.

Infrastructure

- Since the 2014 conflict, many schools, health centers, government offices, and even private homes have remained uninhabitable or dangerous to work or live in.
- Over half a million Palestinians who live in low-lying areas are flooded every winter.
- Poor housing conditions result from an inability to access building materials for maintenance and repair work – including those buildings that are rubble due to mortar fire and missiles.
- There are often power cuts and a near-constant electricity shortage. Providing the population of Gaza with a 24/7 power supply requires about 600 megawatts of electricity. Yet Gaza receives only 180 megawatts – 120 directly from Israel via 10 power lines, and 60 generated by Gaza's power plant with Qatari-funded fuel provided by Israel. As a result, residents usually receive power in eight-hour rotations: eight hours on and eight hours off. In summer, the power can go off for up to 12 hours.²
- As of 2017, more than 96% of Gaza's coastal aquifer – the main source of water for residents of Gaza – has become unfit for human consumption. The reasons include over-extraction because of Gaza's extremely dense population, contamination with sewage and seawater, Israel's 12-year-old blockade, and wars.³

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/dec/23/faithful-few-can-gaza-christian-community-survive> (accessed November 16, 2022).

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Gaza_City (accessed June 28, 2022).

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2019/03/israels-exploitation-palestinian-resources-human-rights-violation-says-un-expert> (accessed June 28, 2022).

History

- Throughout history, including biblical times, this area has been a source of conflict.
- After the 1967 War Israel occupied this area with Israeli troops until 2005.
- In 2007 Hamas won elections and took control. Hamas refuses to recognize Israel as a country and demands that Palestinians forced to leave their homes in 1948 and again in 1967 be granted the Right to Return to the homes they left behind.
- The 2014 Gaza War was a military operation launched by Israel following the kidnapping and death of three Israeli teens in the West Bank.
- Another major escalation between Hamas and Israel took place in May 2021 when Israel's Supreme Court was set to rule on the eviction of dozens of Palestinian families from their homes. Confrontations between Israeli police and Palestinian demonstrators prompted Hamas to launch rockets into Jerusalem and parts of southern Israel; Israel responded with air strikes in the Gaza Strip. Much of the world, including the United States, considers Hamas a terrorist organization that uses violence to achieve its aims.

Finding Gaza in Scripture

Land of Canaan (*Genesis 10:15–19*)

Israelites conquer Canaan (*Joshua 10:40-42*)

Land of the Philistines

(*Deuteronomy 2:23, Jeremiah 47:4*)

Associated with judgment

(*Amos 1:6-7, Jeremiah 25:17-20*)

Samson & Delilah (*Judges 16*)

Philip and the Ethiopian (*Acts 8:28-40*)



Meet Suhaila Tarazi

Suhaila Tarazi, who has served as the general director of the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City for more than 30 years, is one of the 1,000 Christians remaining in Gaza. She's also one of the few Gazans who could leave. She has a U.S. passport, but she stays, by choice, to help her people. She said to John Lent, former Executive Director of AFEDJ, "Ahli hospital is the church at work, the hands of Jesus in this desperate place. We are witnesses, to Jesus. We are the spirit of reconciliation responding to tragedy with love and compassion for the victims of division. I thank all of our American friends. Without your strong stand beside us it would be difficult for us to continue. You give us the feeling that we are not alone in this ministry. That we are not forgotten."

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