



In June, 2010, intense international pressure obliged Israel to announce measures to ease its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip. Unfortunately, the resulting “loosening” has changed very little for Gazans.

Has Israel truly loosened its blockade of Gaza since June 2010?

Yes and no. Israel has eased restrictions on spices, clothes, cosmetics, refrigerators and other consumer items. This has increased the flow of these items through Israeli-controlled crossings, and reduced their flow through the tunnels under the Egyptian border. As well, construction materials for *Israeli-authorized* projects is beginning to enter Gaza. However, as noted in a joint study released Nov. 30, 2010 by 21 key international organizations,¹ Israel continues to maintain the key elements of the illegal blockade in effect since 2007. Thus, although consumer goods are more accessible than before, Israel continues to deny Gaza the commerce necessary for a true economic and societal recovery. These restrictions (described in the sections below) perpetuate the ongoing crisis in Gaza, including:²

- 39 percent unemployment
- 65 percent of industrial businesses are shut down; the rest operate at only partial capacity
- 60 percent of Gaza’s population receives running water only once every 4 or 5 days, for 6-8 hours
- 50-80 million litres of untreated or partially treated sewage are released into the sea every day, contaminating the fishing grounds that customarily provided many Gazans’ food and livelihoods
- About 90 percent of water supplied to Gaza’s residents is unsuitable for drinking and contaminated with salt and nitrates
- Daily power outages of 4-6 hours, often longer
- 78 percent of homes with major damages from Israel’s 2009 Assault have not been rebuilt

What restrictions on entry of goods remain and what is the impact?

Construction materials:

- **For homes:** UN agencies estimate that 670,000 truckloads of construction materials are needed to construct the 86,000 new housing units required to accommodate past population growth and replace or repair the homes destroyed or severely damaged by Israeli military operations. However, as of late November 2010, only 715 truckloads of construction materials per month for all uses—11 percent of pre-blockade levels—have been allowed in.³ The private sector is still barred from importing construction materials. As a result, only 22 percent of the family homes that sustained major damage during Operation Cast Lead have been repaired; those repairs have been done using recycled rubble and cement smuggled in through the tunnels. Average Palestinian civilians cannot afford the inflated prices of materials from the tunnels.
- **For international projects:** Israel made a commitment in June 2010 to expand and accelerate the inflow of construction materials for international projects. However, as of Nov. 25, 2010, Israel had approved—in principle—just 7 percent (25 projects) of the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) construction plan in Gaza. And only a small fraction of the truckloads of materials needed to complete that 7 percent has actually been allowed in.⁴ Therefore sewage treatment, water and electricity services, among other public services, are inadequate (see figures in first section above).
- **For schools:** Over 90 percent of UNRWA schools are running double shifts, even with shipping containers and other inappropriate spaces sometimes being used as classrooms. Half of Gaza’s population are children. So far, Israel has approved—in principle only—construction of just 6 of the 100 schools needed by UNRWA to educate the children. As a result, 40,000 eligible children had to be turned away in fall 2010.⁵

Industrial machinery and raw materials:

A survey of Gaza businesses conducted by UNRWA between July and September 2010 found that only 18 percent received all of the raw materials needed; 44 percent received some of the materials needed, and 38 percent received none of the raw materials they needed. This, combined with the ban on exports,

has obliged 65 percent of industrial businesses to shut down, and the remainder to operate below capacity. As a result, this sector currently employs only 6,000 workers, compared to 35,000 prior to the blockade.⁶

Other goods⁷:

Following the easing, imports of certain goods into Gaza have indeed increased. However, the amounts entering are still only 35 percent of the pre-blockade levels, and are primarily consumer goods (e.g. food). The published list of prohibited items includes far more items than those recognized by the international community as “dual use” items. And vital water equipment, despite not being on the restricted list, is not being permitted entry. Many essential types of medical equipment, for example radiation machines for cancer treatment, endoscopy and laparoscopy machines for surgery, microscopes and other optical instruments are still blocked. In addition, fuel for the power plant is still restricted, to 68% of its capacity.

Has Israel expanded crossings operations, as promised in June 2010?

Israel agreed to expand crossings operations and to open more crossings. It agreed to expand the operation of the conveyer belt at the Karni crossing—used for the entry of construction materials, wheat and animal feed—to a weekly total of 360 truckloads. However, the conveyer belt continues to operate at a maximum total of 160 truckloads a week. Moreover, due to frequent mechanical breakdowns, the average number of truckloads is only 137 per week – 38 percent of what was promised and less than the 158 truckloads allowed prior to the “easing.” The number of truckloads entering at the Karem Shalom crossing has more than doubled, but the Sufa and Nahal Oz crossings remain closed.⁸

Has Israel eased restrictions on the movement of people?

No. The number of exit permits approved by Israel is less than 1 percent of the levels in 2000.⁹

- There has been no significant expansion of exit permits for medical treatment in Israel. One result is that medical treatment of Gazans—even of children—is delayed, often with fatal consequences.¹⁰
- There has been a reduction in the rate of approvals of entry and exit permits for UN agency aid staff: In September and October of 2010, only 47 percent and 45 percent, respectively, of the requests by UN agencies were approved. This is down from an average of 76 percent in the first half of 2010.¹¹
- Restrictions on the movement of human rights workers have increased: International human rights workers are being denied entry through the Erez crossing. Human rights workers already in Gaza are being denied exit through Erez, and are therefore unable to meet with their counterparts in Israel and the West Bank.¹² This smacks of censorship and blocking access to information.
- Israel has imposed a general ban on the passage of Gazans—including students—to the West Bank since 2000. Only students with scholarships in selected “friendly” countries are allowed to leave. Students enrolled without scholarships, or enrolled in other countries, are denied exit permits.¹³

Has Israel eased the restrictions on exports from Gaza?

No. Due to its relatively small internal market, Gaza has long been export-dependent. Under the 2005 agreement on Movement and Access, Israel agreed to allow 400 truckloads of exports per day. However, since the blockade, only 224 truckloads in total were allowed out—occasional shipments of strawberries and carnations. Since the easing, other than the humanitarian activity of small exports of strawberries, not a single truck of exports has left Gaza. This has led to business closures and unemployment.¹⁴

¹ “Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade,” Amnesty International UK et al, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ UNRWA, as cited in *Dashed Hopes*, pp. 5, 7. Progress on the “approved in principle” projects has also been slowed by Israel’s onerous requirements for approval, monitoring and verification—including multiple photographs—of the use of each truckload of materials.

⁵ UNRWA, as cited in *Dashed Hopes*, p. 7; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) of the occupied Palestinian territories. *The Humanitarian Monitor*, September 2010.

⁶ “Dashed Hopes”, p. 6.

⁷ “Dashed Hopes”, p. 4, 5, 6, 8

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰ “Delayed exit of a toddler from Gaza results in death”. Physicians for Human Rights—Israel. Oct. 20, 2010.

¹¹ *The Humanitarian Monitor*, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) of the occupied Palestinian territories. September and October 2010 issues.

¹² *Dashed Hopes*, p. 8

¹³ *Dashed Hopes*, p. 8

¹⁴ *Dashed Hopes*, pp. 4, 5, 6.