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### HIGHLIGHTS

- 34 Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip during a two-day escalation, including eight children and three women.
- Half of vulnerable families living in rented accommodation in northern Gaza face eviction threats and legal action due to inability to pay rent.
- The 2019 fishing catch in Gaza grew by 34 per cent compared to 2018, following increased access to the sea off Gaza's coast.
- Record 27,000 tons yield expected in current olive harvest, amid ongoing concerns over access restrictions and settler violence.



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Rimas, 7, and her sister, Layan, 11, at risk of eviction from their rented home in Jabalka (Gaza), August 2019.

## OVERVIEW

In the early hours of 12 November, the Israeli Air Force targeted and killed a commander of the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and his wife, while they were sleeping in their home in the northern Gaza Strip. The incident triggered an escalation in hostilities between Israel and various Palestinian armed factions, excluding Hamas. On the morning of 14 November, a cessation of hostilities entered into force and has been largely holding.

Palestinian factions fired hundreds of rockets and mortars towards populated areas in Israel, the vast majority of which landed in open areas or were intercepted in the air. Israeli forces carried out numerous air strikes throughout Gaza, most of which reportedly targeted PIJ's operatives, facilities, open areas and rocket launching squads.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza, 34 people were killed during these attacks, including 23 men, eight children and three women; reportedly, 18 of the fatalities have been claimed as members of Palestinian armed groups.<sup>1</sup> Eight members of the same family, including five children, were killed in one attack, later acknowledged by the Israeli Army as a mistake. The MoH also reported that 109 Palestinians were injured, including 51 children and 20 women. No Israeli fatalities were reported, but at least 78 Israelis were treated by Israel's medical emergency services, all due to light or mild injuries, or shock.

This was the sixth escalation recorded over the past 18 months and one of the most serious since the 2014 conflict. Recurrent outbreak of hostilities have exacerbated already poor living conditions in Gaza, primarily driven by the longstanding Israeli blockade and the internal Palestinian divide, and compounded by mass casualties in the context of the weekly protests along the fence, ongoing since March 2018.

The first of this Bulletin's article highlights one aspect of this deterioration: the thousands of families in Gaza living in rented accommodation, who face legal action and eviction due to their inability to pay their rent. About half of the 522 families in northern Gaza recently surveyed, reported that they have been

### OCTOBER FIGURES

Palestinians killed (direct conflict)	3
Palestinians injured (direct conflict)	871
Israelis killed (direct conflict)	0
Israelis injured (direct conflict)	4
Structures demolished in the West Bank	50
People displaced in the West Bank	80

### HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN 2019

**351 million (US\$)**  
Requested

**57% funded**

57%  
Funded



subject to eviction threats and legal proceedings by their landlords, which in a few cases included imprisonment. The capacity of humanitarian organizations to support families in this situation has been hampered by severe funding shortages. The article profiles Eitidal, 30, mother of two girls whose husband is sick and unemployed, who has been evicted twice in the past three years over unpaid rent, and who is living under constant uncertainty and fear of another recurrence.

Over the course of the most recent escalation, Israel imposed a naval closure along the northern part of Gaza's coast, and reduced the permitted fishing area in the south from 12-15 to six nautical miles. As elaborated in the second article of this month's Bulletin, the expansion of the accessible fishing area in the south since April 2019 has led to a 34 per cent increase in the fishing catch, compared to the equivalent period in 2018. Despite this improvement, fishers' livelihoods and safety continue to be undermined by unpredictability and the measures used to enforce the access restrictions, in addition to impediments on the import of essential fishing equipment.

The final article focuses on the annual olive harvest which has been taking place in the West Bank since the start of October. This season's yield is expected to reach a record 27,000 tons. However, farmers with olive groves in the closed area behind the Barrier and in the vicinity of settlements face difficulties in realizing their full potential due to access restrictions and Israeli settler violence. To mitigate the impact of these challenges, humanitarian partners have been carrying out a series of activities coordinated by the Protection Cluster, including a protective presence; in-kind assistance; psychosocial support; and legal counselling.

In his monthly briefing to the Security Council on 28 October, UN Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov reiterated: "We can no longer continue to address Gaza's critical needs on a month-to-month basis, while failing to confront the broader political reality including the stiffening closures, violence and lack on unity. Similarly, we also can no longer disregard the cracks emerging in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Settlement construction and expansion continues, the PA financial crisis is not fully resolved, and the economy continues to stagnate. Therefore, we must re-assert, once again, that to advance the goal of a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians the only way forward is to return to the negotiations with the goal of two states, living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition, based on relevant UN resolutions, international law and prior agreements."

*"We can no longer continue to address Gaza's critical needs on a month-to-month basis, while failing to confront the broader political reality including the stiffening closures, violence and lack on unity."*

UN Special Coordinator  
Mladenov



Farmers waiting to access their olive groves behind the Barrier, next to Beit Surik village (Ramallah), 31 October, 2019.

## FAMILIES IN GAZA FIGHT AN UPHILL BATTLE TO STAVE OFF EVICTION THREATS

Evictions have become routine for Eitidal, aged 30, a wife and mother of two daughters: Layan, 11, and Rimas, 7. Her husband, Medhat, 33, suffers from epileptic seizures and psychological problems, and has been unable to find regular employment. Over the past few years, the family has been evicted twice over accumulated, unpaid rent.

