



# Gaza One Year On



Islamic Relief Palestine

A Palestinian family outside their home which was partially destroyed by the 2008/2009 Gaza war. Photo: Islamic Relief/Jenny Matthews

Cover Photo: A girl manages to keep a smile despite the destruction of her family's home north of Gaza Strip. Photo: Islamic Relief/Jenny Matthews



# Gaza

## humanitarian crisis

### The 22-day war

On December 27, 2008, Gaza was plunged into a 22-day war that led to one of the worst humanitarian crises the region has witnessed in decades.

Around 1,300 people were killed, more than 5,000 were injured and peoples' homes were destroyed. The people of Gaza survived with little food, water or medical help throughout the conflict, as aid agencies struggled to deliver aid.

Gaza's fragile infrastructure was devastated by the war. The health system struggled to cope with the vast numbers of injured people, thousands of people were made homeless, many schools were destroyed and water supplies were damaged.



### Life-saving aid

Islamic Relief began distributing aid just hours after the conflict began and was one of the few aid agencies working on the ground throughout the emergency.

Truckloads of food and medical aid were immediately sent to al-Shifa Hospital, the biggest medical facility in Gaza. Also, emergency supplies including food, blankets and survival kits were distributed to displaced families.

### One year on

A year after the war, Gaza is still a disaster zone and the population is even more dependent on aid. The people of Gaza continue to face food shortages and poverty is widespread.

Many of those who lost their homes still do not have adequate shelter. There has been little improvement in the health system as there is a severe lack of medicine and medical supplies.

There is also a desperate need for building supplies to rebuild some of what was lost in the war, for materials to help repair water and sanitation facilities and fuel for the power plant.

*Islamic Relief has been working in Gaza since 1998, providing immediate and long-term aid to the population and was an instrumental player during the crisis.*



## Easing a family's hardship

Sami, a 45-year-old Gazan, is disabled and has been unemployed for seven years. Both his back and neck are a source of pain, but nothing pains him like the cries of his hungry children.

Like many of the people of Gaza, he wouldn't be able to feed his children without the support of international aid organizations, like Islamic Relief.

An Islamic Relief donor in the United States has been providing Sami and his family with food through the Family Sponsorship program. The food parcel the family receives is supposed to feed a 7-person family for three months, but it barely lasts six weeks in Sami's household.

They try their best to make the food last, but they can only do so much when there are 14 mouths to feed.

In all, three generations live in his home, and each family member has a story. His 11-year-old son, Mohammad, has a serious heart condition, and his wife has coped with pain in her lungs for a number of years.

But Sami cannot afford healthcare, let alone feed his family and provide for their most basic needs. That's why the sponsorship has been so helpful.

"It makes a big difference," Sami told Islamic Relief USA's VP of Fund Development, Anwar Khan, when he visited the family in November, 2009.

"How else would my children eat? How else can we live?" Sami asked.

Islamic Relief has also been providing Sami's children, and hundreds more, with uniforms and supplies so they can continue going to school. This is a luxury that many cannot afford in Gaza.

Thanks to a donor in the United States who sponsors Sami's household through the Family Sponsorship program, children like Sami's can lead relatively normal lives when so many around them cannot.

*When the 22-day war ended, Islamic Relief Palestine began a massive two-year rehabilitation program that will cost \$44 million.*





## Providing emergency food

The economic blockade of the Gaza Strip is hindering livelihood options for the population which already faces high unemployment rates and low incomes. Many people have little money to spend on food and the problem is made worse by the rising cost of food and basic commodities.

As a result, food shortages are widespread in Gaza and 80 percent of the population is now dependent on food aid for survival.

Since the start of the war in December 2008, Islamic Relief Palestine has provided direct food assistance for more than 100,000 families.

Accomplishments include:

- Emergency food supplies were distributed in hospitals during the war.
- 7,000 meals were provided to internally displaced people living in shelters during the war
- 80,000 food packages have been distributed to vulnerable families living in poverty.

# Sponsoring vulnerable families

Since the start of 2009, there has been a decrease in the amount of basic supplies that are imported into Gaza.

The ongoing blockade is having a direct impact on poverty and unemployment, as global increases in food and fuel prices are also making it difficult for the poorest families to survive.

To help some of Gaza's most vulnerable families, Islamic Relief runs a Family Sponsorship Program that directly supports 2,000 families for a period of two years.

