



STILL WE STAND WITH GAZA

How we are helping
Palestinians pushed
to the brink of survival



Islamic Relief was among the first humanitarian organisations to begin clearing rubble when the ceasefire was announced in January 2025

Introduction

The scale of loss and destruction in Gaza is indescribable. For almost 500 days, Israel carried out atrocities against Palestinians in Gaza, used starvation and denial of humanitarian aid as weapons of war, and sought to destroy every part of the enclave's infrastructure and social fabric – schools, hospitals, homes, power, water. The temporary ceasefire offers some hope, but Gaza has been razed to the ground and its people continue to suffer greatly.

At least 48,200 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 111,600 others injured. More than 15,000 children are dead, including thousands of young babies and infants. Close to 70 per cent of fatalities are children and women, the vast majority of them killed in homes and shelters. Up to 10,000 people are still missing, presumed dead.

Almost all homes, schools and hospitals are in ruins, entire neighbourhoods are wiped out, and an estimated 50 million tonnes of rubble fill the streets. A United Nations damage assessment states that clearing that amount of rubble could take 21 years and

cost up to \$1.2 billion. The UN also estimates that at least \$50 billion will be required to rebuild Gaza.

Islamic Relief has been working in Palestine since 1997. Our teams were on the ground with emergency response and post-conflict support following prior escalations in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2019, and 2021. Now, following the relentless Israeli bombardment, atrocities and immeasurable suffering, our teams and local partners stand ready to begin the long and painstaking process of supporting the Palestinian people to rebuild their lives and overcome the destruction, trauma and loss that they face.

Islamic Relief's track record of delivering high-quality humanitarian and development interventions in Gaza spans nearly 30 years. Over the past three decades, our teams have developed trusted relationships with the communities we serve, and with local partners, whose capacity we aim to build over the months ahead. Since the start of Israel's relentless attacks, Islamic Relief staff and partners have remained in Gaza, and have consistently been



among the first to respond to emergencies with life-saving aid. Our dauntless and dedicated staff and local partners have faced the same hardships and dangers as the communities we serve and have a deep understanding of the huge and complex needs in Gaza.

The bonds of trust and our track record underpin our plan to help meet the urgent needs of Palestinians pushed to the brink of survival; and, as we pray for lasting peace, simultaneously lay the foundations for longer-term rehabilitation and development

Restoring lives and communities will take time. The devastation and the needs of the severely traumatised population in Gaza are unlike anything we have seen. In October 2024, the United Nations stated that Gaza's human development index, a statistical measure that summarises a country's average human development, was expected to drop to a level not seen since 1955.

Islamic Relief is working to alleviate the intolerable suffering of the Palestinian people and reach those that are most vulnerable to prevent further deaths. We will step up our emergency response efforts to increase protection for those most affected, and, when the time comes, support with repairing, rebuilding, and strengthening vital services, facilities and infrastructure. We hope to help get children back to school, get hospitals and specialist care centres back up and running, and implement other longer-term development programmes that empower communities to rebuild self-reliance in a sustainable manner. We will continue to campaign for an end to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine, so there can be lasting peace.



Islamic Relief has been supporting vulnerable people in Palestine for nearly 30 years

500+ nightmare days

October to December 2023

Attacks intensify throughout Gaza, targeting homes, hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure. Israel carries out multiple massacres, and attacks on aid convoys and aid workers also increase. Palestinians across Gaza are issued with so-called 'evacuation orders' and forced into ever-shrinking areas further south. Islamic Relief scales up the emergency response, initially in Khan Younis, Rafah and Deir al-Balah, and later in northern Gaza. We work with our local partners on the ground distributing life-saving medical items, hot meals and other essential items.

21 November 2023

A four-day truce is agreed. Since the start of the bombardment of Gaza, more than 14,000 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, while an estimated 1.7 million Palestinians have been displaced and forced by the Israeli army to flee to the southern areas of Gaza. The truce is extended to seven days but on December, Israel resumes its attacks on Gaza.



December 2023 to April 2024

The Israeli blockade continues to severely restrict aid entering Gaza, as Israel uses starvation as a weapon of war. Hunger and diseases spread across the territory, with hundreds of thousands of people at imminent risk of famine. Islamic Relief begins a new partnership with the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to deliver millions of hot meals and nutritional support.



7 May 2024

Israel forces people out of Rafah in the south and closes the Rafah border with Egypt and the Erez crossing in the north, cutting off the supply route for many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). Islamic Relief's work becomes even more vital as we distribute supplies via the Kerem Shalom crossing, together with established partners and United Nations agencies, including the WFP.