According to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, some 2,000 families in Gaza were at risk of eviction in 2018 over their inability to pay rent. In August this year, the Ministry of Social Development in Gaza estimated the number of families under eviction risk at 9,356. The two different sources make it difficult to verify the increase in families facing eviction, but the numbers suggest a significantly worsening situation.

Other indicators such as the Palestine Monetary Authority's data of a six per cent increase in returned checks over two years and an associated five per cent rise in the prosecution of cases against debtors last year, point to a growing number of families defaulting on loans and rental payments.

Out of 522 vulnerable households, comprising 3,366 individuals, surveyed by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in the northern Gaza Strip between February and March this year, 381, or 73 per cent, reported that they struggled to pay their rent.<sup>2</sup> Unemployment among the 522 households stood at 61 per cent, a further 21 per cent had irregular work and 83 per cent reported debts ranging from NIS 200 (US\$57) to NIS 6,600 (\$1,875). The unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip among the general population for the third quarter of 2019 stood at 45.1 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

Eitidal and her family have been renting their home in Jabalia for the past year. Less than half of the NRC-surveyed households have lived in the same place for more than one year due to their inability to pay rent. The family receives cash-for-rent from the NRC.



*This article was contributed by the Norwegian Refugee Council*

*Out of 522 vulnerable households surveyed in the northern Gaza Strip, 73 per cent, reported that they struggled to pay their rent.*



Eitidal, 30, and her daughter, Layan, 11, meet NRC staff at their home in Jabalia on 21 August 2019.

“Just before NRC’s support, the landlord had warned us that we had to search quickly for another house as we had four months of unpaid rent,” said Eitidal. “We’re still worried about what will happen when the six months of cash for rent assistance end and we fear eviction.”

Of the 522 households, 23 per cent live in homes that fail to meet the minimum standards established by the Shelter Cluster, an inter-agency mechanism led by NRC that coordinates the humanitarian shelter response. Four per cent live in informal shelters such as storage units, which lack running water and sanitation. According to the NRC’s surveyors, Eitidal’s apartment was in particularly poor conditions, including due to limited ventilation, and infestation with mice and cockroaches.

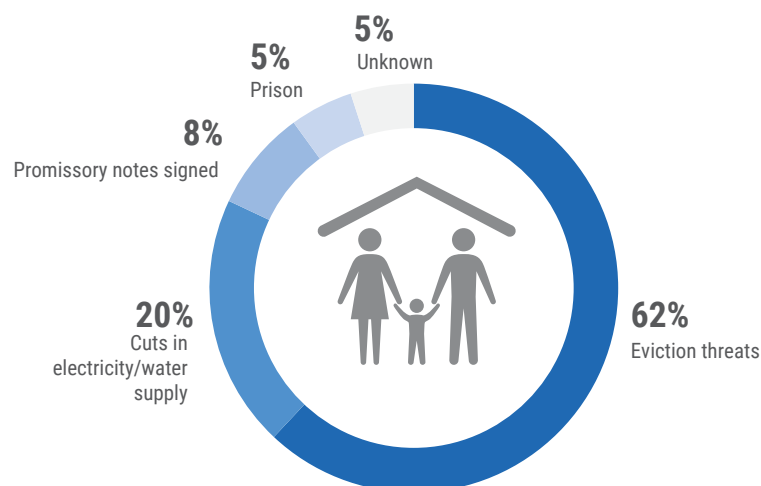
Prior to the last eviction in April 2018, Eitidal’s landlord cut off their electricity and submitted a complaint to the police over accumulated rental debt.

Of the half who responded in the NRC survey to questions about actions taken against them by landlords, 62 per cent reported eviction threats, 20 per cent had experienced cuts to electricity or water supply, eight per cent had signed promissory notes and five per cent ended up in prison.

Too often, Eitidal says, she finds herself without food for her children. In May, her daughter Rimas, tired and hungry after school exams, ate leftover food thrown away by a nearby restaurant and had an attack of food poisoning. Since hearing of the story, the restaurant owner has given the family cooked rice for free, and whenever Eitidal has nothing to feed her children, she sends them there to eat.

*Of the 522 surveyed households, 23 per cent live in homes that fail to meet the minimum standards established by the Shelter Cluster.*

## HOUSEHOLDS AT RISK OF EVICTION BY TYPE OF ACTION



Source: NRC survey

Even drinking water can be hard to come by. “We don’t have either a water tank or a jerry can. I send my daughters to the supermarkets to fill 10 water bottles at a cost of one shekel [\$0.28]. Sometimes we don’t even have one shekel and must depend on the goodwill of neighbours.”

According to the 2018 food security survey by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 68.5 per cent of Gaza’s households are food insecure, with 47 per cent severely affected. Eitidal’s family receives cash assistance of NIS 1,000 (\$284) from the Ministry of Social Development every six months and UNRWA food vouchers every three months.

Of the 522 households surveyed, 70 per cent receive support from a combination of the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA or the World Food Programme (WFP). A significant 16 per cent, or 84 households, however, reported receiving no assistance and having no source of income.

