



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

Poverty in the Gaza Strip



Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

Consultative Status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations

Affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists - Geneva

Member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) - Paris

Member of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network – Copenhagen

Member of the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) - Stockholm

Member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights – Cairo



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The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is an independent non-profit legal agency based in Gaza city. The Centre was established in April 1995 by a group of Palestinian lawyers and human rights activists in order to protect human rights and promote the rule of law in accordance with international standards, create and develop democratic institutions and an active civil society in Palestine in accordance with internationally accepted standards and practices and support all efforts aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights according to international law.

The Centre enjoys Consultative Status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. It was granted three international prominent awards for its efforts in the field of human rights:

1. The 1996 French Republic Award on Human Rights; and
2. The 2002 Bruno Kreisky Award for Outstanding Achievements in the Area of Human Rights; and
3. The 2003 International Service Human Rights Award (UNAIS).

The Centre has wide relationships with human rights and civil society organizations throughout the world. It is an affiliate of five international and Arab human rights organizations, which are active in the international arena:

International Commission of Jurists

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), headquartered in Geneva, is a non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe and the OAU. Founded in 1952, its task is to defend the rule of law throughout the world and to work towards the full observance of the provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. its membership is composed of sixty eminent jurists who are representatives of the different legal systems of the world.

Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme

The Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) is an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to the world-wide defence of human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Founded in 1922, FIDH has eighty-nine national affiliates in all regions.

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (Euro-Med Network) is a network of human rights organisations and individuals from the Middle East, North Africa and the European Union, established in 1997. The overall objective of the Network is to contribute to the protection of the human rights principles embodied in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995.

International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC)

The International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) is one of the most important international legal bodies. It is specialized in legal and judicial training. It includes more than 30 members of distinguished legal organizations throughout the world, including American Bar Association; Arab Lawyers Union; and Bar Council of England and Wales.

The Arab Organization for Human Rights

It is an NGO founded in 1983. It calls for respect and promotion of human and people rights and fundamental freedoms in the Arab World for all individuals on its land in accordance with international human rights instruments. The Organization signed an agreement with Egypt in May 2000, according to which its headquarter was moved from Limassol in Cyprus to Cairo.



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is an independent non-profit non-governmental organisation dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic principles in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

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Introduction

On 27 March 2006, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) formed the tenth Palestinian government, based on the absolute majority achieved in the Palestinian legislative elections. The elections were fair and transparent, as confirmed by local, regional and international monitoring bodies, which conducted various monitoring roles during the electoral process. Consequently, the Israeli government announced a boycott of the newly-formed government and stopped the transfer of Palestinian tax and custom duties. In addition, a number of donor countries, including the United States of America, the European Union, Canada and Japan, halted financial aid to the Palestinian people and Palestinian Authority.

The international position, and particularly that of donor countries, coincided with a catastrophic deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). This deterioration was caused primarily by Israel's occupation policies. These policies include economic and social strangulation, threatening Palestinian livelihoods and obstructing the movement of medicines and food, including nutrition for anemic children (i.e. milk and dairy products), vaccines, medication for pregnant women, elderly and chronic patients.

The situation arising from the implementation of the Israeli unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, on 12 September 2005, gave rise to a situation that bore serious implications for the economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians. These conditions increased the rates of poverty and unemployment in the OPT, noting that these rates were already very high. It is feared that the decision of donor countries will prove to be an additional obstacle to fulfilling the economic and social rights of Palestinian civilians (protected by International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law), especially their right to adequate living standards including suitable housing, water, food and healthcare.

The conditions in the OPT have exacerbated the humanitarian situation for Palestinian civilians. Unemployment and poverty rates have increased dramatically. The rate of unemployment is 34% in the OPT as a whole and 44% in the Gaza Strip. This rate rises to 55% during times of complete closure imposed by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF). Likewise, the poverty rate in the OPT is nearly 50%, with the Gaza Strip rate at approximately 70%. This in turn has impacted the per capita income, which decreased by 32% over the past three years, and is actually 40% lower today than it was three years ago. On the economic front, the gross national product decreased to dangerous levels, threatening the agricultural, industrial, commerce, transportation and tourism sectors.