1 February 2025

The Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt is reopened for the first time in eight months following its capture by the Israeli army. Some 37 sick and wounded Palestinians, most of them children, who had been denied access to medical treatment, cross the border to receive treatment in Egypt. Many more wounded Palestinians remain in Gaza in urgent need of assistance.

19 January 2025

The first phase of the ceasefire begins. Israel begins to gradually withdraw its forces to the edge of Gaza and the first humanitarian aid trucks are allowed into Gaza. The first phase of the ceasefire agreement outlines the release of 33 Israeli hostages in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners over the subsequent six weeks.



19 July 2024

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivers a historic ruling, concluding that Israel should end its illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory, desist from creating new settlements, and evacuate those already established. In both Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israel continues to violate international law on a daily basis.



2 August 2024

Islamic Relief successfully delivers qurbani donations to families in need through the Kerem Shalom crossing, despite delays caused by the Israeli blockade.

15 August 2024

Gaza health officials report that the death toll surpasses a horrific 40,000 people in Gaza after more than 10 months of attacks. Civilians have been killed and wounded at a faster rate than any conflict this century.

September 2024

Islamic Relief continues to deliver humanitarian aid across Gaza, reaching vulnerable people every day with hot meals, vegetable packs, survival items, psychosocial support sessions, clean water, healthcare services and hygiene supplies such as sanitary pads and soap.



15 to 19 January 2025

More than 100 Palestinians in Gaza are killed by Israeli strikes in the four-day interval between the announcement of the ceasefire and its start.



15 January 2025

After 15 months of relentless bombardment and intolerable suffering inflicted upon the Palestinian people, a ceasefire in Gaza is announced. The ceasefire consists of three stages, the first of which is due to last for 42 days and will see the release of hostages, the return of Palestinian prisoners, and the resumption of aid lorries to be allowed into Gaza.

The Gaza Strip has been left in ruins, while at least 48,200 people in Gaza have been killed – including at least 15,000 children – and many more left with life-changing injuries. Some estimates place the death toll significantly higher and many people are still missing under rubble.

December 2024

An astonishing 1.9 million people – 9 out of 10 Palestinians in Gaza – have been displaced, often multiple times, from their homes and so-called safe zones since October 2023. Many fled with only the clothes on their backs and now face a second winter far from their homes, with safety and warmth long forgotten. Amid plummeting temperatures, parents fear their children will die from the cold. Islamic Relief's annual Winterisation Programme provides blankets, fuel and warm clothing to families in need.

November 2024

Northern Gaza is being wiped off the map. Under the guise of 'evacuation', Israeli forces order the forced displacement of an estimated 400,000 Palestinians trapped in northern Gaza, including Gaza City. This is not an evacuation—this is forced displacement under gunfire. Since 1 October, no food has been allowed into the area, and civilians are being starved and bombed in their homes and their tents.



Current humanitarian needs

1.84 million

people do not have enough food to eat.
133,000 people face catastrophic food insecurity:
they are on the brink of starvation

15,000

pregnant women are
on the verge of famine

93 per cent

of homes have been damaged
or destroyed

1.6 million

Palestinians are living in makeshift
shelters across the Gaza Strip

85 per cent

of the water wells
have been destroyed

Life expectancy has dropped
from a pre-war average of

75.5 years to 40.5 years

12,000 to 14,000

people, including 2,500 children, need medical
evacuation from Gaza for urgent treatment

At least 22,500

people have sustained
life-altering injuries

80 per cent

of people in the Gaza Strip are unemployed

Nearly 100 per cent

of the population now live in poverty



Thousands of Palestinians begin returning to what is left of their homes and neighbourhoods after the ceasefire came into force

Our plan to meet the huge and complex needs in Gaza

Emergency relief

Much of Gaza is in ruins. Some 69 per cent of buildings have been flattened or damaged. 1.6 million Palestinians are living in makeshift shelters. The vast majority of people have no income nor means to earn a living. Food production capacity in the Gaza Strip has been devastated: more than half of Gaza's agricultural land has been degraded by the Israeli bombardment, while over 95 per cent of cattle and half of all sheep have been slaughtered or died since the conflict began. 1.8 million people face extreme hunger, including 133,000 people facing catastrophic food insecurity that risks starvation and death. While some food has now begun to enter Gaza, it is nowhere near sufficient to meet the scale of hunger. The ongoing Israeli blockade continues to limit the entry of humanitarian aid.

In this context, Islamic Relief's Early Recovery Plan's immediate priority is to increase protection and food security for the most vulnerable families. We are already working tirelessly to save lives: distributing ready-to-eat food, clean water, clothes and blankets to displaced families and those whose homes have been destroyed; running psychosocial activities and educational lessons for children; and providing cleaning services and hygiene supplies for people who remain in shelters.