According to a report by aid agency Action Against Hunger, the Ministry of Social Development cut support to 1,000 families in April 2018 and to a further 200 in August of that year. Other families saw their assistance reduced by 30 per cent. A fiscal crisis for much of 2019, further precipitated by declines in foreign aid and an unresolved dispute over Israel’s transfer of taxes and import duties to the Palestinian Authority, has forced severe public spending cuts, including a rollback in social assistance.<sup>4</sup> As a result, more Palestinians in Gaza have become dependent on loans, forcing them into mounting debt, with a growing number of families facing legal action for defaulting on loans and rental payments.

Eitidal has had to sell the food items she purchases with the UNRWA vouchers for half their worth to have money for medicine, gas and other basic necessities. This is common practice among poor families in Gaza: more than half of the households surveyed by NRC resorted to selling the assistance received. Otherwise, Eitidal relies on the goodwill of relatives and strangers to survive.

*Eitidal has had to sell the food items she purchases with the UNRWA vouchers for half their worth to have money for medicine, gas and other basic necessities.*



Rimas, 7, plays with her doll, at home in Jabalia on 21 August 2019.

Earlier this year, Eitidal, in desperate need of money, promised the food items she was due to receive to two people. When she was unable to provide the second person with the items, he made a complaint to the police. As a result, Eitidal's husband spent 19 days behind bars.

"The police came to take my husband away to jail and my daughters started crying," said Eitidal. "Since then, they're terrified every time they see a police officer."

More recently, Eitidal signed a promissory note (a written promise to pay an agreed sum by a certain date) for outstanding debts of NIS 220 (\$63) to a supermarket owner, who involved the police to force the family to pay the full amount in instalments.

"The day we receive the cash assistance from the Ministry of Social Development is the worst ever," said Eitidal. "That's when all the lenders come asking for their money."

The ability of humanitarian organizations to support families in Gaza at risk of eviction has been recently hampered by severe funding shortages. For example, of the \$14 million requested in the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan for shelter-related interventions, only 28 per cent (\$3.9 million) have been raised so far. One of the NRC projects, currently under implementation with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entails the provision of cash-for-rent to 280 vulnerable households (including Eitidal's family), which are either at risk of eviction, or have been re-housed after having been evicted due to their inability to pay rent. In 2020, NRC aims at developing the cash-for-rent program into a multi-purpose cash response, including support for other essential needs, such as utilities, healthcare and food.

Addressing the immediate needs of the most vulnerable households in Gaza in the coming year, including those at risk of eviction, would require a much stronger resource mobilization by donors than in 2019. A more sustainable solution, however, would require more structural changes, including a durable, long-term truce (short of a peace agreement), a lifting of the blockade, and ending the internal Palestinian political divide.

*Of the \$14 million requested in the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan for shelter-related interventions, only 28 per cent have been raised so far.*



Rimas, 7, and Layan, 11, play with their father Medhat, 33, outside their home in Jabalia on 21 August 2019.

## GAZA'S FISHERIES: RECORD EXPANSION OF FISHING LIMIT AND RELATIVE INCREASE IN FISH CATCH; SHOOTING AND DETENTION INCIDENTS AT SEA CONTINUE

"I have been fishing since I was ten years old and fishing is the only source of income for my wife, myself and our 10 children," said Fadi, a 44-year-old fisher from Gaza city.<sup>5</sup>

On 1 April 2019, the Israeli authorities expanded the permissible fishing area along the southern and central parts of Gaza's coast from six up to 15 nautical miles (NM) offshore, the furthest distance that Gaza's fishers have been permitted to access since 2000. Access to the northern areas along the coast remain more limited at up to 6 NM, well below the 20 NM agreed under the Oslo Accords (see map).

Despite the improved access, the situation remains unpredictable: between April and October 2019, the fishing limits have been changed (i.e. reduced or extended) 14 times, including on three occasions when Israel announced a full naval closure that denied Palestinian fishers access to the sea following the launching of incendiary balloons towards Israel.

"The expansion of the fishing zone has improved our situation," explained Fadi. "However, only the big boats can reach the 15 mile limit. I had one such boat, which I bought for \$150,000, but I was forced to sell because I didn't earn enough income to maintain it. Each fishing trip cost us between NIS 600 -1,000 and often we returned without any catch."

Up to 2000, the fisheries sector in Gaza provided a significant source of employment with over 10,000 registered fishers who were able to fish in safety. Currently there are 3,617 registered fishers in Gaza which, including their families, suggests that some 18,000 people rely on fishing for their livelihood.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, fish, as a major source of protein, micronutrients and essential fatty acids, provides nutritional diversity to Gazan diets. However, access restrictions to fishing areas, along with import and export limitations including access to outside markets imposed by the Israeli authorities as part of the blockade, have severely undermined the fisheries sector in Gaza.



