



Fact Sheet:

Gaza Fishermen: Life with Poverty, Harassment and Suffering

Palestinian fishermen in Gaza continue to be subject to unreasonable restrictions and attacks by the Israeli occupation forces (IOF) seriously curtailing their right to work. Israeli imposed restrictions prohibit Gaza fishermen from fishing more than three nautical miles off the coast except at the northern and southernmost borders. It is common for IOF soldiers to open fire on fishermen, pursue them in the water while they are fishing, and sabotage and confiscate their equipment, including their nets and boats.

Such acts constitute flagrant violations of Israel's legal obligations, as an occupying power, under international law. They violate the Fishermen's rights to life, work, safety and bodily integrity. They also infringe upon the right not to be tortured and prevent them from maintaining an adequate standard of living.

The Oslo Accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel granted Palestinian fishermen the right to fish within a zone of 20 nautical miles in the sea off the coast of Gaza. In 2002, the IOF reduced the fishing zone to 12 nautical miles and in October 2006 this was further reduced to six nautical miles. In January 2009, following Israel's illegal assault on the Gaza Strip (Operation Cast Lead), the fishing zone was cut again; this time to three nautical miles.¹ These restrictions have only further exacerbated the

hardships imposed upon Gaza's fishing industry, comprised of over 4,000 fishermen and their families.² It has substantially increased the poverty and unemployment rates among not only fishermen but also individuals and groups whose living is in some way connected to the fishing industry.



By having to fish in such shallow waters, Palestinian fishermen catch mainly small fish and those most likely to have ingested the contaminants pumped into the sea by failing or inadequate sewage treatment facilities. Worse still, Gazan fishermen forced across the Egyptian-Gaza marine boundaries for their fish are subjected to the whims of Israeli naval personnel on watch aboard Israeli navy ships that patrol the entire length of the Gaza coast.

Israeli restrictions and attacks on fishermen have shortened considerably the fishing seasons already fraught with problems stemming from a malfunctioning economy. According to statements by fishermen to the Mezan Centre for Human Rights, IOF attacks and harassment against them increase considerably during fishing season.

¹ See *"Between the Fence and a Hard Place"* Report pages 10 and 11 by the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_special_focus_2010_08_19_english.pdf

² According to Nizar Ayyash, the chairman of the Palestinian Fishermen's Syndicate, the number of fishermen who have license is 3700.



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This fact sheet summarizes the situational difficulties Gaza's fisherman face:

- Number of fishermen in Gaza: 4,400, of whom 3,700 are registered with the Fishermen's Syndicate.³ Fishing is the source of living for approximately 65,000 people.⁴
- There are 700 fishing boats in Gaza of which 500 are small-sized boats.⁵
- Poverty among fishermen in 2010 has been the highest of all the population groups in Gaza. It is estimated at 90%; up from 50% in 2008.⁶
- Between 1 May 2009 and 30 November 2010, the IOF:
 - Carried out 53 attacks against fishermen.
 - Killed two fishermen.
 - Injured seven fishermen.
 - Arrested 42 fishermen, including two children. Most of them were subject to ill treatment.
 - Confiscated 17 fishing boats and destroyed one during the same period.
- Despite having radios, Gazan Fishermen have not been warned by the IOF before they are attacked. IOF forces have disrupted the radio communications of Gaza's fishermen hundreds of times, a clear violation of international maritime law.

Rami Sami Omar Baker, 23, is a fisherman. His boat was attacked by the IOF several times. During the last attack, Rami's cousin, Mohammed Mansour Baker, 20, was killed. Rami testified to Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights:

³ According to the Fishermen's Syndicate.

⁴ Ibid, OCHA report, Note 1.

⁵ Ibid, Note 3.

⁶ See ICRC, 'Gaza closure: not another year!', at <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/update/palestine-update-140610.htm>.

"At around 6am on Friday 24 September 2010, my brothers Rani and Omar, my cousin Mohammed Mansour Baker and I left our house and went to the harbor west of Gaza City. We filled the *hasaka* (small fishing boat) with fuel. We checked the cords and the hooks. We put food and water on the *hasaka* and sailed. We headed beyond the harbor's gate out the sea. We sailed for about three kilometers to the west and stopped; we're always careful not to get close to the three nautical-mile virtual line. I switched off the *hasaka* engine and we took out our fishing hooks and started to fish.

"I saw an Israeli military boat patrolling the sea about 400 meters to the west of us. Thirty minutes after our arrival, my brother Rani asked me to sail to the north as we were afraid the Israeli boat would fire at us. I switched the *hasaka* engine on and sailed to the north. We moved for about four kilometers north, but were inside the permitted three-mile zone. When we stopped, we took our fishing hooks out and started to fish. I saw an Israeli military boat sailing from the north to the south. It was about 500 meters from us. Five minutes later, I heard gunfire and I saw bullets hitting the water around us. I switched the *hasaka* on quickly and sailed east towards the shore for about one kilometer. We stopped there and switched off the *hasaka*.

"I then saw an Israeli military boat sailing from the northwest side from where we were. It was moving to the south, directly towards us. When it was about 600 meters from us, it started shooting. While the Israeli boat was approaching I saw the impact of bullets hitting the water around us. I switched the *hasaka* on and tried to flee.

"We sailed south for about 100 meters with the Israeli boat still firing upon us. At that moment the Israeli boat was just 200 meters opposite us. I saw the number plate area, with the number 884 written in black at the front of the boat. I saw about eight soldiers in dark green military uniforms standing on the deck of the boat. The boat was silver with red rubber at the bottom.

"The shooting continued as I sailed slowly. I heard my cousin, Mohammed, saying 'I'm injured'. I looked at him and saw him pushing his hand against his abdomen. Blood was coming out from under his hand.

"We rushed back to the shore and to the Kamal Adwan Hospital. We carried Mohammed to the Emergency Room and laid him on a bed. I asked a doctor about Mohammed's condition and he told me Mohammed had died just as when we arrived at the hospital.

"I don't know why the IOF opened fire at us. We were fishing in an area that did not exceed the three nautical-miles zone. We were inside the fishing zone when the IOF attacked us."



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When the IOF arrest fishermen, they are usually subject to ill treatment; including beating and torture. When arresting fishermen, IOF compel them jump into the sea and swim towards the military boats, even in winter. Then the IOF order fishermen to take off their clothes and blinds fold and cuffs them with plastic straps. IOF detain fishermen in detention centers inside Israel. In many cases IOF confiscated fishing boats of the arrested fishermen for several months.