Our plan will target the most vulnerable families with multi-sectorial humanitarian assistance: providing food to those on the brink of starvation, distributing essential non-food items, such as medicines and cooking items, and ensuring access to water, sanitation and hygiene. These families will receive basic relief packages for the first six months of the recovery plan, as well as multi-purpose cash payments every month, to ensure they are able to meet their essential household needs.

The Early Recovery Plan also aims to provide individuals that can work with employment opportunities for six months. These will be for both skilled and unskilled workers, facilitated by local community-based organisations, and targeted at debris removal – providing people in Gaza with opportunities to earn a living once again, while also beginning the lengthy process of rebuilding their homes and shattered communities.

Islamic Relief teams and local partners have remained within Gaza since the escalation began. Throughout the past 500 days, our focus has been on providing emergency relief wherever possible, as we have done during each and every escalation since we began working in Gaza in 1997.



Islamic Relief distributes hot meals to displaced Palestinians in Gaza

In 2008, within hours of the start of a devastating 22-day conflict in Gaza, Islamic Relief began distributing aid as one of the few humanitarian agencies to remain on the ground throughout the entire crisis. This aid included providing medical equipment, disposables and medication to hospitals struggling with so many critically ill patients. We delivered a £30 million emergency response and reconstruction programme in Gaza, and through our post-conflict programmes, 80,000 families received food aid and 25,000 children at risk of malnutrition received fortified milk and high-energy biscuits daily.

As conflict escalated in Gaza again just three years later, we delivered vital aid from the beginning of the crisis, reaching over 15,000 displaced Palestinians with food and water. We also provided kitchen sets, hygiene kits, children's clothing, 30 water tanks serving eight emergency shelters, and chlorine to disinfect water in municipal wells.

In 2017, a water crisis in Gaza seriously impacted the health of many families, particularly those who could not afford to buy safe drinking water. In Wadi Al-Salqa village, we installed a desalination unit to provide access to clean water for 4,000 people, as well as running a community health awareness programme. We gave hygiene kits to 1,000 children, set up eight women's support groups and a neighbourhood committee that now brings community issues to the attention of the municipality. As a result, waterborne diseases declined dramatically and diarrhoea among children aged over three reduced by 75 per cent.

Our teams were also among the first to respond to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, providing essential equipment to hospitals, health centres and quarantine centres. We disinfected schools and hospitals to reduce the risk of infection.

Islamic Relief once again stands ready to do everything in our power to alleviate the horrific suffering of the Palestinian people and prevent further loss of life.

The long walk home – Islamic Relief aid worker Tarek’s story

After the ceasefire was announced, many Palestinians sought to return to their homes. Islamic Relief aid worker Tarek, along with his wife and five children, joined the thousands of others that left their tents and shelters behind in search of a return to their old lives.

“Nothing was available in the local markets. Even the tents were flooded with rain, and most of the time people’s clothes and bedding were soaked and they couldn’t protect their children from the cold and rain. Their lives were full of fear, sadness, loss, and blood,” Tarek says.

Despite the relentless bombardment that they had endured for nearly 15 months, Tarek and his family remained hopeful that their apartment would still be in good condition. Yet travelling along roads pockmarked with damage and streets lined with debris, his dread grew as he took in the full extent of the devastation inflicted on his neighbourhood.

“The area we lived in was one of the most beautiful areas and now it’s bricks and rubble. I was astonished by the horror of the scenery and the severity of the destruction. There wasn’t a single house that was not destroyed... Everyone was telling me ‘may Allah compensate you for your home’... I did not pay attention to them, I kept going up the stairs until I reached the apartment and found it a mass of rubble. Honestly, the scene was so terrible... I had brought the key to the apartment with me – the key remained but not the apartment.”

Islamic Relief and our local partners have been among the first organisations to support with clearing rubble from the streets after the ceasefire came into place. The enormous task, is sombre. A key pillar of our Early Recovery Plan is to enable Palestinians to work to clear the debris and begin the process of rebuilding their homes. Over the next few months, we will continue to provide a lifeline to families facing the devastating consequences of occupation, continued blockade and the threat of recurring conflict.



Some 69 per cent of Gaza’s buildings have been flattened or damaged

Shelter

A staggering 92 per cent of homes in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed. Many displaced people are returning to where they used to live, only to once again find themselves sheltering in tents as their homes no longer exist.

Over 1.8 million people need emergency shelter. Most women are still in desperately overcrowded shelters and tents without access to clean water or sanitation. In some shelters, hundreds of men, women and children are sharing a single toilet or shower.

While more food is now entering Gaza following the ceasefire, there has been much less progress on other essential items such as tents, medical supplies, fuel and heavy machinery for rubble removal.