*This article is based on information provided by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.*

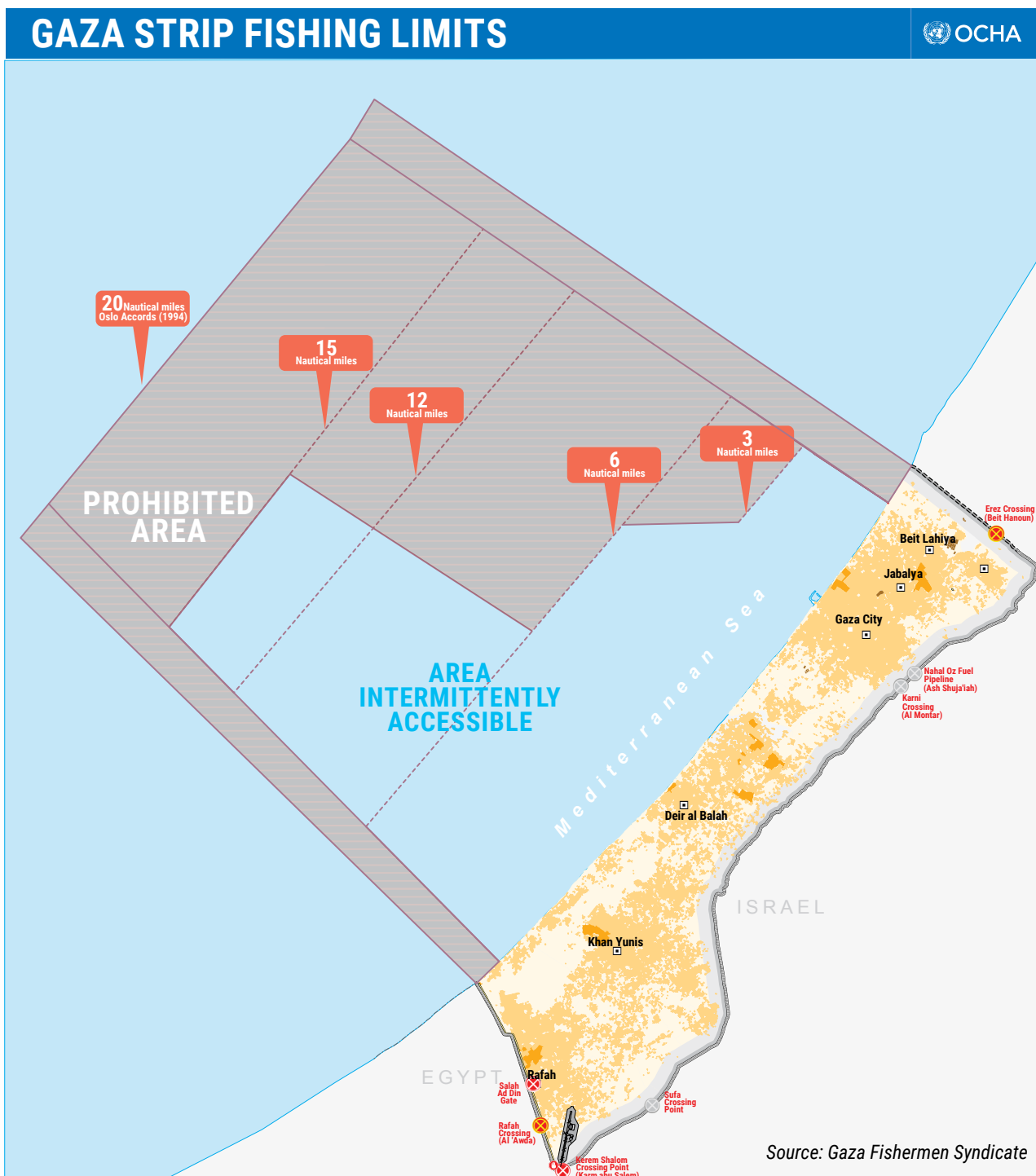
*Despite the improved access, the situation remains unpredictable: between April and October 2019, the fishing limits have been changed (i.e. reduced or extended) 14 times.*



Palestinian fishers hold their fish as they arrive to the fish market in Gaza City, 20 June, 2019.

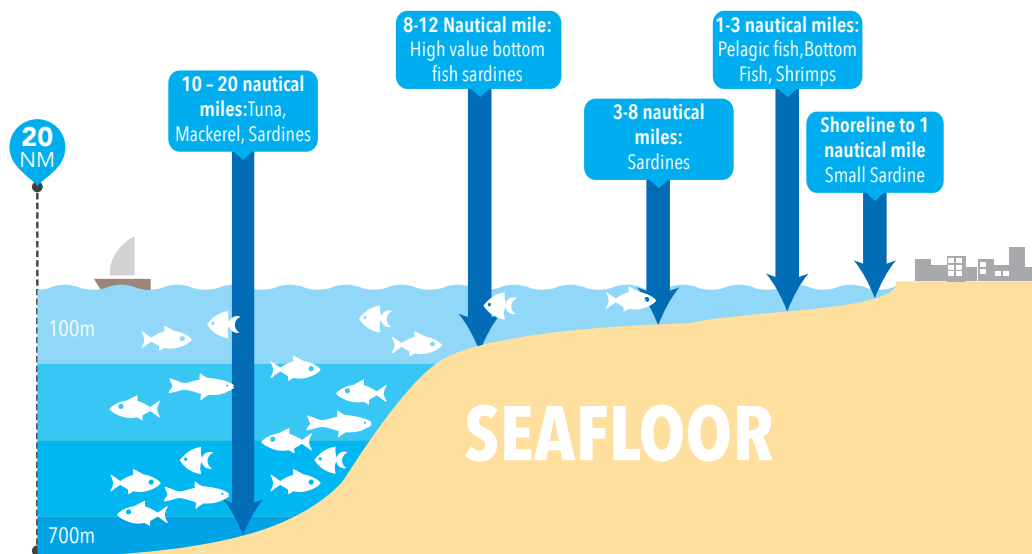
There is a direct correlation between the scope of access to the sea and the quantity and value of the fishing catch; the further out to sea fishers can go, the deeper the water and the higher the value of the fish caught (see chart 1). As a result of the increased access in recent months, the cumulative catch between January and August 2019 reached 2,357 metric tons (MT), a 34 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2018.<sup>7</sup>