As part of the sponsorship package, the families receive basic food supplies, healthcare services including health checks and a medical allowance, education support in the form of school bags and uniforms for children and cash assistance to help them meet their basic needs.





# Restoring medical services

## Rehabilitating health clinics

There are more than 70 health clinics in the Gaza Strip to assist and serve Gaza's people, but the majority of clinics are in desperate need of renovation and maintenance. They also lack adequate medical equipment and even basic furniture. In the aftermath of the war, Islamic Relief rehabilitated eight primary healthcare clinics and plans are now underway to restore another 32 by renovating, equipping and maintaining them.



## Supporting emergency departments

Many hospitals in the Gaza Strip do not have emergency departments or facilities to treat people in need of intensive care. Those that do exist are in desperate need of repair; the facilities they have are no longer functioning properly and in many cases the equipment is so old that there are no spare parts available for their maintenance.

At al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, Islamic Relief has provided new medical equipment that has helped establish an additional Intensive Care Unit with four beds. Islamic Relief will also provide similar support to other hospitals by providing new equipment and building the capacity of existing emergency departments.



## Providing hearing aids

Hearing loss is a problem for a disproportionate number of people in Gaza, especially amongst the poorest families.

After the recent war, many hundreds of people, particularly children, began experiencing hearing difficulties having been exposed to the sounds of bombings and airplanes.

Islamic Relief Palestine has been supporting people with hearing difficulties by providing them with the medical attention and hearing aids they need to improve their quality of life, support their educational achievement and help them integrate better into society.



*Over 800 people with hearing difficulties are currently being supported by Islamic Relief. A third of them are children.*



## Establishing a blood bank

Gaza has two paediatric hospitals providing specialist care for children who may otherwise have to be taken abroad for treatment.

However, like all of Gaza's hospitals, the pediatric hospitals are under-equipped and in need of new medical supplies.

Islamic Relief Palestine identified the need for a blood bank as one of the most critical needs.

As a result, 16 different pieces of medical equipment were provided in one of the pediatric hospitals, allowing it to establish a new blood bank that now serves three other hospitals in Gaza.



## Providing assistance for the disabled

During the war, around 700 people were so severely injured that they had to undergo amputations. The percentage of the population already living with a disability in Gaza stands between three and five percent; significantly higher than in neighboring countries.

Since 2005, Islamic Relief has been supporting Gaza's only Artificial Limbs and Polio Center, giving injured and disabled people the opportunity to live a far better quality of life.

*Since the Gaza war, Islamic Relief Palestine has been providing over \$1.4 million worth of facilities to support 1,000 injured and disabled people through the Center.*

Islamic Relief Palestine is also planning to support the Center's services further by appointing additional staff including technicians and physiotherapists and providing training to existing staff.

# Restoring water supplies

## New water well in Khan Younis

Ground water is the major source of water supply for both domestic and agricultural use in the Gaza Strip; but less than a fifth of all water wells meet the World Health Organization's standards for safe drinking water. Some parts of Gaza urgently need new water sources and Islamic Relief Palestine has helped meet this need by digging a new deep well in the Qizan al-Najjar area of Khan Younis in the south of Gaza.



*The new well dug by Islamic Relief now provides 20,000 people in south Gaza with safe, clean drinking water*

## Building a water network in Rafah

Most of the population of Gaza have problems accessing water which causes significant disruption to their daily lives. One-fifth of Gaza's wells are no longer functioning and more than half do not work properly.

To help improve people's access to water, Islamic Relief Palestine has constructed a new water network in the al-Salam area of Rafah, south of the Gaza Strip. The project involved installing a major water-supply carrier line connecting the area with the main water distribution network. This has helped 20,000 people access safe, clean drinking water.



## Restoring wells for agriculture

The agricultural sector was one of the worst affected by the war as huge areas of agricultural land were destroyed, as were many water-collection pools and irrigation wells. Trees were uprooted, greenhouses were leveled and over 300 water wells were damaged. To help restore these essential facilities, Islamic Relief Palestine has rehabilitated 12 agricultural water wells in Gaza, giving over 70 farmers the ability to restore their lost livelihoods.