Ensuring access to shelter is a key pillar of Islamic Relief’s Early Recovery Plan. As soon as we can, we will provide transitional shelters to increase the protection of the most vulnerable families, particularly women and children. Transitional shelters serve a dual purpose: they function as a critical tool for immediate humanitarian response and help to facilitate sustainable recovery.

While many homes have been reduced to rubble, there are some areas where damage to houses is less severe. These structures can be repaired, rather than having to be comprehensively reconstructed. Our plan aims to rehabilitate people’s homes, focusing initially on repairing those with relatively minor damages, rather than reconstructing those that have been destroyed.

As well as providing families with transitional shelters while their homes are rebuilt, we will deliver items that enable people to become self-sufficient once again, such as kitchen sets and solar powered energy systems.

We have never seen anything on the scale of the destruction that has been wrought on Gaza over the past 500 days, and rebuilding homes and infrastructure will take many years. Yet for many Palestinians, this is not the first time they have lost their home. Each of the escalations of recent years destroyed houses and left Palestinians without shelter. Islamic Relief has been among the first to respond on every occasion. Following the devastating conflict in 2008/9, more than 40,000 people in Gaza were displaced from their homes. To assist these displaced families, Islamic Relief provided canned food, over 2,000 blankets and 2,000 hygiene kits. In 2019, our £20 million emergency appeal enabled us to repair and improve 150 homes and gives families warm blankets, winter clothing and mattresses.

Cash programming

Despite the ceasefire, there is still a significant liquidity crisis in Gaza and many people have no access to cash. Many banks had to shut down over the last 15 months – they are reopening but it will take time to get the financial systems functioning again. With formal banking disrupted, many people rely on informal money transfer systems, but these can be less reliable, and more expensive, with financial agents charging up to 30 per cent in fees.

We know that providing people with cash is a lifeline during humanitarian crises. This is particularly the case with the scale of devastation and need in Gaza. Providing families with cash assistance, so they can purchase what they need most and support local markets, forms a cornerstone of our Early Recovery Plan, which also sets out other cash programming interventions we will implement as soon as the context in Gaza allows.

Cash programming will be used to enhance livelihoods and empower families to once again earn a living. We aim to create multiple short-term employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers. These will include removing debris, as much of Gaza has been reduced to rubble, as well as opportunities, in sectors such as health and agriculture, of up to eight months. These will provide a vital source of income to crisis-affected families, while at the same time helping to restore essential community services. Employment opportunities will be delivered through a network of local community-based organisations with specific sectoral expertise.



Cash assistance allows people to buy what they truly need, such as cooking materials and ingredients, and support local markets

Cash programming and support to establish livelihoods has been a critical part of previous efforts to recover from the effects of conflict and enable Palestinians to strengthen resilience. Following the 2008/9 conflict, Islamic Relief helped those who lost their livelihoods by running a three-month cash-for-work scheme that provided 1,500 unemployed people with temporary work. We also built 12 agricultural wells that helped farmers who were struggling to make a living after irrigation systems were destroyed, implemented a small business loan scheme and supported small enterprises for rural women to help them develop their livelihoods.

In 2011, we provided interest-free qard hasan – benevolent loans – to support livelihoods among Palestinians who were unable to establish their own businesses. One recipient was 25-year-old Zuhair, who lived in Jabaliya in the north of the Gaza Strip. He was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at age 11 and was confined to a wheelchair. A business administration graduate with a first class degree, when he joined our project in 2011, Zuhair picked out a vocational training course in mobile phone maintenance. These new skills, combined with his head for business, made him a perfect candidate for an Islamic Relief micro-credit grant to open his own shop. The grant helped him rent premises and purchase the equipment and stock he needed to get going.

At the time of receiving support from Islamic Relief, Isam was 38 years old. He had 10 children and lived in El-Shejaya quarter in Gaza City. As a result of the restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians by the Israelis, Isam could not attend his job and lost his income. Isam tried to find alternative employment, but there were very few opportunities available in Gaza City, and he was unable to provide for his family's basic needs, including food, medicine, school bags and school uniforms.

Isam owned a small piece of land and applied to Islamic Relief for a loan to cultivate his land and plant cucumbers. In October 2001, Isam received the loan and began to grow cucumbers for sale in the local market. The money he generated from this activity helped Isam to cover his family's basic needs, while supporting the local economy and generating enough income to pay back the loan.

Education

Gaza's education system has been devastated. 88 per cent of schools have been damaged or destroyed. At least 519 teachers and other educational staff have been killed and more than 2,700 injured during the conflict, with the real number of those that have lost their lives likely to be significantly higher.

