

Q and A

World Leaders: lift the blockade, rebuild Gaza

August 2015

What is this petition about?

This petition is about fulfilling the rights and needs of Palestinians in Gaza by calling on world leaders to work to bring an end to the eight-year blockade and the restrictions on desperately needed building materials.

Last year's conflict in Gaza between Israeli forces and armed Palestinian groups saw massive destruction and loss of life but in October 2014, international donors pledged \$3.5 billion for reconstruction. They promised a change in approach to address the blockade as a root cause of the conflict, renew efforts towards a permanent ceasefire and an end to the cycle of conflict, destruction, and donor-funded recovery once and for all.

A year on from the end of the war, the blockade and restrictions on construction materials remain the main obstacle for people desperate to rebuild what's been lost. Reconstruction has started [on just over 2,000](#) of the 19,000 destroyed homes, and not one has been fully rebuilt. Palestinians in Gaza are living in dire conditions, and global leaders with the power to work to change the situation are not doing enough.

Through global support for this petition, we can help create change by showing world leaders that people around the world know they have failed so far and now expect them to live up to their promises to work towards ending the blockade and rebuilding Gaza.

Why are Avaaz and international aid and development agencies working together on this petition?

Avaaz and the agencies signing on this petition share the position that the blockade must be lifted and that restrictions on building materials must be removed so that Palestinians in Gaza can build their homes, hospitals, schools, communities, and their future. Avaaz has campaigned for nearly a decade to bring an end to this conflict and to lift the blockade. The aid, faith, development, and human rights agencies signed on to this petition are members of the Association of International Development Agencies ([AIDA](#)) or other regional coordination networks that AIDA works closely with. AIDA has been at the forefront of campaigning to bring an end to the blockade since 2012.

Has there really been no progress at all on reconstruction?

Around 5 percent of the materials needed to rebuild what was destroyed last year have entered Gaza to date. Removal of the huge amount of rubble from the bombing last year is progressing and there have been some repairs to damaged buildings. There has also been [some work on roads, schools and some repairs to water and sewage networks](#). Cash assistance to rent temporary shelter has been

provided for some, and this month reconstruction of just over 2,000 of the 19,000 homes destroyed last year has started to progress. But a full year later no permanent housing has been fully rebuilt.

At the rate reconstruction is going, it could take 17 years to rebuild what was destroyed a year ago. This simply isn't good enough for families without homes and kids without schools.

Without a sustained diplomatic push to let materials in, this bleak outlook seems unlikely to change. The economy is in ruins and many people cannot help themselves. Meaningful recovery can only happen if the blockade is lifted and Palestinians can move freely and reestablish economic and social ties between Gaza and the West Bank and with the rest of the world.

Where did you get the figure that it will take 17 years to rebuild? I have seen other figures that it could take upwards of 100 years for Gaza to be rebuilt.

The [Shelter Cluster](#), which is responsible for coordinating an emergency shelter response and for information-sharing related to shelter needs in Gaza, has estimated that based on the current rate of entry of building materials it will take 17 years to rebuild what was destroyed last year. As materials trickle in, this figure fluctuates.

But it is important to remember that rebuilding what was destroyed last year is only a start to what Palestinians in Gaza actually need. The blockade and the restrictions on building materials have been in place for eight years. This created a shortage of houses, schools, and hospitals even before adding up the buildings that were destroyed last year. As the population of Gaza grows year by year, needs will increase, hence the need to build more. The figure of 100 years was a projection reported in the media that takes into account the entry rate of building materials, what needs to be rebuilt now, and what needs to be built to keep up with demands related to future population growth.

Why is Israel restricting building materials?

Citing security concerns, the government of Israel restricts the entry of a number of materials into Gaza that it considers "dual-use," defining this as materials that could be used for military activities. While the government of Israel, like any state, has a right to defend itself, international law says that the measures it takes to do so cannot adversely affect civilian life. The list of items that Israel considers "dual-use" includes aggregates (gravel), concrete, steel bars, cement, and wood. These items are essential to civilian life and can be found in homes, schools, hospitals, and office buildings all around the world. They are also critical to reconstruction efforts, and the Israeli restrictions on their entry to Gaza have literally left people with no ability to develop their communities and build homes.