## Back-to-school safely

*"My chair, my desk, the blackboard and the classroom were burnt because of the bombing that hit my school, which was like my second home."*

Islamic Relief Palestine renovated the al-Nobani School, where 15-year-old Hadiya used to attend. This school is one of dozens of schools renovated through an Islamic Relief Palestine project which is co-funded with the Qatar Foundation's 'Reach out to Asia' (ROTA).

*"When my school was hit, I did not expect to see it again, the way it was, but thankfully, within a few months it looks nicer than before," Hadiya said.*



## Improving access to education

The war caused extreme damage to Gaza's education infrastructure with ten schools completely destroyed, over 150 damaged and many kindergartens and universities severely or partially damaged. The estimated cost of repair for this damage was around \$55 million.

Islamic Relief Palestine has been helping improve access to education in Gaza for many years through various projects that encourage children to attend school, such as providing nutritious milk for preschoolers and distributing school bags for children from poor families.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Islamic Relief Palestine rehabilitated 20 schools in Gaza, with funding from the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID).

The project included rebuilding damaged walls, installing new doors and windows, adding new electrical fixtures and ensuring the schools were safe for children to attend.

Islamic Relief Palestine has also received \$5.7 million of funding from the Qatar Foundation's Reach Out To Asia (ROTA), as well as funds from Islamic Relief donors in the UK and Middle East, to repair 22 schools in Gaza, some of which were severely damaged.

The project aims to improve the quality of education in Gaza through the provision of safe, healthy and adequate learning environments for students so that they can return to their classrooms safely.

It will also help provide better facilities for schools including libraries, science laboratories, technology rooms and computer-training facilities as well as psychosocial support and counselling.



## Providing employment

In the immediate aftermath of the war, many people were in desperate need of a source of income in order to support themselves and their families. Islamic Relief Palestine identified some of the most vulnerable people who had lost their home and all their possessions in the war, and offered them the opportunity to work for three months.

A total of 1,500 men and women were employed to support public institutions including hospitals, orphanages and schools and were paid a monthly wage of \$285 that helped ease the financial burden on them and their families during this difficult period.

*The DEC (Disasters Emergency Committee) Scottish Government and SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) job creation projects empowered local communities and restored community assets*

## Repairing homes

Over 4,000 buildings were completely destroyed in the war and another 17,000 were partially damaged, many of them residential homes. Islamic Relief Palestine has started the rehabilitation of 200 partially-damaged houses in Gaza, which will enable families to leave makeshift shelters, return to their pre-war homes and begin rebuilding their lives



# From the field

More than a year after armed conflict left Gaza in ruins, the people are still suffering – and I saw it firsthand.

As part of an international Islamic Relief delegation, I visited Gaza in November 2009, and was saddened by the pain people endured after years of violence and economic blockade.

I met families that were relying on Islamic Relief just so they can survive. Islamic Relief Palestine was helping provide clean water for thousands of people who lack access, and donors from around the world were helping feed needy families through Family Sponsorship.

I was saddened because food and water are things people often take for granted, but the people I met in Gaza were thankful for every sip, every morsel. I even saw children gathering rubble and glass from destroyed buildings so they can make things like jewelry cases and tissue boxes. They recycle everything in Gaza.

I also visited multiple hospitals - including the biggest in Gaza, al-Shifa - and saw how much your support was helping. Islamic Relief Palestine is supplying state-of-the-art equipment, much-needed supplies, and is even renovating entire parts of hospitals and clinics.

At one hospital, Islamic Relief Palestine revamped, rebuilt and supplied an emergency ward in which the paint was peeling and the smell of mold was polluting the whole building. The hospital's staff was thanking me, but I know that it's your support that's making projects like this possible.

I also met Islamic Relief Palestine's staff in Gaza, and was deeply impressed. Many of them risked their lives during the height of the most recent conflict, delivering food and medical equipment to those in need.

I heard stories about staff members that buried their loved ones in the midst of the violence, and returned to work the same day. This dedication and selflessness is why Islamic Relief has been able to serve so many people in Gaza, and continues to do so.

I pray that our work continues to benefit many people in the years to come and the support of those who made our work possible never ends.

Anwar Ahmed Khan  
VP of Fund Development  
Islamic Relief USA





## Caring for children

### Sponsoring orphans

The Gaza war saw one of the highest single-day death tolls in Palestine since 1967. As a result, many children were orphaned and many widows were left struggling to provide for their children. Islamic Relief's One-to-one Orphan Sponsorship program allows an individual donor to sponsor an orphan and help ensure

all the child's basic needs are met, including food, shelter, healthcare, education and psychosocial care. After the Gaza war, Islamic Relief donors sponsored an additional 700 orphans, helping them live a better quality of life after the tragedy of losing one or both parents.