More than 650,000 school-age girls and boys have now been out of formal schooling for at least 15 months. A whole generation faces the prospect of no formal education, many of whom have already suffered from the closure of education facilities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This lost education will affect the rest of their lives.

Despite the ceasefire, it will be difficult for most children to return to school immediately. The scale of destruction and killing of so many teachers means that rebuilding Gaza's education system will take many years. Alongside the destruction and damage to school buildings, 51 university buildings have been completely destroyed and another 57 damaged.

Education is the fundamental building block of a brighter future. Islamic Relief has been running informal, makeshift lessons teaching literacy and numeracy so children can continue to learn. But it is important that they regain access to formal education as quickly as possible. When we are able to implement this part of our Early Recovery Plan, we aim to support children to kickstart their education to enable longer-term development and to overcome the cycle of poverty in which they are trapped.

The first phase of our plan aims to repair public schools which

have moderate damage to their infrastructure, and which can be repaired and improved to a safe standard so that they can function again as school facilities. We will provide these schools with furniture and equipment, while delivering educational kits and school bags directly to children.

Vast numbers of children have suffered unimaginable trauma, which will have a hugely detrimental impact on their long-term mental health. As well as getting children back to school, we will provide psychosocial support for students to begin the process of addressing this trauma.

Schools in Gaza have typically been overcrowded and ill equipped. Increasing their capacity and providing equipment and safe places for brave teachers to support vulnerable children has been a constant priority for Islamic Relief's humanitarian programming in Gaza. In 2010, we provided 15.5 million litres of clean, safe drinking water to 100 schools. Following the 2008/9 conflict, in which many educational facilities were damaged, we repaired and equipped 22 schools, benefitting thousands of students. We developed libraries, science laboratories, health rooms, educational technology and computer training labs in the schools, as well as psychosocial and educational counselling rooms.

We also raised the standard of teaching and care for preschool children by furnishing kindergartens and helping them adopt a new curriculum. In 2018, we provided training and mentoring for teachers and up-to-date learning resources using smart devices to support the cognitive, social, emotional and educational development of 8,400 children.



Education is the fundamental building block of a brighter future and Islamic Relief plans to support children back into formal education

A better future for the children of Gaza

"I feel like a young scientist and this motivates me... The first time I put my eye to a telescope, I didn't want to close my eyes," Lamar, a then-11-year-old from Gaza, told Islamic Relief in 2019.

At the time, Islamic Relief was running educational clubs to unlock the potential of vulnerable children. *"There is no telescope at our school, but we went on a trip to the university laboratory and were able to do scientific experiments,"* explained the schoolgirl, who attended our science club. It used practical and entertaining teaching methods to help children find solutions to community issues.

"When I went to school the next day, my teacher asked me to explain it to my classmates. I got full marks [in science]. I want to be a scientist... to discover a drug for cancer. This will make me happy because I will be able to treat many people all over the world."

In 2019, Islamic Relief improved the learning environment at over 100 kindergartens and trained hundreds of teachers and principals. We ensured over 330 schools had clean water and offered counselling services for over 20,000 children. We also screened over 24,500 children for hearing and speech difficulties, giving hearing aids and specialist support to those who needed them.



Health

Gaza's health infrastructure has suffered immense damage. After 15 months of repeated targeted Israeli attacks, 94 per cent of health facilities are either damaged or destroyed. At least 1,060 health workers have been killed. The World Health Organization has documented hundreds of attacks on healthcare centres, including bombing and shelling hospitals and clinics, striking ambulances as they carried wounded civilians, and shooting paramedics as they tried to reach injured people. Hospitals have frequently been besieged by Israeli military.

The effects of this are further exacerbated by the continuing Israeli blockade that restricts supplies coming into Gaza and prevents people from accessing urgent treatment outside of the Strip. Approximately 12,000 patients in Gaza, including 2,500 children, require urgent medical evacuation abroad, but continue to be prevented from leaving to access this treatment.

By the time the temporary ceasefire was announced, only 50 per cent of hospitals (18 of 36) and 39 per cent of primary health care centres (55 of 141) in Gaza were even partially functioning – and those have been facing a daily struggle to stay operational, with critical shortages of medicine, fuel and basic supplies, such as insulin and paracetamol.

Throughout Israel's campaign against Gaza, Islamic Relief has tried to maintain access to healthcare services, particularly for women and girls. We have supported a temporary medical point, serving around 12,000 people a day, by providing it with essential medicine and supplies, while at the very start of the war, we distributed 2.2 million items of medical supplies to support hospitals and health facilities across Gaza.