However, the revenues obtained so far this year (about \$7 million) increased by less than 10 per cent compared with the equivalent period in 2018, and represent an 18 per cent decline in revenue per metric ton.<sup>8</sup> The decrease in revenue can be partially attributed to the temporary ban on the marketing of fish outside Gaza imposed by the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture and the Palestinian Ministry of National Economy in June 2019, to prevent a rise in the price of fish in the local Gaza market. Gaza's external trade in fish resumed on 6 July amid some restrictions remaining on the types of fish allowed to exit.





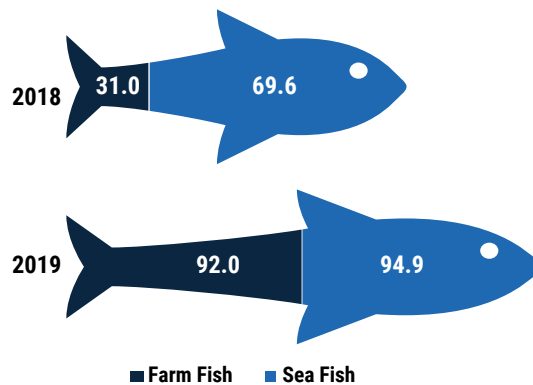
## TYPE OF FISH CATCH BY SEA DEPTH AND DISTANCE FROM THE COAST



In addition to the increased fishing catch from the sea, 2019 recorded a significant increase in the production of farmed fish. As a result, the combined volume of farm and sea fish that exited Gaza in the first nine months of this year is already 85 per cent higher than the volume in all of 2018 (see chart 2).

Fish farming in Gaza started in 1995 and has rapidly increased over the last decade. Since 2009, two producers of sea bream and sea bass operate larger land-based marine fish farming facilities using water from wells. However, the income from these activities has been significantly curtailed by high production costs, including reliance on expensive electricity generators.

### EXTERNAL TRADE OF FISH FROM GAZA BY TYPE (IN TONS) 2018 - SEPTEMBER 2019



Source: Palestinian MoA, Marketing Department. (Data based on export permits)

*As a result of increased access, the cumulative catch between January and August 2019 reached 2,357 metric tons, a 34 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2018.*

### INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING OFF GAZA COAST

FAO, with support from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), is supporting the establishment of an offshore marine cage farm in Gaza, to be managed as a social business owned by the fishing community. The pilot offshore marine cage farm is expected to produce approximately 150 metric tons (MT) of sea bream per year, contributing an additional 4-5 per cent MT to the local fish market. The increased availability will make fish more affordable for consumers, increase consumption levels and dietary diversity, and may contribute to the growth of exports and income earned by the fishing community.

### Continuing shooting and detention incidents

The Israeli navy enforces fishing limits by, among other means, opening live fire at fishing boats, resulting in casualties and damage; forcing fishers to jump into the sea and swim towards Israeli vessels, where they are detained; and confiscating boats and fishing equipment. These practices discourage some fishers from fully exploiting the permissible fishing area even when expanded.

On at least 248 occasions between January and October 2019, Israeli forces have opened fire in areas off the coast of Gaza while enforcing access restrictions; as a monthly average, this is roughly the same as in 2018. While no fisher has been killed so far this year compared with four fatalities in 2018 (two by the Israeli navy and two by the Egyptian navy), 17 fishers, including two children, have been injured in shooting incidents versus 20 in all of last year. Another 33 fishers (including three children) have been detained since the start of 2019, a significant decline compared with 2018 (94 people).

In 2019, Israeli naval forces have also seized and/or damaged 19 fishing boats and fishing nets while enforcing the fishing limits. In a positive development in the first seven months of 2019, the Israeli authorities released 66 boats that had been seized in previous years; some of these boats were severely damaged or lacked engines when returned.

Most fishers in Gaza have old and outdated fishing equipment which impedes their ability to reach the permitted limits. Imports of engines and other equipment into Gaza is restricted by the Israeli authorities citing security concerns.

“We are suffering a lot from the Israeli naval forces,” said Fadi. “They chase us, use water cannons and open fire towards us and detain us. I have been detained six times. I can’t remember how many times me and my sons have been injured by rubber bullets! They’ve confiscated three engines and one small boat, which they still haven’t returned. As fishermen, the sea should be always open for us, but we are trapped in a restricted zone.”

