



NOVEMBER 2012

# 8 DAYS IN GAZA THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT

# INTRODUCTION

## The conflict in numbers

**163** Palestinians killed including 43 children, 15 women and 18 elderly people

Over **1,200** injured including 431 children, 207 women and 88 elderly people

**213** houses destroyed or severely damaged, and another 1,500 in need of repair

Around **10,000** displaced people living in emergency shelters

The conflict of November 2012 has had a devastating impact on the people of Gaza. With 163 killed, 1,200 injured, thousands displaced and significant damage to infrastructure over a period of eight days, the effect of the bombardment has been catastrophic in this densely populated territory where most of the population were already dependent on humanitarian aid for survival.

Amongst the destruction a hospital, a school and a water well rebuilt by Islamic Relief after the 2008 war have been damaged once again. Islamic Relief staff, who were on the ground throughout the conflict delivering life-saving medical aid, are now assessing the extent of the damage. More worrying than the collapse of health and education facilities is the impact on a generation of Gazan children of eight days of trauma that may stay with them for the rest of their lives.



A woman grieves at the moment of farewell to her niece who was killed during the attacks

Islamic Relief launched a £5 million global appeal at the start of the conflict to raise funds for vital medical supplies, and our donors responded generously. In the coming days we will be assessing the extent of the damage and increasing our fundraising target to include reconstruction and support programmes.

# BEFORE THE RECENT CONFLICT

## An ongoing humanitarian crisis

Israel withdrew its forces from Gaza in 2005 but maintains control of the borders. Since 2007, Israel has restricted some aspects of life in Gaza severely.

- ▶ The 1.7 million population has very limited access to the outside world. There is no freedom of movement by air, sea or land
- ▶ A blockade since 2007 has led to a shortage in basic supplies and a severe fuel shortage
- ▶ 80% of the population are dependent on humanitarian aid
- ▶ Hundreds of injured patients cannot leave Gaza for medical treatment
- ▶ Unemployment stands at 45%, one of the highest rates in the world

## At this rate Gaza will be uninhabitable by 2020

according to a UN report 'Gaza in 2020: A liveable place?'  
[www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1423](http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1423)

## Supporting the people of Gaza

Islamic Relief has been working in the Palestinian Territories since 1994, and opened an office in Gaza City in 1998. Our work includes helping vulnerable communities rebuild their livelihoods through agricultural projects, vocational training programmes, micro-finance loans and cash-for-work schemes.

Much of our work in Gaza focuses on children. Our donors currently sponsor 4,000 orphans, giving them the opportunity for a better start in life. We also provide psychosocial support for traumatised children, health checks and medical treatment, daily milk and nutrition for pre-school children, and a number of projects to improve access to education.

## Recovering from the 2008 war

When the latest escalation of violence began, the population of Gaza was still recovering from the 22-day war in December 2008. That previous conflict claimed 1,400 lives, left 5,000 injured and displaced 40,000 people from their homes.

Islamic Relief worked throughout the 22-day war delivering vital aid, including 7,000 meals and 80,000 food packages, to vulnerable families.

Since the 2008 war Islamic Relief has worked to rebuild some of the infrastructure that was damaged through a £30 million rehabilitation programme. We rehabilitated 40 health clinics, repaired 22 schools and provided 80,000 people with a new water supply in Khan Younis.

# WORKING THROUGH THE NIGHTMARE



A father and child flee after a nearby explosion causes a fire

Life in Gaza is not easy at the best of times but during the November 2012 attacks it was an even greater struggle. Most people were too afraid to go out. Those who did venture out went only to get food or medicine, though few grocers or pharmacies remained open for long. Everyone wanted to get back to their families as life had become so precarious.

News of deaths, injuries and destruction reached every neighbourhood. The two-storey home of the Al-Doula family in Gaza City was destroyed in an instant, killing a dozen people including five children. Everyone lived in fear of who would be next.

Islamic Relief's field workers found themselves at risk many times as they continued to distribute emergency aid throughout the conflict. On one occasion they had a narrow escape when a building was hit near the Islamic Relief medical supplies warehouse.



Islamic Relief aid workers distribute medical supplies

An explosion also happened less than 200 metres from the Islamic Relief office in Gaza, though fortunately only the glass was broken. Similar damage was also caused to the homes of 12 of our staff.



