**Al Mezan and Al Haq Joint Report on**

**Follow-up to Concluding Observations (Israel)**

1. The present report provides an overview of the fulfillment of economic, social, and cultural rights in the occupied Gaza Strip during the reporting period, i.e., between 2019 and 2022. Particularly, it will review the Israeli ongoing blockade and closure policies and their repercussions and effects on the enjoyment of these rights.

# Articles 1, 6, 7

1. In serious breach of international law, Israel has maintained illegal land, sea, and air closure regime over the Gaza Strip, which constitutes a collective punishment of 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza. The 15-year-long closure is characterized by a range of punitive measures and policies, *inter alia*, suffocating restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons and goods, repetitive military incursions and offensives against civilians, arbitrary shrinking of the fishing zone in Palestinian territorial waters, creation of military no-go zones (access restricted areas) along the perimeter fence, as well as deliberate obstruction of implementation of strategic projects in relation to the desalination of drinking water and the development of the energy sector. Israel’s discriminatory stifling closure constitutes a prohibited collective punishment under international humanitarian law and is an integral part of a concrete system of apartheid, fragmentation, and domination against the Palestinian people as a whole.
2. Gaza’s economic sectors are enduring obstacles that considerably limit their ability to grow and contribute to the Palestinian GDP. These obstacles are created by a wide range of Israeli policies—including its 15-year closure, restrictions on the free movement of people and goods in and out of the Strip, and repeated military attacks which target key components of the economy—which are part and parcel of its apartheid regime against the Palestinian people as a whole.
3. **The devastating impacts of Israel’s closure and blockade against Gaza**
4. According to Al Mezan’s available data, the volume of imports into Gaza has dramatically dropped as Israel imposed its closure and blockade on the Strip. In 2005, there were 111,480 trucks of imported goods entered the Gaza Strip. In 2018, there were 26,838. In 2020, the number of trucks was 96,651—an increase that is not due to an easing of Israeli restrictions but rather due to population growth and increased demand for services. The volume of exported goods also declined with the imposition of the closure. While the Gaza Strip exported 9,319 trucks of goods in 2005, the volume of exports decreased dramatically to 33 trucks in 2008. In 2020, the Gaza Strip exported 3,118 truckloads of goods—around only one-third of the volume before the closure.[[1]](#footnote-1)
5. The agricultural sector has also been affected by the closure, as Israel bans the entry of basic agricultural necessities to the Gaza Strip—including fertilizers, irrigation pumps, and agricultural machinery—and imposes restrictions on exports of agricultural produce and marketing process via Karem Abu Salem Crossing, the only commercial crossing that connects Gaza to Israel and the rest of Palestine.
6. The Palestinian farming community nearby Gaza’s perimeter fence endures constant attacks by Israeli forces, who unlawfully enforce an ‘access restricted areas’ (ARA) within Palestinian territory and up to 1,500 meters from the fence. The ARA covers approximately 62 square kilometers of land, i.e., about 35 percent of the total agricultural land of the Strip and 15 percent of the Gaza Strip’s total area.[[2]](#footnote-2)
7. Palestinian fishermen also endure significant difficulties to access their livelihood, as Israel does not only deny them their right to work—whether by shrinking down the permitted fishing zone or attacking them and jeopardizing their lives—but also bans the entry of materials and equipment necessary for fishing and boat repair, mainly fiberglass, as well as the basic material used for the manufacture and maintenance of damaged boats. Israel also bars the entry of engines and their spare parts, as well as marine electronics, such as the GPS.
8. Economic and social indicators in the Gaza Strip have been affected by Israel’s restrictions on the freedom of trade and the ban on entry of materials necessary for the economic, industrial, and agricultural sectors. As a result, throughout the reporting period, the unemployment rate remained high in the Gaza Strip. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCSB), there has been a large disparity in the unemployment rates between the labor force in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which stands at 47 percent in the Gaza Strip against 14 percent in the West Bank.[[3]](#footnote-3)
9. According to UN OCHA, 1.3 million out of 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza (ca. 62 percent of the total population) are in need of food assistance, and 31 percent of households in Gaza have difficulties meeting essential educational needs, such as tuition fees and books, due to the lack of financial resources.[[4]](#footnote-4) The poverty rate in Gaza stands at 53 percent, while 64 percent of Gaza’s population is severely or moderately food insecure.
10. **Two full scales Israeli military attacks in less than two years**
11. During the reporting period, Israel launched two large-scale military strikes against the Gaza Strip, in May 2021 and August 2022, which caused massive destruction to economic structures.
12. Between 10-21 May 2021, Israel launched a full-scale military offensive against Gaza, conducting a relentless series of heavy airstrikes at densely populated areas in Gaza and deliberately targeting civilians and their homes as well as civilian and public infrastructure. Al Mezan, Al-Haq, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights documented the attacks.[[5]](#footnote-5)
13. During the offensive, 261 Palestinians were killed, with 240 killed by Israeli forces—151 of whom were civilians, including 38 women and 59 children (39 of whom were under12). The Israeli military wounded another 1,968 Palestinians in Gaza, including 630 children (415 of whom were under 12). In 13 percent of Israeli military attacks, ambulances were obstructed from reaching victims and hospitals due to ongoing attacks and destruction of roads.
14. Of the 240 Palestinians killed by the Israeli military, 113 were targeted in their homes without warning. With whole residential apartment blocks targeted and 7,680 housing units damaged or destroyed pursuant to an apparent policy at least tacitly agreed by Israel’s military and political leadership, the Israeli government resumed the key feature of its 51-day hostilities in the summer of 2014: targeted military attacks against family homes resulting in civilian casualties.[[6]](#footnote-6)
15. Further, 24 wells, 221 poultry and livestock farms, seven banks, 124 mosques, 81 daycare centers, 50 healthcare clinics, and 184 schools were damaged or destroyed, among other private and public facilities. Israeli forces also destroyed water and electricity lines, roads, and waterworks that feed entire residential neighborhoods as indispensable objects to the survival of civilians, deliberately subjecting two million Palestinians to inhumane living conditions.
16. After a little more than a year, with a population still being traumatized by the previous escalation, between 5-7 August 2022, Israel waged an unprovoked military offensive against Gaza, conducting a series of heavy airstrikes on densely populated areas and deliberately targeting civilians and their homes as well as civilian and public infrastructure.
17. During the 3-day offensive, 49 Palestinians were killed, including four women and 17 children, while another 360 were wounded, including 151 children and 58 women. At the time of writing, Al Mezan is still investigating every incident and, as of 22 August 2022, has determined that of the 32 Palestinians so far confirmed to have been killed by the Israeli army, 19 were civilians, including eight children and three women. With whole residential apartment blocks targeted, the Israeli government resumed the key feature of previous full-scale military offensives against Gaza, i.e., targeted military attacks against family homes—often without warning—resulting in civilian casualties.
18. Our daily and firsthand field monitoring on the ground throughout both offensives and follow-up documentation indicate that Israeli military attacks were conducted in blatant violation of the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions enshrined in customary international humanitarian law. The conducts amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity under international criminal law.