Unemployment and poverty in the Gaza Strip were aggravated further by destruction of infrastructure in Palestinian towns and villages by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), as well as the destruction of production and service sector institutions, including security establishments. Furthermore, IOF destroyed the agricultural sector by uprooting fruit trees, vegetable farms, livestock farms and beehives that made up approximately 40% of the Palestinian gross local product.

Living conditions of civilians in the OPT are regressing further due to the suspension of international aid, which has totaled approximately \$US 9 billion over the past few years. The

situation is complicated further by the Palestinian Authority's inability to pay the salaries of civil servants in both the civilian and security sectors. The monthly budget of the Palestinian Authority is estimated at \$US 165million a month. Approximately 60% of this budget goes to salaries, which support the livelihoods of about one million Palestinians, approximately 25% of Palestinians living in the OPT.

If the situation persists, poverty is expected to increase to about 74%. In addition, per capita income is expected to decline a further 25% below the 2005 level.

This report attempts to highlight the dangers of halting international aid to Palestinians in the OPT, especially in the Gaza Strip. It aims at showing the implications of the donor countries' decision for the economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinian civilians. This report is a call to donor countries to stop imposing collective punishment on the Palestinian people and to enact the principles of International Humanitarian Law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relevant to the protection of civilians at times of war. In addition, it is a call to these countries to enact the principles of International Human Rights Law and regional conventions on human rights, including the EU Association Agreement with the government of Israel.

The Gaza Strip: Background

The Gaza Strip is a coastal area of land on the Mediterranean Sea in southern area of Palestine. The land area of the Strip is approximately 365 square kilometers, with a length of about 41 kilometers and a width ranging from 7-12 kilometers. Israel borders the Strip from the north and east; Egypt borders it from the south; and the Mediterranean Sea borders it from the west.

Over the past 5 decades, the Strip's population developed in a way that reflected the political developments in Palestine. There was a sharp increase in population in 1948 due to the uprooting of thousands of Palestinians from their homes during the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948. In 1967, the Strip's population was 280,000, of whom 90,000 were original Gaza Strip residents. And by 1968 the population had jumped to 381,000.

In 1971, the Strip's population decreased to 340,000 as a result of the exodus caused by the deteriorating security situation, which saw violent clashes between Palestinian resistance and IOF. An estimated 70,000 people left the Strip in the period between 1967 and 1971. Many of them left to work abroad or to visit relatives, but were unable to return later due to restrictions imposed by IOF.

In 1980, the Strip's population reached 450,600. The population continued to increase, with the following numbers registered: 518,500 in 1985, 626,600 in 1990, 800,000 in 1992, and 936,028 in 1996. The Strip broke the one million population mark in late 1997.¹ The population continued to increase at a high rate, reaching 1,337,236 in 2004, 1,389,789 in 2005 and 1,443,814 by mid 2006. The high population density continues to be one of the main problems facing the Gaza Strip. The density is approximately 3,663.7 individuals per square kilometer.

¹ The Director of the Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Hasan Abu Libda, announced in a press conference on 26 February 1998 in El-Bireh that the preliminary results of the census showed that the Gaza Strip's population on 9 October 1997 was 1,020,812. For more details, refer to Al-Ayyam newspaper on 27 February 1998.

63.7% of the Strip's population is urban, 5.1% is rural and 31.2% live in refugee camps. The Strip's population is relatively young, with people aged between 0 and 14 accounting for 49.1% of the population in 2005. The age group between 15 and 64 accounted for 48.3% and those aged 65 and over accounted for 2.6%. 50.35% of the population is under 15 years of age, raising the dependency rate to 113.2% in the Strip as a whole, and to 166% in refugee camps.

The fertility rate in the Strip is high at 5.8. The high fertility rate is attributed to early marriage, the custom of having many children, as well as other customs of Palestinian society. The population growth rate in the Gaza Strip at 4.7% is one of the highest in the world. It is greater than the population growth percentage in the West Bank, which is 3.5%.