While more supplies are now getting into Gaza, the scale of destruction and the killing of so many health workers mean that many people are unable to secure the medical treatment they desperately need. A critical pillar of Islamic Relief's Early Recovery Plan is to strengthen healthcare systems by providing medical supplies and other support to improve the quality and accessibility of medical services, especially for women, children, older people and people with disabilities.

A first step to increasing access to medical services will be repairing the hospitals that have not been fully destroyed. As with educational facilities, our plan will prioritise repairing those with relatively minor damages to get them up and running as quickly as possible. We have also already begun to deliver some immediate recovery programmes, including supporting the physical rehabilitation of wounded children.

Hospitals and medical facilities have routinely been targeted during previous escalations. Following the 2008/9 war, we restored intensive care and emergency departments in nine hospitals. Palestinian hospitals suffer from an extreme shortage of medical supplies and equipment, and heavy duty and high-tech equipment is particularly in short supply. In 2008, we helped to establish an intensive care unit at Al Shifa Hospital and set up a new blood bank to serve three other local hospitals. We provided the Al Shifa and Al Aqsa hospitals in Gaza with five haemodialysis machines to allow patients with renal failure to dialyse their blood three times a week. We also supplied the Cardiology Unit at the Paediatric Hospital in Gaza with medical equipment and essential furniture, allowing it to reopen after a period of sustained closure.

In 2012, as part of our emergency response to another round of conflict, we mobilised quickly to deliver £1 million worth of medical supplies to hospitals which allowed them to treat incoming casualties. In 2020, we established a project to diagnose health issues in children and provide life-changing treatment and rehabilitation services. This project helped over 30,000 children to thrive in school and at home, as well as improving their self-esteem and psychological wellbeing.



A healthcare worker examines a patient

Transforming lives through early health interventions

Even before Israel began its most recent attack on Gaza, Palestinian children with physical or mental health issues were struggling to get the support they needed in the poverty-stricken enclave, with its overstretched health and education systems. Islamic Relief addressed these issues with a project which diagnosed health issues in children and provided life-changing treatment and rehabilitation services.

"Janaa's health increased our household difficulties and also affected our movements and economic situation. I was always afraid that she might hurt herself," her mother told Islamic Relief in 2020, describing the impact of Janaa's curved spine and inability to walk.

Islamic Relief provided Janaa with a stand which is helping with her spine. *"The stand helps her to stand up and to fix her back and her body... I feel that she is now able to stand steadily."*

The project helped over 30,000 children like Janaa to thrive in school and at home, as well as improving their self-esteem and psychological wellbeing.



A doctor examines a child as part of an Islamic Relief health project that has reached over 30,000 children in Gaza

Facilities for people with special needs and disabilities

People with special needs and disabilities in Gaza are particularly vulnerable and continue to experience great suffering. Before the ceasefire was announced, people with severe disabilities, often in wheelchairs, were subject to repeated evacuation orders and forced to travel for miles in search of new shelter. Living in tents and temporary shelters is particularly challenging for those with physical disabilities, as wheelchairs cannot move freely, and there are no dedicated facilities available to them.

At least 22,500 people have sustained life-altering injuries in Israel's attacks since October 2023. Gaza now has the highest number of child amputees per capita in the world – and they lack immediate and long-term rehabilitation services or devices, such as wheelchairs, to enable their mobility. Gaza's single limb reconstruction and rehabilitation centre ceased functioning in December 2023 due to a lack of supplies and skilled staff.

Islamic Relief's Early Recovery Plan will increase and sustain access to essential health and education services for both children and adults with disabilities. We will strengthen healthcare systems by providing medical supplies and other support to improve the quality and accessibility of medical services, especially for people with disabilities, women, children and older people.

We will prioritise repairing the facilities of NGOs that provide specialist medical services and support for those with disabilities. We will upgrade centres with medical equipment and furniture, virtually all of which has been destroyed during the bombardment of the past 15 months.

We will also support repair works to specialist centres, providing specialist equipment and furniture that is adapted for people with disabilities. These centres provide services that cannot be replicated elsewhere, and demand for their support has skyrocketed among the population of Gaza following the Israeli bombardment.

Ever since Islamic Relief began working in Gaza in 1997, we have provided targeted support for Palestinians with disabilities and special needs. In 1998, with funding from what was then the UK's Department for International Development, we set up two educational enhancement centres in refugee camps: the Rafah Camp and Deir El Balal Camp. The centres served vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, providing targeted education support as well as a range of vocational activities in the evenings.

In 2008, following the devastating conflict, we provided hearing aids for hearing-impaired children. People with special needs, including hearing-impaired persons and those living with other disabilities, are especially vulnerable in the context of instability, and among children, partial or total hearing loss can lead to learning difficulties. In the Gaza Strip, hearing loss is more common among the poorest families, and restrictions on medical equipment entering Gaza caused the cost of hearing aids to rise. Islamic Relief provided 100 children with hearing aids, which transformed their quality of life.

