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Gaza Rebuild Effort Could Take 100 Years: Oxfam

By Andrea Germanos

Global Research,



People walk through the heavily-bombed Shujaiya area in eastern Gaza in July 2014 during a pause in attacks. (Photo: Iyad al Baba/Oxfam via flickr/cc)

Despair and destruction continue to envelop the blockaded Gaza strip, where the rebuilding of vital structures could take up to a century, Oxfam International has warned.

The organization's statement comes six months after a ceasefire agreement ended Israel's 50-day assault on Gaza, which left over 2,100 Palestinians dead, decimated thousands of structures, and weakened already damaged infrastructure systems.

Oxfam is one of 30 international aid agencies that operate in Gaza, including the Norwegian Refugee Council and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), to issue a joint statement Thursday expressing alarm at the slow pace of reconstruction and worsening living conditions for Gaza's residents.

Among the families hit by the destruction this summer was that of Abdel Momen Abu Hujair, who farms in Johr El-Diek. His wife, Um Mohammed, told the Norwegian Refugee Council:

Is this what our lives have come into? Living in a shack after we invested all what we had to build a house? I am very depressed and feel unable to take care of my children. I used to help them with their studies; their performance at school is now deteriorating. I feel no hope for the future or reconstruction. I am afraid we will spend the rest of our lives in this shack, in suffering and despair.

In their joint statement, the organizations lay out some of the ongoing problems:

since July, the situation has deteriorated dramatically. Approximately 100,000 Palestinians remain displaced this winter, living in dire conditions in schools and makeshift shelters not designed for long-term stay. Scheduled power cuts persist for up to 18 hours a day. The continued non-payment of the salaries of public sector employees and the lack of progress in the national unity government further increases tensions. With severe restrictions on movement, most of the 1.8 million residents are trapped in the coastal enclave, with no hope for the future.

Bearing the brunt of this suffering are the most vulnerable, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and nearly one million children, who have experienced unimaginable suffering in three major conflicts in six short years. Children lack access to quality education, with over 400,000 of them in need of immediate psychosocial support.

"I am afraid we will spend the rest of our lives in this shack, in suffering and despair."The statement adds that "Israel, as the occupying power, is the main duty bearer and must comply with its obligations under international law," and concludes: "We must not fail in Gaza."

In an update earlier this month, UNRWA said a funding shortfall had forced it "to suspend its cash assistance program supporting repairs and providing rental subsidies to Palestine refugee families in Gaza," and Oxfam pointed to the responsibility of the international community as well.

"Only an end to the blockade of Gaza will ensure that people can rebuild their lives," Catherine Essoyan, Oxfam's Regional Director, said in a media statement.

"Families have been living in homes without roofs, walls or windows for the past six months. Many have just six hours of electricity a day and are without running water. Every day that

people are unable to build is putting more lives at risk. It is utterly deplorable that the international community is once again failing the people of Gaza when they need it most,” Essoyan stated.

But *Electronic Intifada* co-founder Ali Abunimah writes that little change to the dire situation will come if aid agencies continue to make appeals to the vague “international community” and avoid putting blame on “the home governments of many of the international civil society organizations have been complicit in Israel’s military attacks and siege on Gaza.”

He continues: “Aid agencies should not have waited six long months to speak out. Now that they have done so, they should have called for specific punitive measures against the party they correctly call the ‘occupying power’ to force it to end its siege.”

“Israel, moreover, could not carry on the way it does without the complicity of ‘Western’ governments: the aid agencies should hold their governments accountable and pressure them to end their complicity,” Abunimah writes.

Human rights organizations Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued reports finding that some of Israel’s actions during the summer assault amounted to war crimes, but the head of a UN war crimes inquiry into the operation announced his resignation this month, stating: “This work in defense of human rights appears to have made me a huge target for malicious attacks.”