*On at least 248 occasions this year, Israeli forces opened fire off the coast of Gaza while enforcing access restrictions, roughly the same as in 2018.*



Palestinian farmer working at his fish farm (AL-Bahar) in Gaza City, 20 June, 2019.

## OLIVE HARVEST SEASON: EXPECTED RECORD YIELD COMPROMISED DUE TO ACCESS RESTRICTIONS AND SETTLER VIOLENCE

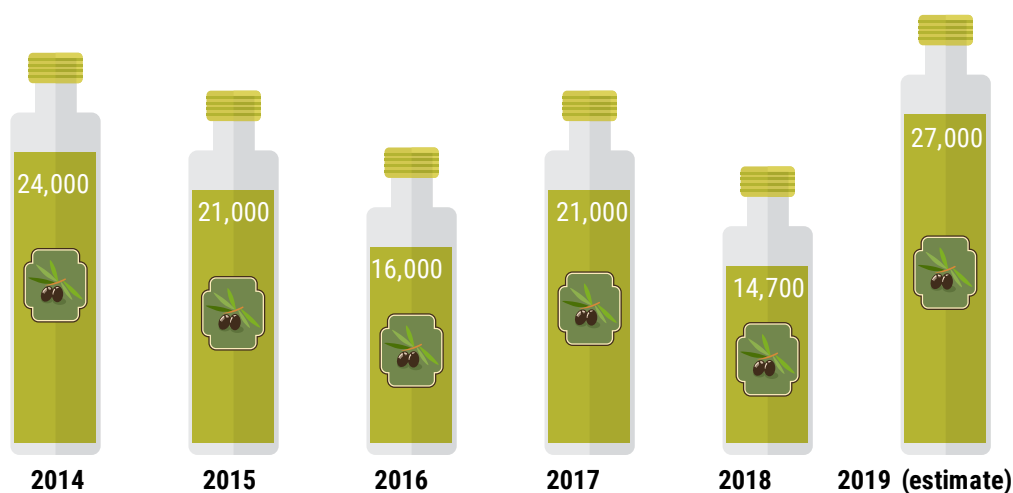
The annual olive harvest, which takes place every year between October and November, is a key economic, social and cultural event for Palestinians. In the West Bank, more than 10 million olive trees are cultivated on approximately 86,000 hectares of land, representing 47 per cent of the total cultivated agricultural area. Between 80,000 and 100,000 families are said to rely on olives and olive oil for primary or secondary sources of income, and the sector employs large numbers of unskilled laborers and more than 15 per cent of working women.<sup>9</sup> According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the olive oil yield for the West Bank in 2019 is estimated to reach a record 27,000 tons, which is an 84 per cent increase over the previous year. The estimated record yield this year is due to the alternate fruit-bearing “on and off seasons” and less infestation by the olive fruit fly during the current season.<sup>10</sup>

In some areas, the realization of a potential record yield is compromised due to access restrictions and attacks and intimidation by Israeli settlers. Palestinians with olive groves located in the closed area between the Barrier and the ‘Green Line’ (also known as the ‘Seam Zone’), and in the vicinity of Israeli settlements, face year-round access restrictions and threats that prevent them from safely maintaining their olive-based livelihoods.

To support affected farmers and mitigate the impact of these challenges, humanitarian partners are carrying out a series of activities coordinated by the Protection Cluster, including a protective presence; in-kind assistance; psychosocial support; and legal counselling.

*Between 80,000 and 100,000 families are said to rely on olives and olive oil for primary or secondary sources of income, and the sector employs large numbers of unskilled laborers and more than 15 per cent of working women.*

### OLIVE OIL YIELD IN THE WEST BANK IN TONS



Source: Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)

## Barrier permits and agricultural gates

Israel began building the Barrier in 2002, following a wave of Palestinian attacks, including suicide bombings inside Israel, with the stated aim of preventing such attacks. The majority of the Barrier's route, however, is located within the West Bank.

The land located in the 'Seam Zone' has been declared closed under an Israeli military order.<sup>11</sup> Palestinian farmers and agricultural workers require special permits or 'prior coordination' to access farming land in this area.<sup>12</sup>

In its Advisory Opinion of 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) established that the sections of the Barrier that run inside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, together with the associated gate and permit regime, violate Israel's obligations under international law. The ICJ called on Israel to cease construction of the Barrier inside the West Bank, to dismantle the sections already completed and repeal all legislative measures related to it. The decision has not been acted upon.

According to official data obtained by the Israeli NGO HaMoked, the approval rate for permits for landowners fell from 76 per cent of applications in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2018 (as of 25 November). Permits issued for agricultural workers to enter these areas declined from 70 per cent of applications to 50 per cent in the same period.<sup>13</sup>

While the stated objective of the Barrier is to prevent violent attacks in Israel, permit applicants are increasingly rejected for a variety of bureaucratic reasons that include 'no connection to the land' or 'not having enough land', rather than on security grounds. Some 83 per cent of the requests in the data obtained by HaMoked were denied for failing to meet one of these bureaucratic criteria. In September 2019, the Israeli military issued a new set of procedures regulating Palestinian access to the Seam Zone which may further undermine the agricultural livelihoods of affected farmers (see box).

