



Al Mezan Center for Human Rights

Fact Sheet:

The Access-Restricted Areas (“Buffer Zone”) in the Gaza Strip



This project is funded by the European
Union



Implemented in partnership with Oxfam GB

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Factsheet

The Access-Restricted Areas (“Buffer Zone”) in the Gaza Strip

This factsheet highlights the continuous Israeli violations of the rights of Palestinians living in Gaza’s border areas. It presents detailed information on the access-restricted areas along the Gaza-Israel border (also known as the “security buffer zone),” including figures and statistics for losses and damages suffered from the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000 up to the first three months of 2012.

General Background

The Gaza Strip is a roughly rectangular territory lying along the Mediterranean Sea. From north to south the Strip extends about 45 kilometers, with a width varying between six and 12 kilometers from east to west. It is about 365 square kilometers in area, divided into five districts: North Gaza, Gaza, Deir Al Balah, Khan Younis, and Rafah. The separation fence runs along the border of all five districts. The zone classified as highly dangerous extends westward from the fence to a distance ranging between 500 and 1500 meters inside the Strip. It starts at the northern border along the outskirts of Beit Lahiya and Um An-Naser village and continues along the northern and eastern parts of Beit Hanoun.

The Israeli Occupation Force (IOF) continue to carry out various violations of human rights and international humanitarian law against civilians in the border areas, including killings, destruction of property, displacement from homes, arrest, and destruction of means of livelihood. These abuses increase the misery of those living in areas near the borders, who are already suffering badly due to the forcible displacement of all residents living within 500 meters of the separation fence.

Facts and Reality

According to official IOF information, Israel’s efforts to impose what was referred to as a “buffer zone” and is now more widely known as the “access restricted areas” (ARA) began after implementation of the disengagement plan in September 2005. The boundary of the “buffer” area was, according to repeated Israeli declarations, 300 meters from the eastern and northern borders of the Gaza Strip. However, facts on the ground demonstrate that the IOF has attacked civilian individuals, properties, and objects even when they have been at a distance of 1.5 kilometer from the border. According to reports by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the ARA covers approximately 62.6 square kilometers—approximately 35% of Gaza’s cultivable land and 85% its maritime area—making these areas totally or partially inaccessible to Palestinians.

Analysis of information from the database of incidents maintained by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights indicates that the IOF initially imposed restrictions on residents of the border areas at the beginning of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. The IOF established a zone between 100 and 300 meters deep in which it prevented economic and residential activity, barring the presence of families or individuals in the area. The IOF did not at that time publicly announce its intent to impose a buffer zone, but it dropped leaflets warning residents against living in the area dozens of times in an attempt to establish it as a “no-go” zone. In the first year of the Intifada, the IOF destroyed 14 houses along the border, affecting 137 people, including 47 children.

IOF violations escalated gradually in the following years. According to Al Mezan's records, between September 2005 and the date of writing, the IOF killed 190 persons in the border areas, including 11 women and 47 children. The IOF also shelled and damaged 1,066 houses, 613 of which were completely destroyed. 8,668 persons were displaced, including 4,309 women and girls, and 4,334 children. In addition, the IOF razed 3,108 dunams of agricultural land, directly harming 4,563 persons who earned their sustenance from these lands.

The IOF deliberately attacks residents of the border areas using various means. More than one family has suffered repeated attacks. Al Mezan has documented how the family of Jaber Abu Is'ayeed, 64, who live east of Juhur Ad-Dik village, about 300 meters from the separation fence, has been attacked twice. The first attack, on 13 July 2010, killed Ne'ma Abu Is'ayeed, 32, the wife of Naser Jaber Abu Is'ayeed, and injured Sanaa' Ahmed Abu Is'ayeed, 25; Ameera Jaber Abu Is'ayeed, 30; and the elderly Jaber, the owner of the principal family home on the land. The house sustained severe structural damage from the attack.

On 28 April 2011, the IOF attacked the same home for a second time, firing several artillery shells on and around it, injuring Mohammed Jaber Abu Is'ayeed, 29; his wife Sanaa, 25; Alaa Naser Abu Is'ayeed, ten years old; and his sister Maysaa, five years old. The home of Naser Jaber Abu Is'ayeed—the top floor of the family's main house—was totally destroyed in this attack.