The Strip's land area of 365 square kilometers included Israeli settlements before the implementation of the Israeli unilateral disengagement plan on 12 September 2005. The settlements occupied 37 square kilometers before the signing of the Oslo Accords. The remainder of the land was distributed as follows: 168 square kilometers of agricultural land, 56.5 square kilometers of housing and 103.5 square kilometers of sand dunes and arid land. 42% of the Strip's land was under IOF security control after the Oslo Accords.

Poverty in the Gaza Strip:

Poverty in Palestine has resulted from the culmination of the many disasters that have been endured by the Palestinian people over the course of the last century, including uprooting, wars, occupation and deprivation of national rights. These circumstances have led to a situation of stagnant poverty for large sectors of Palestinian society. Since poverty is a product of political, economic and social factors, it is essential to discuss the full historical context of poverty in the Gaza Strip, as well as poverty in the context of the Palestinian people as a whole.

- The forced migration and ethnic-cleansing of Palestinian civilians from their homes and property in 1948, referred to as the Nakba of Palestine, led to the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to neighboring countries and various countries around the globe. The State of Israel was established on Palestinian towns and villages that had been cleansed of their original inhabitants. Palestinian civilians were scattered and Palestinian refugees came to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which were not occupied at the time, as well as to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Most of these refugees continue to live in refugee camps, including 8 camps in the Gaza Strip. These refugees lost their property, land, homes and livelihoods and were therefore subjected to a state of poverty, deprivation and exposure.

- 1967 constituted a continuation of the sequence of poverty and deprivation for Palestinians. IOF occupied the Gaza Strip and West Bank. This occupation was accompanied by uprooting of more Palestinians and the creation of more refugees. As a result, the state of poverty and deprivation was exacerbated.

- IOF imposed a number of policies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including the annexation of Jerusalem. These policies included the issuing of a series of military orders that facilitated the confiscation of hundreds of thousands of dunums of Palestinian land and control of Palestinian resources, particularly water resources. These policies ensured Israeli control over the consumer and production sectors of the Palestinian economy, making it a market for Israeli products and a source of cheap labor. In addition, a heavy tax system was imposed, which led to a decrease in the income of Palestinians.

- The living standards of Palestinians decreased at the end of 1987 after the eruption of the popular uprising (Intifada) in the OPT. This led to an increase in poverty among civilians. IOF imposed restrictions on Palestinian labor in the Israeli market, resulting in the loss of work for tens of thousands of laborers, who now joined in the ranks of the unemployed.

- In 1991, living standards in the OPT deteriorated further due to outbreak of the Second Gulf War. A large number of Palestinians lost work in the region as a result. Many families depended on money transfers from expatriates, particularly those working in the Gulf states. In addition, monetary transfers from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to the West Bank and Gaza Strip decreased due to the loss of funding from Gulf states.

- The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was established in 1994 after the signing of the Oslo accords between the PLO and the government of Israel. The accords were based on the Declaration

of Principles signed in Washington in 1993. Palestinians were soon disappointed, however, when the economic prosperity expected from the peace agreement was not achieved, especially in light of international promises to establish a developed Palestinian economy. Contrary to promises made, IOF continued to strengthen its control over Palestinian natural resources, as well as control over all border crossings linking the OPT to the outside world or to Israel, and control of the movement of goods and individuals.

- In 1996, IOF introduced policies of comprehensive closure and siege of the OPT. IOF isolated the West Bank and Jerusalem from the Gaza Strip, depriving Palestinians of geographical contiguity. In addition, IOF prevented thousands of Palestinian laborers from reaching their work places in Israel, resulting in the increase of unemployment rates. The living standards of tens of thousands of Palestinian families deteriorated and poverty rates increased.

- On 29 September 2000, the "Al-Aqsa Intifada" erupted. Since then, IOF have imposed a comprehensive closure on the OPT, which has led to a halting of economic exchange and which has paralyzed economic and production sectors. More than 120,000 Palestinian laborers from the OPT were prevented from reaching their workplaces inside Israel as a result of closure. In addition, thousands of Palestinians employed in the local market became unemployed due to the closure of workshops and factories, which were affected by the closure policy or were damaged/destroyed by IOF. Unemployment rates reached unprecedented levels, which further exacerbated the poverty problem in the OPT.