# LIVE FROM GAZA



Islamic Relief aid worker, Hatem Shurrab, reported throughout the conflict



Ambulances work around the clock to reach the injured but medical supplies are extremely low

## DAY 2 ► 15 November

‘Warplanes and drones were the backdrop to this morning’s call to prayer. Few would have needed the wake-up call as it was almost impossible to sleep. I visited a hospital where young children were being treated for their injuries. Hanin Tafish, an infant girl I met in intensive care just two hours ago, has died. As a father, I will do anything to protect my two-year old son Karam. He is my whole life, but what can I do against an F16 bomb?’



Residents look at the devastation in their neighbourhood

## DAY 1 ► 14 November

‘Explosions have rocked my neighbourhood here in Gaza – one of which was very near my home. It felt like an earthquake. Ambulances rushed and took the injured to hospital. One car was hit in Thalatini Street, where my family and I were just an hour ago. A bomb seems to go off every ten minutes; then a moment of eerie calm. I wonder what tomorrow will bring.’

## DAY 3 ► 16 November

‘It’s dusty due to smoke from explosions but we can’t close our windows in case the glass breaks. The last two days have seen over 600 airstrikes in this densely populated city and that means many casualties. Injured people are being rushed to hospital but medical supplies are critically low. Islamic Relief has already distributed medical aid but much more is needed. Who knows how long this nightmare could go on.’

## DAY 4 ► 17 November

‘Even the voice of the *muezzin* making the call to prayer trembled this afternoon. An Israeli missile hit a grocery store in Khan Younis; another fell next to a bakery. Islamic Relief staff have been delivering aid regardless, but two of our team narrowly escaped an airstrike today. We’ve distributed medical supplies, blankets and cans of meat for patients in Gaza’s hospitals.’

# LIVE FROM GAZA



A layer of smoke fills the air as airstrikes are unrelenting

## DAY 5 ► 18 November

‘There is glass everywhere; almost all the windows of my home shattered when a bomb exploded nearby – the closest strike so far. My nephew was slightly injured. My son is still in shock. Children are heard crying all night. They look to their parents for reassurance and we try hard to give it, but news of fatalities continues to flood in. A father and son killed in their car in northern Gaza... a mother, her son and sister all crushed under the rubble of their home...’

## DAY 6 ► 19 November

‘A hundred Palestinians have now been killed and the attacks continue. My son Karam is sick with worry and lack of sleep; my nephews are the same. A group of ten boys ventured out to play football today during a quiet hour. As soon as they heard an airstrike they all ran back home, terrified. Even their schools are being blown to pieces. One of the schools Islamic Relief rebuilt after the 2008 war is damaged once again.’

## DAY 7 ► 20 November

‘It’s dark and dusty; the electricity got cut off in the latest attack. Karam is struggling to breathe in the dusty air, which is no good for asthma. But other children have it far worse. I’m speechless after seeing so many young children fighting for their lives today in intensive care. An injured boy cries until he’s placed next to his mother; he waits for her to wake up, but she is dead. Another girl calls for her daddy but daddy is in an even more critical condition than her.’



A man tries to access the damage to his home through the rubble after an air strike hits a nearby football stadium

## DAY 8 ► 21 November

‘The sounds of Gaza: drones, strikes, ambulance sirens, screaming wounded people and crying children. The silent prayers for a ceasefire, finally answered tonight. The nightmare has ended. I feel sadness for all the innocent people killed and injured over the last eight days. I feel proud of my people and how patiently they have endured this tragedy. God bless the people of Gaza.’

# A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

**'Before the recent escalation we had enough medicine and disposables to last a month, under normal circumstances. Those supplies ran out within two days of the conflict due to the large number of casualties. We had to treat many injured children; some were so severely wounded that we couldn't save them; others survived but will have to live with disabilities and health problems.'**

Dr Ayman Sahabani, Head of Emergency,  
Al-Shifa Hospital, Gaza

Gaza's health infrastructure was already struggling with low stocks of essential drugs and disposables before the recent conflict. Many hospitals and health clinics had been severely damaged in the 2008 war and some had only recently been rehabilitated by Islamic Relief.

One of these was the Beit Hanoun Hospital, a 36-bed Ministry of Health facility in the north of Gaza. Islamic Relief rehabilitated the emergency department in 2010. On 21st November 2012 a missile penetrated the roof and damaged an internal stairwell. The number of injuries is yet to be verified.