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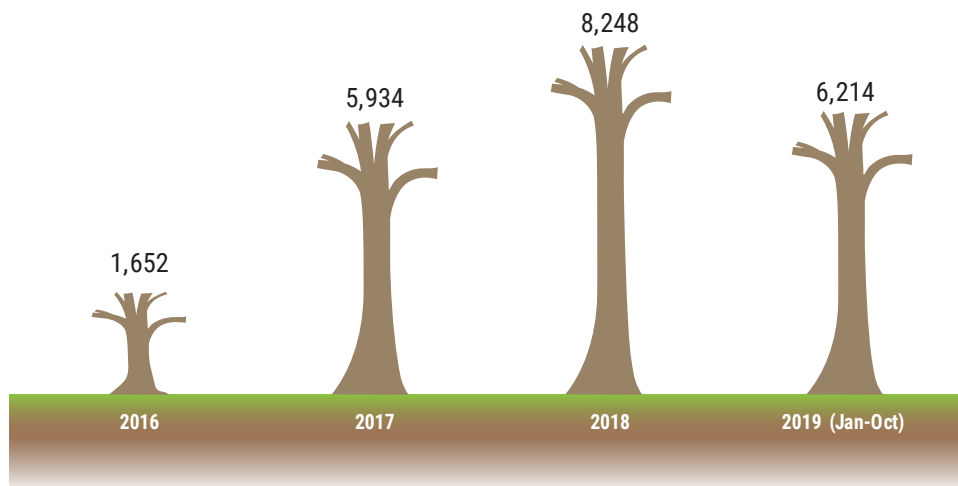
### NEW STANDING REGULATIONS ON THE SEAM ZONE

New standing regulations pertaining to the permit regime for Palestinians to cross the Barrier were issued by the Israeli military ahead of the current olive harvest season. They have two major implications, particularly for Palestinian farmers:

**Downgrading the purpose of access.** Whereas previous regulations stated that the purpose of farmer permits is to "preserve connection to the land", the new regulations state that the purpose is "to enable agricultural cultivation according to agricultural need, based on the size of the plot and the type of crops, while preserving connection to the land." (Section C, paragraph 2). Palestinian landowners and their families, therefore, will not be able to visit their own land for recreation or any other purpose except cultivation.

**Limiting entry even for those granted permits.** For the first time, the new regulations specify "Number of Yearly Entries" (Section C, paragraph 5). Under the previous regulations, the access of permit holders to their land was only subject to the opening modality of the relevant agricultural gate. Entry for farmers with olive groves, for example, is set at 40 days a year.

## TREES VANDALIZED BY ISRAELI SETTLERS



Source: OCHA's Protection of Civilians Database.

If granted approval, farmers must cross designated Barrier gates or checkpoints to reach the closed area. During the 2018 olive harvest, there were 77 operable gates, of which 55 opened only during the few weeks of the olive harvest, and only for limited hours on those days, and remained closed the rest of the year.<sup>14</sup>

### Attacks by settlers

Olive-based livelihoods in many areas of the West Bank are also undermined by Israeli settlers who uproot and vandalize olive trees, and intimidate and physically assault Palestinian farmers, including during the olive harvest season.

Settler attacks have been on the rise in recent years: between January and October 2019 OCHA and partners have recorded a monthly average of 27 attacks resulting in Palestinian casualties or damage to property, compared with 25 in 2018, 14 in 2017 and 8 in 2016. The incidents recorded so far in 2019 resulted in damage to over 6,200 (mostly olive) trees, nearly half of them in the Nablus governorate (mostly around Yitzhar settlement), followed by Ramallah and Hebron governorates.

In October 2019, in the context of the olive harvest, humanitarian partners recorded a total of 26 incidents where Israeli settlers targeted farmers, trees or olive produce. This represents an increase compared with 19 and 20 incidents for the same period in 2018 and 2017 respectively.

As the occupying power, Israel has the obligation to protect Palestinian civilians from all acts or threats of violence, including by Israeli settlers, and to ensure that attacks are investigated effectively and perpetrators held accountable. The failure to do so has been a longstanding concern of the humanitarian community in the oPt and is believed to contribute to the persistently high levels of settler violence.<sup>15</sup>

*The incidents recorded so far in 2019 resulted in damage to over 6,200 (mostly olive) trees, nearly half of them in the Nablus governorate.*

### Access restrictions to areas around settlements

Dozens of Palestinian communities in the West Bank have land within or in the vicinity of Israeli settlements. Much of this land has been declared by the Israeli authorities as a closed military area and can be accessed by Palestinian farmers only following authorization by the Israeli authorities, also known as ‘prior coordination’. Such authorization is generally granted for a limited number of days during the harvest and ploughing seasons.

