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# HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN

## MONTHLY REPORT

MAY 2014



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### Overview:

#### **The Gaza blockade must be lifted**

This month witnessed two positive developments in the Gaza Strip. First, the fishing catch during the sardine season, which ended this month, was significantly higher than in previous years. This was primarily due to an easing of Israeli restrictions on access to the sea as part of the November 2012 ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, although discontinued for periods of 2013. Second, the Israeli Ministry of Defence authorized the resumption of several UN construction projects, including health centres, schools, housing and water infrastructure. These were suspended in October 2013 following the discovery of an underground tunnel from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

These positive developments notwithstanding, much more is needed to adequately alleviate the humanitarian hardship affecting the civilian population in the Gaza Strip and highlight the fact that in Gaza access has become a rare exception rather than the rule.

Despite the resumption of several UN projects, the ban on the import of building materials by the commercial sector remains in place, denying tens of thousands an income from work in the construction sector and preventing the reconstruction or upgrading of homes and infrastructure. Similarly, although the extension of the accessible fishing area has had a positive impact on the livelihoods of fishermen, the current limit (six nautical miles) is less than one third of the fishing area allocated under the Oslo Accords and does not allow for a genuine reactivation of the fishing sector. The latter currently employs some 3,500 people, down from over 10,000 in 1999.

Living conditions in the Gaza Strip have been also affected by a significant decline in the quality of services. Gaps in access to health care are of particular concern. Due to the financial crisis facing the State of Palestine, stocks of approximately a quarter of essential medicines were at zero stock in May 2014. The chronic shortage of electricity also impairs continuity of patient care in hospitals and increases maintenance and fuel costs.

June 2014 marks seven years since the start of the blockade on the Gaza Strip following the takeover by Hamas in 2007. The movement and access restrictions imposed in this context have destroyed Gaza's once dynamic private sector and pushed the majority of the population into poverty and forced reliance on international aid. Notwithstanding Israel's legitimate security concerns, the UN Secretary-General has repeatedly called for the lifting of the blockade to end the collective punishment of the civilian population.

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