# Article 11

1. Israel’s recurrent military attacks against the Gaza Strip, which involve the targeting of residential buildings and towers, have created a housing crisis and increased the deficit in residential apartments. In addition, the reconstruction process has met considerable challenges due to the lack of funds and the Israeli restrictions imposed on the entry of construction materials classified as ‘dual-use items’.
2. Following the May 2021 hostilities, as Israeli authorities maintained their restrictions on the entry of heavy machinery and construction equipment to the Gaza Strip, Egypt offered and supported Gaza with the needed types of machinery to help lift the rubbles left by the Israeli military offensive. Later on, Israel allowed the entry of basic construction materials such as steel bars, gravel, and cement (some types), which were blocked from entering the Gaza Strip for three months after the May 2021 offensive. However, it still bars the entry of steel pipes over a certain diameter, concrete mixers, pumps, and heavy machinery. The dual-use list also includes thousands of other materials needed for civil needs, such as epoxy and fiberglass, vital for industry, manufacturing, and other sectors.[[7]](#footnote-7)
3. The Palestinian Contractor Union (PCU) confirmed that Israeli authorities allowed the entry of steel and cement (black and white) via Karem Abu Salem crossing to the local market, meanwhile barring the entry of other construction materials, including pipes, steel profiles, asphalt material, electric lifts, electrical cables, pumps. They also conditioned conducting prior coordination before the importation process, further obstructing the reconstruction process.[[8]](#footnote-8)

