



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.



## Major Issues: Gaza



*In the absence of sustained and effective remedial action and an enabling political environment, the challenges which confront the people of Gaza now will only intensify over the coming years to 2020, a period in which another half a million people will be added to the present estimated population of 1.6 million.*

*Without such action, the daily lives of Gazans in 2020 will be worse than they are now. There will be virtually no reliable access to sources of safe drinking water, standards of healthcare and education will have continued to decline, and the vision of affordable and reliable electricity for all will have become a distant memory for most.*

*To ensure that Gaza in 2020 will be "a liveable place," on-going herculean efforts by Palestinians and partners in such sectors as energy, education, health, water and sanitation, need to be accelerated and intensified in the face of all difficulties.*

-----UN 2012 Report Gaza in 2020: A Liveable Place?

## International Law

***"Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."***

– Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 13 (10 December 1948)

***"No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property."***

– Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 17 (10 December 1948)

# What's at Stake

More than a million and a half people inhabit this narrow strip of land wedged between Greater Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. Numerous factors, including a rift in Palestinian governance with Hamas in power there, prevent Gaza's residents from having adequate access to nutrition, water and sanitation, medical care, education and employment. Despite a unilateral "disengagement" in 2005, Israel continues to block the flow of people and goods in and out of Gaza. The Israeli blockade of Gaza and continued rocket fire from Gaza both contributed to a three-week war in 2008-09 that devastated Gaza's infrastructure and killed 1300 Gazans and six Israelis. Due to the blockade, which Israel continues based on fears that Hamas will use imported materials for weapons, most of the infrastructure and homes are still in ruins.

## Stories: The Human Face of the Conflict

### Israeli-Palestinian empathy in Sderot on the Gaza border

At least one ELCA member participated in the July 2010 [Interfaith Peace-Builders](#) and American Friends Service Committee delegation to Israel/Palestine. This delegation, the 34th since 2001, spent a day in the village of Sderot, a half-mile from the border with Gaza and frequent target of Hamas-fired rockets. They learned that a third of Sderot's population is on welfare. But the delegation also met with Nomika, an Israeli woman from Other Voice. This group of Sderot residents support ending the siege on Gaza and have formed relationships with some of the Palestinians suffering under the blockade of Gaza.

A delegation member concluded her report this way: "Someone like Nomika is a challenge to all Israelis. She, of all people, might seem like the most likely candidate to hate and fear Gazans. But she is one of the few Israelis I've met on this trip who seemed to feel genuine empathy for the Palestinians, to want to end the conflict not just for Israelis, but for them. At the moment of greatest danger for her, her heart was in Gaza." [Read more ...](#)

### A garden in Gaza

"Children from Al Zarqa in northern Gaza, together with their parents and relatives, planted trees in a new garden built by Oxfam as part of a project in one of the Gaza Strip's poorest neighborhoods. Asmaa and Amira, aged 11 and 8, are seen watering the tree they just planted together with other school children. "It's great to have our own garden because we have nowhere to play," Amira said. "As children we have a right to play in a safe area but this is often forgotten because of all the problems we face in Gaza." Parents and relatives accompanying the children were equally enthusiastic about the garden, saying it will provide a space for them to play and forget about the hardships brought about by the blockade."



Story and picture from the Oct. 24-30, 2010, update from Oxfam, Gaza.

## Act Now

In Gaza innocent people are being denied basic human rights necessary for the God-given gift of life abundant due to the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Civilians in Israel live in fear of rockets fired from Gaza. Therefore, we ask people to write their congressional representatives to advocate for:

- the opening of monitored Gaza borders to aid, trade and transit with requisite security measures;
- the resumption of talks with all parties that could lead to the renunciation of violence against civilians by all parties.

## The Church's Voice

### **ELCA Presiding Bishop Hanson expresses deep sadness over Gaza flotilla deaths, calls for independent investigation and urgency for just peace**

June 1, 2010 – The Rev. Mark Hanson, presiding bishop of the ELCA and president of The Lutheran World Federation, released a statement Tuesday expressing sadness and regret over the people killed and wounded in the Israeli interception of the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza. He questioned the proportionality of the response, whether all non-military options had been exhausted and reiterated his call for a lifting of the blockade of Gaza in accordance with UN Resolution 1860.