*Islamic Relief has been providing One-to-one Orphan Sponsorship for children in Gaza since 1999, and now sponsors 7,000 children.*

### Providing winter clothes and school bags

The guardians of orphans and vulnerable children in Gaza often struggle to provide clothes and school equipment for the children in their care, which in turn affects their education and social wellbeing.

After the war, the situation became even more severe as many people lost all their possessions under the rubble of the homes. To help ease the burden on some of the poorest families, Islamic Relief Palestine carried out a distribution of school bags and winter clothes to 3,000 children.





## Psychosocial support

Islamic Relief Palestine has been providing psychosocial care for traumatized children in Gaza since 1999, helping children who have witnessed violence and experienced personal tragedies come to terms with their experiences through various therapy and counseling sessions.

Having worked in this field for many years, Islamic Relief Palestine was able to provide immediate care after the war for families that were directly affected by the war. The two-month project supported more than 1,600 families, providing them with psychosocial care.

When school attendance resumed in Gaza, Islamic Relief Palestine began providing psychosocial support on a group and individual basis for schoolchildren. The project, partly funded by DFID, helped more than 36,000 children in 50 schools across the Gaza Strip. This project lasted for three months and required more than 50 animators, ten psychologists and many support staff.



## Feeding Children

Five months after the war, Islamic Relief, in partnership with the Islamic Development Bank, initiated a project to feed more than 20,000 children in Gaza, many of whom do not receive adequate nutrition. The children receive fortified milk and high-energy biscuits on daily basis. Islamic Relief is also planning a new project that will provide food for 10,000 schoolchildren in Gaza for three years.

*Islamic Relief has been providing milk for schoolchildren in Gaza since 2003, following studies that revealed alarming rates of anaemia and acute and chronic malnutrition in young children.*



## Psychosocial centers

Following the war and the increased need for psychosocial care, Islamic Relief Palestine began a project to establish five psychosocial support centers in Gaza. A pilot center was established four months after the war in northern Gaza, where many attacks took place. Funded by the Catholic Agency for International Development (CAFOD) in the UK and Secures Catholique in France, the center has now been running successfully for over six months. Over 100 children have received individual psychosocial support intervention while hundreds have benefited from group activities.

In addition, many parents have attended awareness-raising sessions on how to deal with children during emergencies. The center is well-known in the area and many local NGOs and school staff have benefited from the various training courses it offers.





## War through a child's eyes

Mohannad's life was once very different from how it is now. He lived happily with his parents and four siblings, and even had his own bedroom with lots of full of cuddly toys and games. But in a short period of time Mohannad's life changed forever.

His father died a short time before the war and then his home was destroyed during the attacks, which left his mother struggling to provide food and shelter for her children.

What remained of Mohannad's family home was destroyed before his eyes. This traumatized all the family but as the youngest, Mohannad found the trauma of war particularly difficult to bear.

"My dear Mohannad has changed since experiencing this panic and terror," said Fayza, Muhannad's mother, who suffers from epilepsy. "He used to play a lot, running around to and fro, drawing with colors and flying kites. Now he is no longer at ease; he bites his fingers when angry,

has nightmares, begins shouting in the dark and thinks he is falling from the 9th floor.

“He describes horrific scenes like seeing dead bodies covered in blood. His appetite is poor, he has become an introvert and is often aggressive and selfish. He has lost all his games and now tries to keep as much as he can by taking from others.”

“All my children are suffering from what we experienced, and so am I,” said Fayza, crying. “But I thank Allah that despite all we have been through, I am still alive and able to care for my children.”

Mohannad is now sponsored by an Islamic Relief donor through the One-to-one Orphan Sponsorship program that ensures all his basic needs are met, including food, shelter, education and healthcare. Since the sponsorship started, Mohammad’s quality of life has started to improve and the family even has some basic furniture in their home as well as a television.

Mohannad is now being referred to Islamic Relief Palestine’s Psychosocial Care Center that will help him deal with the trauma of the war. His life is slowly starting to change and his mother hopes that the spark will return to his eyes once again.





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