

UN says over one million Palestinians under poverty line in Gaza Strip

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The UN report calls for end to Israeli siege that has crippled economic activities in Gaza.

Geneva, November 26 (RHC)-- The Israel blockade of the Gaza Strip cost the Palestinian enclave more than \$16 billion and pushed more than one million people below the poverty line in just more than 10 years, according to a new United Nations report.

The document issued on Wednesday by the UN's Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to the General Assembly covered the years between 2007 and 2018. It called for an immediate stop to the continuing siege that has caused a near-collapse of economic activities in Gaza and a poverty rate of 56 percent.

“The situation is going to get worse if the blockade continues,” said Mahmoud Elkhafif, coordinator of the Assistance to the Palestinian People of UNCTAD. “This unfair blockade in which two million Palestinians are kept inside Gaza should be lifted immediately. They should be allowed to move freely, do business, trade with the outside world and reconnect with their families outside of the Strip,” Elkhafif added.

Since June 2007, people of Gaza have been confined to the 365 square kilometres enclave of the Strip and subject to a land, air and sea embargo. The entry of goods has been reduced to a minimum, while external trade and exports have been stopped. Meanwhile, the population has very limited access to safe water and lack regular electricity supply or even a proper sewage system.

“Unless Palestinians in the Strip get access to the outside world, it is difficult to see anything but underdevelopment being the fate of the Gaza Palestinian society,” said Richard Kozul-Wright, director of the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies at UNCTAD. “It is really shocking that in the 21st century, two million people can be left in that kind of condition.”

In addition to the prolonged blockade and restrictions by neighboring Egypt, the Hamas-run enclave endured three Israeli military operations in 2007, 2012 and 2014 that severely damaged civilian infrastructure and caused heavy casualties.

At least 3,793 Palestinians were killed, some 18,000 were wounded and more than half of Gaza’s population was displaced, according to the UNCTAD’s report. More than 1,500 commercial and industrial enterprises were damaged, along with some 150,000 household units and public infrastructure including energy, water, sanitation, health and educational facilities and government buildings.

Meanwhile, the isolation of the Strip has not prevented the coronavirus pandemic from reaching Gaza, worsening an already critical situation. As of Monday, 14,768 people had contracted COVID-19, with 65 deaths.

Earlier this week, health authorities in Gaza warned of an imminent catastrophe if Israel continued to block humanitarian access as well as the entry of necessary health equipment and medical supplies. Hospitals and healthcare staff are in need of protective clothing, ventilators and beds. “The health crisis is exposing the underlying conditions that have been worsening over a decade,” said Kozul-Wright.

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