- From September 2000 to the end of 2005, the number of Palestinian civilians killed by IOF and Israeli settlers reached 2,936, including 651 children and 106 women. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were injured. The injured included 8,662 injured people from the Gaza Strip, including hundreds who now suffer from permanent disabilities.

- IOF carried out extensive destruction of Palestinian property. This destruction included the bulldozing of agricultural land, demolition of agricultural and industrial establishments, as well as destruction of infrastructure. PCHR documented the bulldozing and uprooting of over 31,699 dunums of agricultural land in the Gaza Strip, comprising approximately 20% of the agricultural land in the Strip.

- IOF actions and the comprehensive closure affected the living standards of Palestinian families. Unemployment reached unprecedented levels, resulting in raised poverty rates. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) indicates that the percentage of Palestinian families living under the poverty line increased to more than 64% from the beginning of Al-Aqsa Intifada to April 2001, meaning that over two million Palestinians were living under the poverty line. The

geographical distribution of these impoverished Palestinians was 55.7% in the West Bank and 81.4% in the Gaza Strip.²

- The Special UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food in the OPT classified families living on brink of a humanitarian disaster. He indicated that the main reason behind this situation was the strict security procedures imposed by IOF on the OPT, since the outbreak of Al-Aqsa Intifada on 29 September 2000. The Rapporteur indicated that acute malnutrition in the Gaza Strip was on the same scale as that seen in poor countries of the Southern Sahara. Given the fertile nature of Palestinian land, such comparisons were startling.

- More than 22% of children under the age of 5 suffer from malnutrition, including 9.3% suffering from acute malnutrition, 13.2% suffering from chronic mal-nutrition and 15.6% suffering from acute anemia. It is expected that this will lead to long-term negative effects on the physical and cognitive development of many of these children. More than half of Palestinian families eat one meal a day only. Food consumption in Palestinian families dropped by 25-30% per person, especially protein intake. The number of Palestinians living under extreme poverty multiplied threefold since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

- PCBS statistics indicate that the percentage of families in the OPT facing difficulties obtaining food stuffs during the Intifada is 63.4%, divided geographically into 65% in the Gaza Strip and 62.5% in the West Bank.

- PCBS also indicates that the percentage of families that face extreme difficulties in obtaining healthcare for children during the Intifada is 41%, 32.1% in the Gaza Strip and 44.6% in the West Bank. Anemic children in the 6-59 months age group, 41.6% face extreme difficulties in obtaining healthcare.

- According to PCBS statistics, the number of employees in the OPT in the year 2005 was 633,000, 453,000 in the West Bank and 180,000 in the Gaza Strip. During the same period, there were 105,000 employed women, with 20,000 in the Gaza Strip and the remainder in the West Bank. Also in 2005, the number of West Bank Palestinian laborers in Israel and Israeli settlements was 35,000; while the number of laborers from the Gaza Strip was under 1000, working in settlements in the Strip. After the outbreak of the Intifada the number of laborers working in Israel and Israeli settlements dropped dramatically. On the eve of the Intifada in September 2000, there were 146,000 laborers, with 30,000 from the Gaza Strip.

- The percentage of paid employees was 59.5% in the OPT, with 56.4% in the West Bank and 67.1% in the Gaza Strip. The total percentage was 67.6% before the Intifada, 66.2% in the West Bank and 71% in the Gaza Strip. The number of self-employed workers increased from 18.1% in the third quarter of 2000 to 26.1% in the year 2005.

- The service sector (including education, health and public management) was the primary employer in the year 2005, accounting for 34.4% of the labor force excluding those employed in Israel. The service sector employed 49.5% in the Gaza Strip and 31.5% in the West Bank. The construction industry was the main employer for laborers in Israel and Israeli settlements, employing 41.9%. The business, restaurant and hotel sectors were the second employer in the local Palestinian market, accounting for 20.8% of the customized labor force in the West Bank and 16.3% in the Gaza Strip. The agriculture and fishing sector was the third employer, accounting for 17.1% in the West Bank and 11.7% in the Gaza Strip.