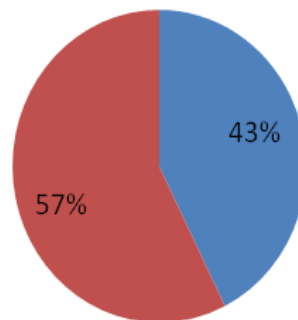
The IOF has continued to carry out attacks and impose restrictions on residents of the ARA since the beginning of 2012. According to Al Mezan's records for the year to date, the IOF has opened fire on the border areas 56 times; carried out 18 limited incursions, during which it arrested 12 persons, including four civilians; injured 63 people, including five women; and severely damaged 17 houses, 16 of which were partially destroyed. The IOF also destroyed one civilian vehicle during this time period.

Residential Destruction Distributed by Type of Damage for the Period between 27 September 2000 and 7 May 2012

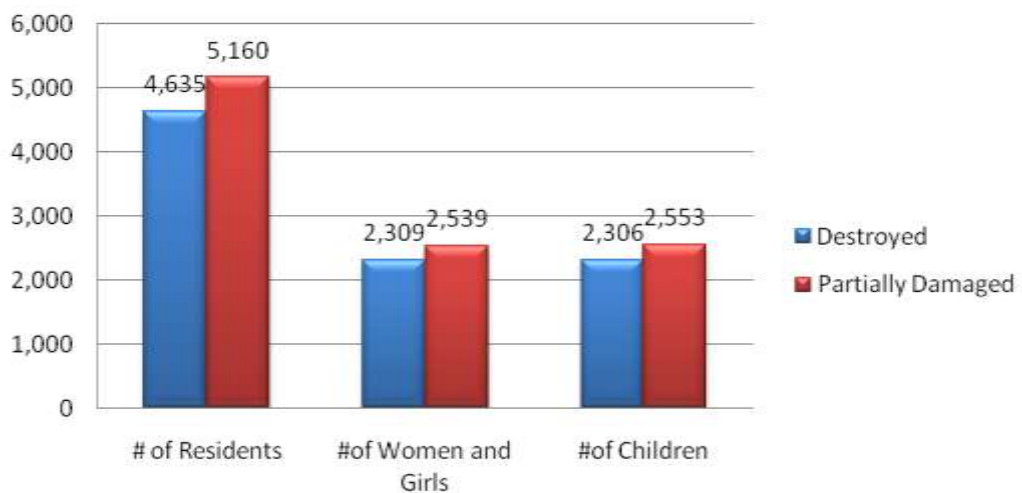
Type of Damage	# of Houses	# of Residents	#of Women and Girls	#of Children
Partially Damaged	520	4,635	2,309	2,306
Destroyed	700	5,160	2,539	2,553
Total	1,220	9,795	4,848	4,859

Residential Destruction Distributed by Type of Damage

■ Partially damaged ■ destroyed



Houses Damaged in the Buffer Zone Distributed by Residents



Conclusion

Al Mezan condemns the ongoing Israeli attempts to enforce a “buffer zone” inside the Gaza Strip, and emphasizes that denial of access to a high percentage of Gaza’s agricultural lands will have catastrophic impacts on the future of agricultural production and the economic situation generally. Al Mezan also condemns the IOF’s attacks on civilians near the borders, particularly farmers and rubble collectors. These attacks violate the international legal prohibition of deliberate attacks on civilians under any circumstances.

Al Mezan reiterates its previous condemnation Israel’s violations of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Al Mezan asserts that the IOF’s insistence on imposing restrictions on civilians’ access to land, particularly with respect to farmers owning fields near the borders, is a gross violation of international law. Therefore, Al Mezan calls on the international community to take prompt and urgent action to ensure protection of Palestinian civilians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Al Mezan calls on the international community to intervene to end the IOF’s enforcement of the “buffer zone” inside the Gaza Strip, which has had a severe humanitarian impact on the Gazan population.