Another 40-bed field hospital that opened in Gaza City in 2009 was hit on 21st November. The missile penetrated two floors, damaging the in-patient department in the centre of the hospital. Fortunately patients had been evacuated only ten minutes prior to the attack.

Since the ceasefire was announced, Islamic Relief has been assessing the extent of damage to Gaza's health facilities and will continue to support the rehabilitation process in the weeks ahead.



A child is taken to the morgue on the first day of attacks

**The Ministry of Health postponed all elective surgeries because of the shortages of anesthesia, transferred non-urgent cases to NGO hospitals and asked health staff to report to the nearest health facility and serve extended shifts.**



# SCHOOLS DAMAGED – AGAIN



A child looks for his belongings inside his devastated home

**'Forty-three schools have been damaged in the recent conflict. That's 25,000 children left with nowhere to study. For the children of Gaza, life is not back to normal after the ceasefire.'**

Rami Mahani, Islamic Relief's Acting Head of Mission in Gaza

The Israeli operation in Gaza damaged 41 schools and two kindergartens – some sustained light damage, others more severe. This included 34 schools run by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, six UNRWA schools and one private school.

The Um Al-Qura Primary School in Gaza had already been destroyed once during the 2008 war. It was renovated and improved by Islamic Relief with funding from ROTA (the Qatar Foundation's Reach Out To Asia programme) and pupils enjoyed excellent facilities including science labs, a health room, a new library and other facilities. In the November bombardment the school was damaged once again.

Islamic Relief staff are assessing the extent of the damage but are also concerned about the psychological impact on its pupils. Around 1,400 boys and girls had been attending the school in two daily shifts since it was rebuilt; these children now have nowhere to go once again.



**BEFORE:** The Um Al-Qura Primary School was renovated by Islamic Relief after the 2008 war



**AFTER:** Damaged once again, after a nearby missile attack in the November 2012 conflict



# A TRAUMATISED GENERATION

**'Yesterday I asked my child to draw a picture and he drew a boy with a gun. He wouldn't have done that two weeks ago. It's a worrying sign.'**

Muna Abed, Coordinator of Islamic Relief's Psychosocial Support Programme in Gaza

Every child in Gaza has been affected by the violence they witnessed. Throughout the conflict children could be heard screaming and crying through the night, clinging to their family and seeking reassurance. Now that the bombardment is over, the impact of these traumatic events will start to emerge.

Islamic Relief has been running psychosocial programmes to help traumatised children in Gaza since 1998. Muna Abed, a Coordinator of one of the programmes and a mother of three, is familiar with the signs of extreme trauma.

'The attacks affected us all, young and old, but the impact on children is always more worrying and will probably stay with them for a long time. It will take months to observe the extent of their trauma as we witness problems like poor concentration and bedwetting.'

'My own three-year-old son, Momen, has become very clingy. We slept together throughout the conflict and tried our best to protect him from what was happening but he is well aware that something is wrong. Once his father went out and an explosion happened soon after. Momen cried and screamed. Now he doesn't allow his father to go out to the shops. He has become aware of political issues at three years of age, when he should be busy playing and learning.'



A child clings to her doll while looking on at the funeral of a local child

# DESTRUCTION OF A LIFELINE

'The population here has few livelihood opportunities. Islamic Relief has been working to maximize these through building water wells and providing agricultural support. When these are devastated time and again, it leaves people with little hope.'

Rami Mahani, Islamic Relief's Acting Head of Mission in Gaza

Eight days of bombardment have had a devastating impact on Gaza's agricultural land, ruining crops, uprooting trees and destroying agricultural water wells. In the Gaza Strip, where more than half of the population lives in poverty, this destruction of livelihoods has cut off an essential lifeline.

One of the agricultural water wells severely damaged in the conflict was a well in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza, which was renovated by Islamic Relief in 2010. The well had served an area of 50 *dunums* (50,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of land, supporting 20 families to grow crops including citrus fruits and vegetables.

An agricultural school in Beit Hanoun was also damaged, having been recently renovated and equipped by Islamic Relief. The school serves hundreds of students every year and also provides help with livestock and crop production.



**BEFORE:** An agricultural water well in Beit Lahiya renovated by Islamic Relief in 2010



**AFTER:** The water well after the recent bombardment

**Please continue  
to support Islamic  
Relief's work with  
the people of Gaza  
to give them hope  
for a better future**



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Children light candles during a power cut in Gaza