- The public sector has played a key role in reducing the economic crisis. Over the past 4 years, the public sector has employed 26,000 employees, raising its workforce to 141,000, 72,000 in the West Bank and 69,000 in the Gaza Strip. In 2005, public sector employees comprised 23% of the

² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001; Effect of Israeli Measures on the Economic Situation of Palestinian Families; Ramallah, Palestine.

total workforce, 16.9% in the West Bank and 38.1% in the Gaza Strip. The total public sector percentage before the Intifada was 17.4%.

- International organizations, including humanitarian organizations working in the OPT, foresee catastrophic humanitarian effects in the OPT in general and the Gaza Strip in particular. World Bank estimates indicate that unemployment is expected to rise to 40% in 2006 and to 47% by 2008. The economic and social situation will be more acute in the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank, where unemployment and poverty rates are high and work is dependent on the PNA civilian and security branches. Some organizations estimate that unemployment in the Gaza Strip will reach 60%. Other estimates point to poverty rates in the OPT rising to 67% in 2006 and to 74% by 2008.

- International organization data indicate that the policy of closure imposed on the OPT has led to the loss of nearly two-thirds of the international aid donated to Palestinians since the establishment of the PNA.

- There is an increase in the poverty rate seen in the current crisis, compared to the years before the Intifada. Poverty rates in the Gaza Strip remained higher than the West Bank. The percentage of poverty in relation to expenditure was 37.2% in 2005 and the rate of poverty in relation to income was 65%. The average monthly expenditure of a family was 498.2 Jordanian Dinars (JD), with the average monthly expenditure on food at 184.1 JD. The average monthly expenditure per capita was 67.8 JD, while per capita monthly expenditure on food was 25.1 JD.

- The number of families whose income decreased by more than 50% compared to pre-Intifada days was 57.7%. Indicators for the first quarter of 2005 pointed that 54.4% of the families in the Gaza Strip had reduced their expenditure on basic needs over the past year.

- Statistics showed that 79% of the families depended on their income for survival, while 65.8% delayed paying due bills. With regard to humanitarian assistance in the first quarter indicators for 2005, 58.2% of the families or at least one of the family members had received humanitarian aid.

Impoverished Palestinian families by real monthly consumer patters for selected indicators

Indicators	Poverty		Extreme Poverty	
	Percentage	Contribution	Percentage	Contribution
Gaza Strip	37.2	48.6	26.0	53.1
West Bank	19.8	51.4	11.6	46.9
North West Bank	22.2	23.7	11.7	19.3
Central West Bank	6.7	5.5	3.7	4.8
South West Bank	31.2	22.2	20.6	22.8
OPT	25.6	100	16.4	100

Source: PCBS, Annual Statistics Booklet #6.

Poverty Features and Characteristics in the Gaza Strip:

The poverty report issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation indicated that the poverty rate in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was 25% in 1997, with more than 38% of Gaza Strip families living under the poverty line. Two-thirds of poor families suffer from extreme poverty and are unable to provide their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. Poverty is most extreme in the center and southern areas of the Gaza Strip, where more than half the population is living under the poverty line. In the southern Gaza Strip, 51% of the population is poor, while the rate is 31% in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip.

Although poor families constitute 38.2% of the population, they consume only 19.3% of goods and services. The consumption rate for the poor was one-third of that for those living above the poverty line in 1997. Families above the poverty line consume 4 times the clothing and healthcare services of poor families. Poor people in the Strip consume 23.5% of the food, whereas non-poor families consume 76.5% of the food, while comprising only 61.8% of consumers.

The report indicates that poverty is higher in single-mother families (30%) compared to families headed by a male (22%). Poverty is inversely proportional to education, with a poverty rate of 32% for those without elementary education, 23% for those with elementary education, 20% for those with preparatory education, 12% for those with a 2-year under-graduate diploma, and 8% for those with university degrees.

The report also points to the fact that poverty is not exclusive to the unemployed. About 20% of the labor force in 1997 was under the poverty line. This points to the fact that poverty results from the poor conditions in the Palestinian labor market, especially the low wages in some sectors.³

The PCBS report on poverty in the OPT indicates that the overall poverty rate in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in 1998 was 22%, with 33% in the Gaza Strip. According to these statistics the poverty rate in the Gaza Strip was more than double that in the West Bank, where the rate was 15%.⁴

The PCBS report indicates that 1 in 5 Gaza Strip families were suffering from extreme poverty and unable to meet their basic needs in terms of clothing, food and shelter. The report also points that the southern Gaza Strip is poorer than the north, and that refugee camps are the poorest areas in the Strip. One in three families living in refugee camps was under the poverty line.

