

The EU needs a long-term strategy to reconnect Gaza to the West Bank

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As international development agencies, we travel regularly to Gaza in order to support and assist our partners. The testimonies we hear are dire. Life in Gaza has become intolerable as the humanitarian situation is increasingly deteriorating. After Egypt's recent destruction of hundreds of smuggling tunnels, the territory is now starved of the resources it needs for any significant commercial activity and suffering shortages of affordable fuel, construction materials etc.

Long term perspectives of sustainable economic growth and development can only be achieved with a strategy aimed at reconnecting Gaza to the West Bank in every possible way. A consensus exists that Gaza's development is prevented by the **closure**, which continues to [collectively punish](#) 1.7 million Palestinians by impacting on their health, education, and socio-economic wellbeing, as well as isolating the Strip further from the rest of the Palestinian territory and population¹. This, along with the **current strife between the PA** and the **de facto authorities** in Gaza, is **widening intra-Palestinian social, political and economic gaps**. Aid from the EU and the international community has been critical to the short-term welfare of the Palestinian population, but without ending violations of humanitarian law, it only can only serve to stem somewhat the deterioration in the Gaza Strip.

Besides this, continued EU non-engagement with Hamas, is seriously hampering its efforts to create a viable and durable solution, for Gaza and for wider peace and stability. Hamas, as the de facto authority in the Gaza Strip, is also obliged to respect and protect the rights of all and to prevent any violations of international law. Ensuring this though will only be achieved through engagement, dialogue and development, not continued isolation and punishment. As well as this, continuation of the no-contact policy with Hamas is a major impediment to resolving the internal conflict between different Palestinian leaderships as it prevents any engagement with Hamas on this topic.

In order to overcome the current deadlock, in view of the Foreign Affairs Council of April, 14 and the current round of peace negotiations, **APRODEV invites the EU and its international partners to re-examine how they engage with all parties to the conflict and urges** the EU and its Member States to:

- Make effective use of the [EU Guidelines on the promotion of compliance with international humanitarian law](#) and [condition](#) their relations with Israel on tangible progress with respect to international law, particularly by encouraging and, when necessary, exerting pressure on Israel to:
 - a. Completely lift the blanket and disproportionate restrictions on the movement of persons, commercial goods and humanitarian aid, in and out of Gaza.
 - b. Cease all attacks on civilians and their property and open investigations, prosecute alleged perpetrators and provide full reparation to victims of previous attacks, in line with international standards.
 - c. Allow safe access to the "[Access Restricted Areas](#)" to fishermen and farmers for the maintenance of their livelihoods with limitations subjected only to strict criteria based on military necessity and the security of the civilians themselves

- Revise its no-contact policy with Hamas and actively take steps to assist in remedying the disruption of Palestine’s national unity and territorial integrity.ⁱⁱ This should include:
 - a. Actively supporting reconciliation between Palestinian political factions in order to help Palestinians create an accountable and effective representative body.
 - b. Calling on Hamas to ensure respect of IHL by all Palestinian factions, including by opening investigations and prosecuting alleged perpetrators of previous violations, in line with international standards.
 - c. Calling on Hamas and Palestinian Authority to enforce the human rights of the Palestinian population in their respective jurisdictions.
 - d. Urging the Palestinian Authority to enhance cooperation with Hamas to ensure that the Gaza Strip receives a steady supply of industrial fuel and essential medicines.

- Undergo a more conflict-sensitive development and humanitarian aid programming by:
 - a. Including Gaza when possible in bilateral programmes.
 - b. As appropriate, accompanying aid interventions with political action that addresses the causes of the humanitarian situation in order to make sustainable development a tangible possibility in the future.
 - c. Assessing all interventions against their potential to address the underlying causes of the conflict, inadvertently undermine Palestinian unity,ⁱⁱⁱ increase social fragmentation, or stabilize the political status-quo.

- Urge Egypt to facilitate the movement of residents to and from Gaza and the passage of humanitarian relief consignments.

Member Organisations:

Members agencies of APRODEV active and supporting local organizations in the Middle East are: Bread for the World, Germany • Christian Aid, UK • Church of Sweden, Sweden • DanChurchAid, Denmark • Diakonia, Sweden • Finn Church Aid, Finland • HEKS/EPER, Switzerland • ICCO, Netherlands • Kerk in Actie, , Netherlands • Norwegian Church Aid, Norway. They all share a vision of peaceful co-existence in the Middle East. This begins with a respect for international law, and deepens with a rights-based recognition of the need for security-for-all.

ⁱ [Humanitarian Implementation Plan](#), Occupied Palestinian Territory, 10/10/12, DG ECHO, European Commission

ⁱⁱ [Cf. General Assembly Resolution 2625 \(XXV\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Cf. UNSC resolution 1860](#).