The Israeli authorities have justified this practice citing the risk that harvesting activities, which involve the increased presence of farmers and their families in the field, could be exploited by terrorist groups to carry out attacks against adjacent Israeli settlements.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that Israeli soldiers are usually deployed around the affected olive groves during the ‘coordination periods’ is believed to have contributed to the reduction of settler attacks during the harvest season itself. However, as is the case regarding the Seam Zone, the restrictions imposed on access by farmers to their olive groves in the vicinity of settlements during most of the year impede their ability to carry out essential maintenance works, thereby undermining the productivity of the trees.

Moreover, although access by settlers to these areas is also prohibited, in some cases the location of the affected groves in the immediate vicinity of the settlements’ built-up areas, including within their fenced area, and the prolonged absence of the Palestinian landowners, has facilitated vandalizing of trees by settlers. Often, the farmers would discover the damage sustained only months later when the next round of coordinated access is granted.

### Humanitarian response

To mitigate the impact of some of the aforementioned challenges, humanitarian partners carried out a mapping exercise that identified ‘hotspots’ of potential settler violence and access restrictions. The mapping allows humanitarian partners to provide a coordinated protective presence; in-kind assistance; psychosocial support; legal assistance; and to coordinate detailed timetable plans with Palestinian farmers and with military forces to accompany the harvest season. Humanitarian partners are providing a protective presence in at-risk areas with a dual objective: to deter potential attacks and to document incidents.

OCHA and humanitarian partners have participated in various olive harvest briefings provided by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), in which the ICA informed the international community that it aims to reduce friction, particularly on land surrounded by settlements, and accompany the farmers to ensure that harvesting is done without harassment.

*Often, the farmers would discover the damage sustained only months later when the next round of coordinated access is granted.*

The protective presence is, however, undermined by funding gaps. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), one of the main organizations carrying out this activity, has had to reduce its protective presence during the olive harvest in 15 of the 32 communities they serve.

### LIMITED AND UNPREDICTABLE ACCESS

Hiyam Ahmad Jumaa, a 58-year-old widow with ten children, lives with her adult son in Beit Surik village in western Ramallah governorate. She owns 22 dunums of land planted with olive, figs, grapes, peach and pomegranate trees. Since the Barrier was built in 2004, she is disconnected from her land and requires 'prior coordination', i.e. special authorization by the Israeli authorities, to access it.

"Our main access problem is not necessarily during the olive harvest," said Hiyam. "To maintain our trees, especially the pomegranate, grapes and peach trees, we need to reach our land during the whole year, but we are only allowed to access twice a year for a few days. Most of these fruit trees are currently not producing anything."

When OCHA arrived on 31 October at around 9 am to "Barrier Gate 105", which leads to Hiyam's land, she was waiting with her two sons for the Israeli soldiers to open the gate. "The gate is supposed to be opened at around 6:30. We have been standing here since then but nobody showed up. Yesterday they opened it at 9:30 and the day before at 12:30 pm," lamented Hiyam.

*"Our main access problem is not necessarily during the olive harvest. To maintain our trees we need to reach our land during the whole year, but we are only allowed to access twice a year for a few days."*



Hiyam Ahmad Jumaa, and her two sons in front of "Barrier Gate 105", outside of Beit Surik village (Ramallah), 31 October, 2019.

## ENDNOTES

1. According to the IDF 25 of those killed were members of armed groups.
2. Of the surveyed families, 20 per cent were headed by females. The selection of households targeted in the survey was based on pre-defined criteria, which was applied to datasets about vulnerable families provided by the ministries of Public Works and Housing, Social Development and Education and Higher Education, as well as by NRC itself.
3. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, [Labour Force Survey](#).
4. In October 2019 the PA agreed to resume receiving the revenues under Israel's conditions, starting with a \$430 million immediate transfer.
5. Full name is withheld.
6. Information provided by the Department of Fisheries in the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaza.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. PALTRADE, The State of Palestine National Export Strategy- Olive oil sector export strategy 2014 – 2018. According to PALTRADE, the entire olive sub-sector, including olive oil, table olives, pickles and soap, is worth between \$160 and \$191 million in good years.
10. Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).
11. In the northern West Bank, the land between the Barrier and the Green Line was declared closed by military order in October 2003. In January 2009, the closed area designation was extended to all or part of areas between the Barrier and the Green Line in the Salfit, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron districts, plus to various areas between the Barrier and the Israeli-defined municipal boundary of Jerusalem.
12. Of the 77 agricultural gates that operated during the 2018 olive harvest season, 47 required access permits and 30 operated via prior coordination.
13. The data were obtained following a freedom of information request by HaMoked and, following no substantive response, a petition to the Israeli High Court of Justice.
14. An additional nine gates are considered 'weekly' in that they open for some day(s) of the week throughout the year in addition to the olive season. Only 13 gates along the completed 465 kilometers of the Barrier open daily.
15. According to the Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din, of 185 investigations monitored by the organization which were opened between 2014 and 2017 and reached a final stage, only 21, or 11.4 per cent, led to the prosecution of offenders, while the other 164 files were closed without indictment.
16. This justification was given in a recent submission by the Israeli authorities to the Israeli High Court of Justice in response to a petition filed by Palestinian farmers from Qariut village (Nablus) together with the Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din: HCJ 6949/19, Head of Qariut Village Council and others vs IDF Commander in the West Bank, State Response, para. 6, 7 November 2019.