The restrictions on building materials has also heavily impacted international aid efforts in Gaza, with international agencies unable to commence work on many of the crucial health, education, and water and sewage projects they have initiated in response to the urgent needs created by last year's conflict.

Many of the items on the “dual-use” list are not internationally recognized as “dual-use,” as they are not included in the [Waasenaar](#) arrangement or on globally accepted munitions lists. In addition to building materials, the “dual-use” list includes things like x-ray machines and pumps needed to power water and sewage lines. This has a major impact on the public health of Palestinians in Gaza and their ability to receive quality health care or drink clean water.

Given the devastating impact on civilians, Avaaz and the agencies supporting this petition stress that the blockade and restrictions on building materials is not the solution. Through the installation and proper use of technology used in airports and border crossings all over the world, the crossings to Gaza could be opened for the free flow of people and goods while addressing Israel’s security concerns.

Israel’s arguments for maintaining the blockade?

Israeli restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip have increased since the 1990s, culminating in the full implementation of the blockade in 2007, when Hamas came to power in the Gaza Strip. Israel has justified the blockade on security grounds, stating that it was necessary to isolate Hamas and prevent attacks.

Since the blockade has been implemented, civilians have borne the brunt of its effects, with 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza effectively sealed off from the rest of the world, in violation of international law.

The blockade has destroyed Gaza’s economy, with a recent [World Bank](#) report finding that as a result of the blockade, Gaza now has the highest unemployment rate in the world. Without opportunity to earn an income, 80 percent of Palestinians in Gaza rely on international assistance to get by. In light of this, the blockade can be seen as building human *insecurity* in Gaza.

The blockade has also failed to bring real security to Palestinians or Israelis, with civilians on both sides caught in the crossfire of three major military conflicts between the government of Israel and Palestinian armed groups, including Hamas, in the past six years.

Why is the blockade illegal?

The blockade has been found to be [in violation of international law](#) and is [collective punishment](#) of all Palestinians in Gaza, punishing ordinary people for the acts of groups they have nothing to do with. The Geneva Conventions say that civilians cannot be punished for acts that they did not commit themselves, and forbids collective punishment.

Egypt has closed their border to Gaza too, why don't you focus on them?

We have pointed out that Egypt could be doing more to help ensure humanitarian assistance reaches the Palestinians in Gaza by opening the Rafah Border Crossing. The government of Egypt has different obligations than the government of Israel does, as the occupying power. It is the obligation of Israel to

open the crossings between Israel and Gaza and allow Palestinians freedom of movement and freedom to develop an economy between Gaza and the West Bank.

The Egyptian government has an obligation as a third party state to facilitate humanitarian assistance. Egypt has frequently shut the Rafah crossing, preventing thousands of people from going in and out of Gaza. We also call on Egypt to open its border to allow for humanitarian relief, most urgently for the movement of patients, medical supplies, and other items necessary for reconstruction efforts.

Are the Palestinian Authority and Hamas doing their part to help reconstruction efforts?

We do point out that Palestinian political parties have failed to reconcile and to prioritize reconstruction. This remains an additional hindrance to the rebuilding efforts in Gaza. But the blockade and the restrictions on building materials remains the biggest obstacle to homes, hospitals, schools, and water and sewage networks being repaired or rebuilt.

Israel says the blockade and restrictions on building materials are in place to stop Hamas from firing rockets and building tunnels. Why should Israel lift the blockade and the restrictions on building materials to make it easier for them? Isn't that one-sided?

We condemn all violence against civilians by all sides. Both sides must end violence against civilians. Since the end of the war last year, violence against civilians continues by both sides with 46 rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel and more than 679 incidents of Israeli airstrikes, naval, or border fire into Gaza.

Indiscriminate rocket fire is a violation of international humanitarian law that must stop. The blockade is collective punishment of all Palestinians in Gaza, punishing ordinary people for the acts of groups they have nothing to do with, and needs to be lifted immediately.

Maintaining the status quo only makes another conflict more likely. The blockade has not stopped conflict - there have been three since it was imposed fully eight years ago. Only a permanent ceasefire that addresses the root causes of the conflict can bring lasting security to both Israelis and Palestinians. All parties need to urgently resume long-term ceasefire negotiations that address the root causes of conflict, including the blockade, to avoid future conflict.