[Presiding Bishop Hanson's letter to President Obama](#)

### **Other church statement:**

[World Council of Churches statement](#)

## Background

Gaza is an area of land three to eight miles wide and less than 30 miles long (slightly more than twice the size of Washington, D.C.), with 1.6 million people, on the southwestern coast of Israel/Palestine. Many call it the largest open-air prison in the world. The flow of people and goods has been under a blockade for years; the blockade was intensified after Hamas took control of the area following the



The American International School in Gaza was one of 312 schools and university buildings destroyed or damaged in Operation Cast Lead.

Palestinian legislative elections in 2006 and an armed struggle against Fatah in 2007. Many Israelis say the blockade is justifiable because Hamas is a "hostile entity" that calls for the destruction of Israel in its charter, and Hamas and other groups have fired rockets at nearby Israeli towns, killing 11 Israelis from September 2005 to the end of November 2009.

Under international law, Gaza is part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, along with the West Bank, which includes East Jerusalem. Many Israelis say Gaza is no longer occupied because they pulled out military troops and 8000 illegal settlers in 2005 in the "Gaza Disengagement Plan." However, under international law, it is still considered occupied territory. Israel has kept tight control of air, land and sea borders, as well as everyday life. In addition, from the disengagement until Dec. 26, 2008, according to the Israeli Human Rights group B'Tselem, numerous Israeli incursions killed 522 Palestinian civilians who were not taking part in hostilities. This number included 195 minors, 49 women, and 25 men over age 50.

In late December of 2008, a three-week Israeli incursion (Operation Cast Lead) killed 1300 Palestinians, over 700 of whom were non-combatants, while six Israelis were killed during the same period (data also from B'Tselem). In the incursion, 6500 homes were either completely demolished or severely damaged, along with key public buildings, such as schools, hospitals and sewage and electrical facilities.

Both the blockade and the incursions have left staggering unemployment and food insecurity, as well as a devastated infrastructure, which hasn't been rebuilt due to the blockade on virtually all (until June 2010) goods into and out of Gaza, especially construction materials. The international community has tried to call attention to this humanitarian crisis and several boats have attempted to bring goods into Gaza. The most recent effort at the end of May 2010 generated an international conflict when eight Turkish and one Turkish-American nationals were killed when Israeli commandoes boarded the ship in international waters.

The May 2010 incident highlighted questions of both the humanitarian and the legal status of Gaza. Some Israeli officials claim there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza and that the blockade must be maintained because Hamas might use materials brought in for attacks against Israel. As Michael Oren, Israeli ambassador to the United States, has said: "Over 100 trucks, every day, laden with food and medicine go into Gaza. There's no shortage of food. There is no shortage of medicine."

On the other hand, the United Nations and many non-governmental organizations have documented the conditions inside Gaza and concluded that there is a dire humanitarian crisis. They also argue that the blockade is against international humanitarian law because it constitutes collective punishment against the entire population of Gaza.

According to [UN OCHA](#), restrictions on movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza continues. Less than 200 people per day (on average) were allowed out of Gaza via Israel in the first half of 2013, compared to 26,000 in the equivalent period of 2000, before the second Intifada. Less than one truckload of goods per day (on average) exited Gaza in the first half of 2013, compared to 38 during the first half of 2007, before the imposition of the blockade. The humanitarian impact of the blockade is the 57 percent of Gaza households are food insecure and about 80 percent are aid recipients. Despite the easing of some restrictions since 2010, the restrictions have reduced access to livelihoods, essential services and

housing, disrupted family life, and undermined the people's hopes for a secure and prosperous future.

**See these links for more information about Gaza:**

- [UN OCHA Gaza Factsheet July 2013](#)
- [February 2010 United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report about the humanitarian situation in Gaza](#)
- [Middle East Quartet Calls Gaza Situation Unacceptable, Calls for Action and Gilad Shalit Release](#)
- [Amnesty International Jun 10-Suffocating Gaza: the Effect of the Israeli Blockade](#)
- [Israeli Defense Forces-The Humanitarian Situation in Gaza](#)
- [Oxfam Report Dec 09-Failing Gaza: No Rebuilding, No Recovery, No More Excuses](#)
- [Btselem Background on Gaza](#)

## Relevant International Law

***"Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited."***

– Fourth Geneva Convention, Art. 33 (12 August 1949)

***"The Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives."***

– Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol 1, Art. 48 (8 June 1977)

***"Those who plan or decide upon an attack shall refrain from deciding to launch any attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated."***

– Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol 1, Art. 57 (8 June 1977)