# Article 12

1. As part of the unlawful closure imposed on the Strip, Israeli authorities have been applying an arbitrary and discriminatory permit regime on Gaza residents seeking to cross Erez crossing for different purposes. Many applicants’ requests for exit permits are met with denial or delay. Al Mezan’s documentation shows that the number of people who submitted exit permit applications to the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affair in 2021 was 68,609, distributed among different categories, including merchants, patients, and normal travelers. The Israeli Coordination and Liaison Administration (CLA) at Erez approved only 46.6 percent of the submitted requests, while delaying or dening the rest. Most of the applicants are desperately in need to pass Erez Crossing for economic, health, or social motives.[[9]](#footnote-9)
2. One of the most vulnerable groups affected by Israel’s draconian and arbitrary exist-permit system is medical patients. The discriminatory system has deprived dozens of referral patients, whose treatment is unavailable in the Gaza Strip due to the closure, of life-saving treatment in hospitals in the Wes Bank and Jerusalem, putting their lives at risk.
3. The Israeli permit regime has also been the main obstacle for Gaza medical patients to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. This regime has compounded the suffering of patients with serious diseases and puts their lives at further risk. In 2021, the CLA delayed or denied 36 percent of patients’ requests for a travel permit. In the most extreme cases, Palestinian patients have died after the Israeli authorities denied them access to hospitals and medical care by the time of the prescheduled medical appointment. Since the beginning of 2022, four Palestinian patients from Gaza have lost their lives as they had had their applications significantly delayed or denied by the Israeli authorities.
4. In parallel with this, Israel continues to practice medical apartheid against Palestinians in Gaza by obstructing the entry of essential materials, equipment, drugs, and other maintenance necessary to Gaza’s hospitals and medical centers. The Ministry of Health in Gaza has, for example, been unable to import medical devices for radiology and imaging scanning machines and spare parts which left the patients in Gaza, particularly who suffer from cancer or tumors, in a life-threatening situation.
5. Gaza’s readily precarious health sector has been overburdened by the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. Despite the spread of a threatening pandemic, Israeli authorities blocked access to necessary medical equipment such as ventilators and PCR tests, while at the same time Israel discriminatorily excluded Gaza from its vaccination programs and impaired equitable access to clean vaccines for the millions of Palestinians living under its effective control.

# Article 13

1. Israel’s permit regime has systematically hampered the movement of people to and from the Strip, putting at risk the future of Palestinian students from Gaza wishing to pursue a higher degree at the West Bank universities or outside the occupied Palestinian territory. This is because Israel’s restrictions on the freedom of movement of Palestinians deny Gaza students the right to continue their education at Palestinian universities and institutions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, or abroad.
2. Moreover, Israel maintains its control on Palestinian information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and the frequency spectrum, as well as bans the entry of smart devices needed for upgrading internet services to the Gaza Strip, in an attempt to deepen the digital gap between the Gaza Strip and the outside world.
3. Israel’s closure has contributed to the deterioration of economic conditions and affected the households’ ability to cover education tuitions, thereby exacerbating the financial crisis endured by higher education institutions.

# Article 15

1. Gazan intellectuals and artists are deprived of participating in any of the cultural activities carried out in the West Bank, and they are unable to hold book fairs.

1. Israel’s illegal closure and blockade on the Gaza Strip as well as the repeated military attacks have deepened the cultural gap in Gaza. Cultural institutions, libraries, and publishing houses have been targeted during Israel’s attacks against the Gaza Strip, causing destruction in the following libraries: Samir Masnour, al-Nahda, Iqraa, and al-Manara. Gaza readers and researchers lack the ability to access many new books and they cannot catch up with new cultural activities taking place outside Gaza.
2. **Given these current developments, the right to enjoy the highest attainable standards of economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights is still most likely unattainable to Palestinian living in the Gaza Strip.**
1. Unpublished data from the Palestinian Trade Center (PalTrade) accessed by Al Mezan on 5 June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Al Mezan, “Statistical report on the Israeli violations by land”, July 2019, at: <http://mezan.org/uploads/files/15636897141620.pdf> - available in Arabic only [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. PCBS, results of the labour force survey, first quarter of 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. OCHA, the humanitarian impact of the 15-year blockade on Gaza, June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Al Mezan et al at: <http://mezan.org/en/post/24096> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Al Mezan at: <http://mezan.org/en/post/23978> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gisha- Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, Red Line, Gray Lists, [Red Lines, Gray Lists | Gisha](https://features.gisha.org/red-lines-gray-lists/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Interview with Aladdin al-Araj, Chief of PCU, on 7 February 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affair, unpublished data collected by Al Mezan in 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)