We also helped to modernise the Artificial Limbs and Polio Centre, the only institution in Gaza providing prosthetic limbs and specialist care for amputees. We helped provide and fit artificial limbs and polio apparatus for over 100 people, most of them women and children.

In 2017, our funding improved health services for children at two special needs schools in Gaza, by installing treatment devices in physiotherapy rooms, furnishing classrooms and libraries, and providing equipment and games to assist children with disabilities.



The then UK Foreign Secretary Robin Cook attends the opening ceremony of an education centre set up by Islamic Relief in Deir El Balal Camp in 1998

Deir El Balah Educational Enhancement Centre

Ahmed was a 14-year-old boy living in the Deir El Balah Refugee Camp when he joined the Deir El Balah Educational Enhancement Centre in 1999. Traumatized from his experiences and isolated in the camp, Ahmed struggled to initially participate in the activities at the centre. Over time, he began to engage and form new relationships, participating in parties and festivals. The centre became like a home to Ahmed. Alongside forming new relationships, the centre provided him with new experiences, enriched his imagination and helped him to manage his behaviour, teaching him skills such as commitment, calmness and politeness.

“For us, the centre was the third home after our real home and school. We participated in Kanaan Parliament for children, in which we discussed many problems facing children and suggested suitable solutions. We worked hard to publish booklets in which we try to enlighten children and let them know their rights and duties. I have enjoyed very much the toy library that includes different games, toys and educational and entertainment videotapes. Also, I have learned how to use a computer.”



Islamic Relief staff with children attending the Deir El Balah Educational Enhancement Centre

Orphan and child welfare and psychosocial support

Children make up nearly half of Gaza's entire population. Over the past 15 months, they have been trapped in a nightmare. They have been repeatedly bombed, starved and forcibly displaced.

More children have been killed in Gaza than have been killed in the last four years of all wars worldwide combined. As well as the thousands of children that have tragically lost their lives, tens of thousands more have been wounded, many with life-changing injuries such as the loss of limbs. At least 1 million children need mental health and psychosocial support.



Aysha died just a month after her 12th birthday. She had spent her last holiday at a summer camp, determined, as always, to live life to the fullest. A friendly, brave and polite girl, Aysha had been doing well at school and aspired to become a doctor. She liked to read, draw, and paint. She lived with her big family in Al Nusairat City and had been enrolled in Islamic Relief's Orphan Sponsorship Programme since 2016.

Our Orphan Sponsorship Programme provides cash transfers that help orphaned children and young people get food, shelter, education, healthcare and other basic necessities. Islamic Relief has been able to continue its support for orphans in Gaza throughout the war. Heartbreakingly, dozens of those that we sponsor have been killed by Israeli attacks since October 2023 – the youngest of them was just five years old. Many guardians involved in the Orphan Sponsorship Programme have also been killed, meaning that many children who previously lost their parents have now also lost their remaining guardian.

We have more than doubled the capacity of our Orphan Sponsorship Programme due to the huge needs: we now sponsor and transfer money to the families of 18,300 orphaned children in Gaza. But the needs are far greater: over 20,000 children are estimated to have been newly orphaned over the past 15 months. 5,800 children are currently awaiting an Islamic Relief Orphan Sponsor – and 3,000 more are in the process of being added to our system.

Islamic Relief will continue to expand the Orphan Sponsorship Programme wherever possible to support the needs of the most vulnerable children. Transferring money has been a challenge throughout the crisis, due to the massive liquidity shortage in Gaza and the collapse of the banking system. We have been using the payment system of the WFP, through which families receive an SMS code which they can use to withdraw money from functioning supermarkets. As well as seeking to expand our Orphan Sponsorship Programme, our Early Recovery Plan will prioritise getting cash into the hands of the remaining families as quickly as possible.

The extent of trauma following the past 500 terrifying, sorrow-filled days, particularly among children, will be overwhelming. The need for specialist support will far outstrip provision. A key pillar of our Early Recovery Plan will be to use our experience of working in Gaza following previous escalations to support children, and adults, with specialist trauma recovery services. In 1998, in one of Islamic Relief's first interventions in Gaza, we established a Youth Centre in Rafah refugee camp, for young people who were receiving no formal education and suffering from the effects of displacement and living in the camp. The centre supported 1,000 young people, with facilities including a library and a toy and games room for children to play and learn.

In 2009, 36,000 children suffering from trauma were helped through specialist care sessions, and a new psychosocial centre was opened to support children and parents. By 2012, over 500 children had received specialist trauma counselling at this centre.

