
Gaza reconstruction project hit by Israeli sanctions

GAZA CITY, 2 June 2009 (IRIN) - Thousands of non-refugee Palestinians in Gaza receiving financial assistance from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) are finding it difficult to reconstruct and rehabilitate their homes, because they are unable to access sufficient quantities of building materials, UNDP programme officer Husam Toubil told IRIN.

Of Gaza's total population of 1,416,539, according to the [UN Population Fund](#), 1,073,303 are registered as refugees by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). The remainder are non-refugees who cannot get assistance from UNRWA so UNDP is trying to assist them.

About 13,300 homes/households are registered as recipients for this UNDP aid. Some 1,300 homes which were completely destroyed and 1,000 which sustained major damage (in the 23-day Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip which ended on 18 January 2009) are scheduled for reconstruction, according to Toubil.

UNDP has already given cash handouts to 8,000 families to help them do minor repairs: Some 11,000 of the registered homes sustained minor damage estimated at US\$100-5,000, according to UNDP.

However, about 1,000 families who are due to receive more substantial UNDP aid have had problems getting the money due to [Gaza's liquidity crisis](#).

Gaza lacks all kinds of building material "primarily cement, steel, aluminium, aggregates, glass and wood to begin reconstruction," said Toubil. "And materials are unavailable on the local market, or too expensive for families trying to repair minor damage."

Thip Mansour, aged 24, his wife and their four-month-old daughter, Fatima, are living with nine other family members in their house which was badly damaged.

The UNDP gave Thip, unemployed, 1,200 NIS (shekels; about US\$300) to repair his home in Jabalya. Three rooms of his home and the windows were destroyed when the neighbouring house was targeted by Israeli forces during the offensive.

"The money is not enough to rebuild one room, and cement and wood is unavailable or too costly," said Thip. "We covered the windows with plastic sheeting, but it tore apart and now we are using cloth-sheets."

UNDP still awaiting response

Toubil said that the reconstruction of damaged homes and buildings would require 170,000 tons of aggregates (gravel, sand, etc.) to rebuild totally destroyed houses, and about 20,000 tons of aggregates for partially destroyed houses. In addition, 50,000 tons of cement are needed to rebuild completely destroyed houses and 41,000 tons to rebuild public buildings.

The UNDP placed a request in early April via the [logistics cluster](#) led by the World Food Programme to bring building materials and equipment into Gaza but is still awaiting a response.

Israeli Defence Ministry spokesperson Shlomo Dror said it was difficult for Israel to allow building materials to enter Gaza, since they cannot be sure the materials will not be used for "terrorist activities" by Hamas.

Fighting during the offensive destroyed some 4,000 homes and damaged another 40,000. Donor countries have pledged billions of dollars but work on reconstruction cannot start because of the Israeli blockade, [said the top UN humanitarian official in OPT](#), Maxwell Gaylard on 28 May.

Meanwhile the tunnels, though an important economic lifeline, are not much use when it comes to large quantities of heavy building materials, and are used for smaller items, like cash.

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