

GAZA



INTRODUCTION

June 2008

Most of the world looks at Gaza through a prism of news footage comprised of missile attacks, political turmoil, and humanitarian crisis. However, Gaza is a vital part of the Palestinian entity and identity, and its place in the middle of the Palestinian Question makes it a prominent focus of global politics. In effect, the fate of Gaza and the Palestinian people of Gaza will parallel that of the conflict as a whole; nothing can be decided without factoring in the Strip and the 1.5 million inhabitants that represent 40 percent of the total population in the Palestinian territories. With that in mind, this bulletin intends to answer the basic questions that surround the territory and its place in the larger picture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It should be mentioned that when we talk of Gaza we are talking of the entire Gaza Strip, because the term can also refer to Gaza City, which is the eponymous city located in the north of the region. Gaza City is the area's largest metropolis; it served as the Philistine capital upon their capture of the area in the 13th century BC and became the capital of Palestine in 1660. In fact, it is one of the oldest cities in the world and has a history of prosperity and importance that stretches back to antiquity. For the purposes of this bulletin, however, the term "Gaza" will refer to the entire Gaza Strip rather than just Gaza City. Other main centers of population include Khan Younis and Rafah in the south of the territory.

Gaza at a Glance:¹

Area: 365 km² ^a

Boundaries: 51 km Israel to north & east; 11 km Egypt to south; 40 km Mediterranean Sea to west^a

Population: 1,499,369 people (2007 est.)^a

Median Age: 15.3 years^a

Growth Rate: 3.8% ^b

Population Density: 4,108 persons/km² ^b

Urban Population: 63.5% ^b

Religion: Muslim (99.3%; almost all Sunni), Christian (.7%)^a

Refugees: 1,030,638 registered with UNRWA as of June 2007; 47% live in camps ^c

Real GDP (2007 estimate): about \$3,901 million (14% lower than its peak in 1999)^d

Poverty Rate: 35% (or 67% if based only on household income, excl. remittances and food aid)^d

There is a need to go further stereotypical images of Gaza, which is usually associated with violence and destitution. Moreover, due to the current situation – i.e., the physical and political separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the importance of Gaza for greater stability Middle East – it is important to summarize current facts and figures about the Gaza Strip in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of related issues. Thus, major elements from general statistics to a detailed map and a brief analysis of recent relations between the political "tribes" of Fateh and Hamas are provided in this bulletin.

Symbolizing the Lack of Normalcy in 2008

Even in the midst of crisis, a simple game can often provide insight into the confusion. Egyptian football star Mohamed Aboutreika increased his already sizable popularity among Egyptians and Gazans alike when, after



scoring a goal in the Africa Cup of Nations, he lifted his jersey to show an undershirt with the words "Sympathize with Gaza" printed across the chest. Less than a year earlier, the Israeli Army had decided to punish the Palestinians in Gaza by using artillery fire to level the only football stadium in the territory. An Israeli Army spokesman was quick to point out that the act of collective punishment was justified, saying, "The terrorism is coming from within them, and they need to know that they are the ones suffering."² The Israeli Army went on to say the stadium was targeted to "send a strong message to the Palestinian people against terrorism."

Yet despite the difficulties Gazans face in merely engaging in a recreational activity like playing football, a dedicated group of young men earned an invitation to compete against top professional teams in England in the summer of 2007. Their chance to represent Gaza on an international stage was quashed, however, when the British government decided to refuse the visa requests for the trip. These three instances show how even a game like football can be used as either a symbol of hope or just another example of the crushing effect the Israeli occupation has on even the simplest aspects of daily life.

¹ Statistics from: ^a PASSIA Diary 2008 ^b PCBS (2007); ^c UNRWA (June 2007), ^d World Bank (April 2008).

² Last, Jeremy. "Fifa consider action over air strike." *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 April 2006.

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