We have consistently run emergency psychosocial projects in the Gaza Strip following periods of extreme violence, to support children affected by these experiences, many of whom have witnessed the deaths of family members and friends. These projects provide children with the opportunity to play in a safe environment, and to express themselves to come to terms with their thoughts and fears. Following nearly 500 days of bombing and destruction, the need for this support among children in Gaza is far greater than at any time since Islamic Relief has been working in Gaza.

My dada was a sponsored orphan – now I am, too

As a child, Nasr was an orphan sponsored by Islamic Relief. This support enabled Nasr to overcome the loss and grief he experienced – he studied at university, secured a job and dreamed about having a family of his own.

During the recent war, Nasr's wife became pregnant. Nasr was a doting husband, remaining by his wife's side. *"He refused to leave me for a second during the war, except when he went to get me medicine or food. He would go and return, and I was always worried about him, fearing that I might hear bad news at any moment."*

Nasr eventually ventured out in search of food and medicine for his wife, and was killed by an Israeli attack before he got the chance to meet his child. His wife, suffering from anaemia and grief, gave birth to his daughter. *"What hurt me the most during this time was Nasr's absence, because Nasr had always wished for us to have a child and to create a beautiful life for our daughter, Salam."*

After her birth, Salam suffered from malnutrition. Her mother was emotionally and physically exhausted and didn't have access to the proper nutrition needed to produce healthy breast milk. She also struggled to find clothes for her as the markets lack children's clothing.

Islamic Relief sponsored Salam as part of the expansion of the Orphan Sponsorship Programme, providing food and cash as a vital lifeline to support Salam and her mother to survive on their own, and to come to terms with the death of Nasr.

"Salam's sponsorship through the Islamic Relief programme might help me secure a future for her, just as Nasr dreamed of providing her with everything in life without lacking anything."



Islamic Relief's long-term commitment to Gaza

No previous escalation nor crisis in the Gaza Strip have prepared the people of Gaza, our teams and local partners for the scale of destruction and hardship that they have witnessed and endured over the past 500 days. Every individual in Gaza is grieving. Not a single person's life is untouched. The legacy of massacre, misery, and unrelenting attacks on civilians, shelters, hospitals, and schools will last for many years, as will the trauma, both physical and mental, of the millions of people that have suffered at the hands of the Israeli assault.

Following the ceasefire, we remain committed to placing all our efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, and to implementing humanitarian projects across all regions of the Gaza Strip, encompassing Rafah, Khan Younis, Deir Al-Balah, Gaza, and North Gaza. Our commitment to comprehensive coverage underscores our dedication to fostering positive change and alleviating suffering in all areas of the Gaza Strip, for all Palestinians.

The ceasefire does not represent an end to the suffering of the people of Gaza. It is, we hope, the beginning of a process in which Palestinians are given the opportunity to begin to salvage what remains of their previous lives, and lay the foundations for a new, brighter future. But many barriers remain in their way. The ceasefire remains temporary and extremely fragile. International governments must ensure it is fully implemented and extended, and must hold parties accountable for any violations.

As we have done during the past 500 days and previous decades, Islamic Relief will stand shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian people. We will provide emergency relief to those most in need, prioritising the most vulnerable families to prevent further death, including from starvation and disease, and we will continue to work tirelessly to deliver a lasting peace in which all Palestinians can live in dignity.

The scale of destruction and humanitarian need must not be used as an excuse to force Palestinians out of Gaza, as indicated by concerning statements by some international and Israeli officials since the ceasefire. International governments must ensure that Palestinians can stay on their land and that reconstruction happens at the necessary speed and scale.

We cannot just return to the status quo of before October 2023. At that time Gaza was a prison camp under Israel's illegal blockade, which controls the movement of goods and people in and out of the Strip and restricts livelihoods. Palestinians in Gaza faced daily violations of their rights. There must be an end to the blockade and the ceasefire must lead to a lasting peace in which all people can live in safety and have their fundamental human rights upheld. We believe this will only be possible when there is an end to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine.

International governments must not be complicit in Israel's illegal occupation. We will continue to call on and pressure governments to end arms sales and take other political action to ensure Israel abides by international law. Above all, the horror of the past 15 months must not be forgotten and there must be justice and accountability for the repeated violations of international law, Israel's brutal collective punishment of an entire population, and its complete disregard for the measures ordered by the International Court of Justice to prevent genocide.



Middle area, January 2025 - Families queue for an Islamic Relief distribution





Islamic Relief Worldwide

19 Rea Street South
Birmingham
B5 6LB
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 121 605 5555
Fax: +44 121 622 5003

irw@irworldwide.org
www.islamic-relief.org

Registered Charity No. 328158
Registered Company No. 02365572