The report indicated that poverty was proportional to family size. The highest poverty rates in 1998 were in families of 10 or more members, with 32% of these families under the poverty line. Single-member, predominantly elderly families were next in line at 28%. Families headed by females are poorer than those led by males. The poverty rate for female-led families is 26%; whereas the rate for male-led families is 20%. The report points that the elderly are more exposed to poverty, with 65% of Palestinians aged 65 or more living under the poverty line. This could be the result of the lack of social security and suitable retirement benefits in the OPT.

³ Palestine – Poverty Report 1998; National Team for Combating Poverty; Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation; November 1998; pgs. 35-47, 165-168.

⁴ PCBS, 2000; Poverty in the Palestinian Areas (1998); Ramallah, Palestine.

The report indicates that poverty decreases with higher educational levels. In 1998, 28% percent of Palestinians who have not finished primary school live under the poverty line; while only 7% of those who have finished at least a 2-year undergraduate diploma live under the poverty line.

Study results indicate that poor families do not feel that education is available to everyone, since education requires expenses beyond the means of poor families. Although education is nearly free in governmental and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, education-related expenses such as buying books, stationary, clothes, transportation, and school fees for governmental schools are beyond the means of some poor families. This could explain the link between poverty, school drop out rates, and child labor. Students' negative school performance leads many students to drop out of school.⁵ The most notable statistics about the labor market in the OPT, as declared by PCBS at the beginning of May 2006, are:

- Participation in the labor force is a key indicator of labor market activity and effectiveness in providing employment. Participation dropped to 40.7% of the labor force (individuals aged 15 or more) for the year 2005. Only 4 out of every 10 people in the age group are active in the labor force. The percentage for the year 2000 was 43.6%.

- In the West Bank during 2005, participation in the labor force was 42.9%, while the percentage was 36.7% in the Gaza Strip. Female participation was very low compared to males, with only 13.4% female participation in the labor force (15.8% in the West Bank and 9.0% in the Gaza Strip). On the other hand, male participation was 67.6% (69.5% in the West Bank and 63.9% in the Gaza Strip). The number of active workers is approximately 827,000, 568,000 in the West Bank and 259,000 in the Gaza Strip.

- The labor force is divided into 2 main groups: employed and unemployed. The employed are divided into complete employment and partial employment. The percentage of employment in relation to the labor force in the OPT is 76.5%, including 8.6% partially employed.

- The unemployment rate in the labor force for 2005 was 23.5%, with 20.3% in the West Bank and 30.3% in the Gaza Strip. The unemployment rate for females in the labor force was 22.3% compared to 23.7% for males. The number of unemployed workers was 194,000, with 115,000 in the West Bank and 79,000 in the Gaza Strip. Unemployment in the OPT is the highest in the region. Unemployment in Jordan is 12.5% and 10.4% in Israel.

- In the West Bank, the governorate of Hebron had the highest unemployment rate at 26.1%, followed by Jenin at 25.3%. While the lowest unemployment rates were in Jericho (13.2%) and Bethlehem (13.5%). In the Gaza Strip, the highest unemployment rate was in Deir El-Balah (35.1%), followed by the northern Gaza Strip (33.6%). The lowest unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip was 26.8% in Gaza City.

⁵ Hadeel Qazzaz & Nadir Said; Poverty in Palestine – Case Studies; Development Studies Program; Birzeit University; 1999; pgs. 89-90.

Key nutrition indicators by area for 2004

Indicator	Gaza Strip	West Bank	OPT
Families facing difficulties obtaining food during the Intifada	65.0%	62.5%	63.4%
Families facing difficulties in getting healthcare for their children during the Intifada	32.1%	44.6%	40%
Anemic children (6-59 months)	41.6%	35.5%	38.0%
Children suffering from stunted growth (6-59 months)	11.4%	8.8%	9.9%

Source: PCBS, Annual Statistics Booklet #6.

Relevant International Instruments

Poverty was an international concern before the establishment of the United Nations (UN). The third part of the Versailles Agreement of 1919 stated, "Permanent world peace cannot be established without social justice."

The UN has taken special notice of poverty since its establishment in 1948. The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), stated, "the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people." This was repeated in the preambles of the international covenants on human rights of 1966: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stated, "Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights."

Poverty was long considered an economic problem until the UN Committee on Human Rights placed it on the agenda of economic, social and cultural rights. Thus, extreme poverty is a violation of human dignity, and a denial of all human rights, not just economic and social rights. The UN General Assembly adopted a number of important decisions, most notably resolution 47/196 for the year 1992, which announced that the 17th of October is an International Day against Poverty. Thus, poverty is viewed from a human rights perspective. In a broader sense, poverty includes bad living conditions, unhealthy shelter, insufficient education, disenfranchisement, unemployment and poor health conditions.

A number of international conventions and covenants stressed the importance of fighting poverty and ensuring a dignified life for human beings, through ensuring the fair distribution of resources among individuals and adopting steps aiming to develop human life.

*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*⁶

Article 22 provides:

“Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.”

Article 23 provides:

“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”

“Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.”

“Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection....”

*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*⁷

Article 1 provides:

“All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.”

Article 6 provides:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.”

“The steps to be taken by a State Party to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include technical and vocational guidance and training programs, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms of individuals.”

⁶Adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948.

⁷Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by the UN General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, and entered into force on 3 January 1976, in accordance with article 27.

Article 9 provides:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance.”

Article 11 provides:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.”

There are a number of international human rights conventions that consider poverty a violation of human dignity, and establish legal obligations on contracting parties to fight poverty. One of these conventions is the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Right to Development, and others. Furthermore, international UN conferences, especially the World Summit for Social Development (March 1995), was a key turning pointing in establishing mechanisms to eliminate poverty. The Copenhagen Declaration issued in the conference indicated that poverty is a key issue that requires urgent steps to eliminate it, and to achieve the desired social development. The conference considered poverty, unemployment and social discrimination as the three main social problems affecting humanity.

Recommendations

PCHR issues a reminder to the international community, including donor countries and IOF, of their infringement of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, especially:

- Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, as well as the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other circumstances beyond his/ her control leading to lack of livelihood. (Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
- All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.
- The States Parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. (Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
- The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.
- The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programs, which are needed, taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need. (Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
- Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited. It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive. (Article 54 in
- the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts – Protocol 1).
- No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited. Pillage is prohibited. Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited. (Article 33 of 4th Geneva Convention).
- To the fullest extent of the means available to it the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are

inadequate. The Occupying Power may not requisition foodstuffs, articles or medical supplies available in the occupied territory, except for use by the occupation forces and administration personnel, and then only if the requirements of the civilian population have been taken into account. Subject to the provisions of other international Conventions, the Occupying Power shall make arrangements to ensure that fair value is paid for any requisitioned goods. The Protecting Power shall, at any time, be at liberty to verify the state of the food and medical supplies in occupied territories, except where temporary restrictions are made necessary by imperative military requirements. (Article 55 of 4th Geneva Convention).

- To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the cooperation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics. Medical personnel of all categories shall be allowed to carry out their duties. (Article 56 of 4th Geneva Convention).

The International Community

- Cancel the decision to stop financial aid to the Palestinian people. Work to stop collective punishment of civilians, in order to protect their economic, social and cultural rights and to eliminate poverty and extreme poverty in the OPT in general, and the Gaza Strip in particular.
- Pressure IOF to lift the siege imposed on the OPT.
- Assume its legal responsibilities to force Israel to abide to the International Bill of Human Rights, especially the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.
- Assist the Palestinian people to achieve their rights to self-determinations and political and economic independence.

The Israeli Occupation Authorities

- Lift the siege imposed on the OPT and to stop their aggression against the Palestinian people.
- Compensate Palestinian laborers for lost workdays.
- Release blocked money of the PNA to enable it to combat poverty and cover the deficit of its budget.
- Compensate Palestinians who have been victims of Israeli actions of retaliation.
- Respect the rights of Palestinians to work, travel, education, and health.