

[Living conditions in Gaza 'more and more wretched' over past decade, UN finds](#)

11 July 2017 – A decade after Hamas seized the Gaza Strip, the living conditions for two million people in the Palestinian enclave are deteriorating “further and faster” than the prediction made in 2012 that the enclave would become “unlivable” by 2020, a new United Nations report has found.

“Gaza has [continued on its trajectory of ‘de-development’](#), in many cases even faster than we had originally projected,” said Robert Piper, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities, in a press release on the new report, [“Gaza 10 years later.”](#)

In an intra-Palestinian conflict, Hamas took over Gaza in 2007. Israel has sought to isolate the group by restricting the movements of goods and people in and out of the strip. It was also administratively separated from the West Bank.

The report, compiled by the UN country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, took stock of some key indicators identified in an earlier 2012 UN report that predicted Gaza would become “unlivable” by 2020 unless underlying trends were reversed.

The report found that real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita had decreased and the provision of health services continued to decline in Gaza, where average Palestinians are trapped in a “sad reality” and their daily lives are “getting more and more wretched” .

The report called on Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and the international community to take action towards more sustainable development investments, reinvigoration of Gaza’s productive sectors, improvement of freedom of movement for both people and goods, as well as respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

“The alternative will be a Gaza that is more isolated and more desperate,” warned Mr. Piper. “The threat of a renewed, more devastating escalation will increase, and the prospects for intra-Palestinian reconciliation will dwindle and with them, the prospects for peace between Israel and Palestine.”

Thanks in large part to the scale of services provided by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)), Gaza has maintained high education standards, but average daily classroom time for students remains as low as four hours.

While an earlier projection that the coastal aquifer would become unusable by

2016 has been revised to the end of 2017, Gaza's only water source is predicted to be irreversibly-depleted by 2020, unless immediate remedial action is taken.

Access to materials, which are necessary to allow the Gazan economy, infrastructure and basic services to recover from the 2014 conflict, remains highly restricted.

Electricity supply this year the most visible deterioration in the living conditions in Gaza is as low as at 90 megawatts in recent days against the 450 megawatts needed. Ongoing humanitarian assistance, especially through UNRWA's services, are helping slow this descent, but the downward direction remains clear, said Mr. Piper.

Yesterday, the UN and non-governmental organizations conducted a field visit to Gaza with nine members of the diplomatic community from Australia, Canada, the European Union, Germany, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, to witness first-hand the cumulative impact of 10 years of closures and internal divide.

[Safe, effective family planning is key to 'empowering people, developing nations' – UN](#)

11 July 2017 – If the demand of women in developing countries who wanted access to safe and effective family planning was met, it would reduce an estimated 100,000 maternal death and avert 67 million unintended pregnancies, the United Nations population agency today said.

Some 214 million women in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy are [not using safe and effective family planning methods](#), for reasons ranging from lack of access to information or services to lack of support from their partners or communities, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) said on the occasion of [World Population Day](#), marked annually on 11 July.

This year's occurrence coincides with the [Family Planning Summit](#), the second meeting of the FP2020-Family Planning 2020-initiative, which aims to expand access to voluntary family planning to 120 million additional women by 2020.

Natalia Kanem, UNFPA Acting Executive Director, noted that better reproductive health care including voluntary family planning could bolster economies and contribute to sustainable development by empowering women to complete school and join the labour force. There, she would be likely to earn a higher income and increase her and her family's savings and investment.

In addition, for each additional dollar spent on contraceptive services above the current level, the cost of pregnancy-related care is reduced by \$2.30, according to UNFPA figures.

Investments in family planning help lead to prosperity for all, Ms. Kanem said, highlighting this year's theme for the 2017 Day, 'Family Planning: Empowering People, Developing Nations.'

She added that safe and effective family planning also contribute to the success of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, particularly the corresponding goals of ending poverty, ending hunger, promoting good health, and aiming for gender equality.

In her message, Ms. Kanem urged all Governments and stakeholders to help the UN agency achieve its goal of meeting unmet demand for family planning by 2030.

On behalf of UNFPA, she also called on the 179 member countries that endorsed the Programme of Action of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development ([ICPD](#)) to fulfill their commitments to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health, including voluntary family planning.

Not only is this a matter of protecting health and rights, but it is also a matter of investing in economic development as well as humanity's prosperity and progress, said Ms. Kanem.

[With Mosul reclaimed, accountability key to heal Iraq's 'ISIL wounds' – UN rights chief](#)

11 July 2017 – Although the retaking of Mosul city from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters by Iraqi Government forces marks a significant turning point in the conflict, Iraq must ensure that those who committed crimes must be held accountable, the United Nations human rights chief has said.

Dialogue between communities needs to begin now to try to halt the cycle of violence, and to promote accountability for the crimes against Iraqis, said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a news release from his Office ([OHCHR](#)).

The right to truth must prevail to ensure ISIL's crimes do not poison Iraqi society for generations, he stressed.

With Mosul now reclaimed, the extent of ISIL's violations and abuses has become even more evident. Information gathered by OHCHR strongly suggests that international crimes may have been perpetrated by ISIL during the three years that the group was in control not only of Mosul but of large areas of Iraq.

The right to truth must prevail to ensure ISIL's crimes do not poison Iraqi society for generations

ISIL's serious and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and gross abuses and violations of human rights, including the sexual slavery of women and girls, committed over these past three years have left deep scars on Iraqi society, Mr. Zeid said. This includes the abduction of 1,636 women and girls, and 1,733 men and boys from the Yezidi community who remain unaccounted for.

Even now, ISIL fighters can terrify and kill through bombings and abductions, and people are still being subjected to daily horrors and suffering in remaining ISIL strongholds, such as Tal Afar and Hawijah, Mr. Zeid warned.

He also noted that there have also been allegations of human rights violations and abuses by the Government security and associated forces, as well as by individuals taking revenge against captured ISIL fighters or people accused of supporting them.

Such punishments are an act of vengeance that works against national reconciliation and social cohesion, he warned.

The most fitting response... is to step up efforts to create an Iraq grounded in equality and the rule of law, he said.

The High Commissioner welcomed the fact that the judicial authorities have launched investigations into allegations of serious human rights violations committed by pro-government forces, and he called on the Government to make the findings public and ensure that perpetrators are brought before courts.

Given the large-scale nature of serious crimes, Iraq should also seek legal reforms to allow domestic courts to have jurisdiction over international crimes. To this end, the OHCHR and the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq ([UNAMI](#)) are supporting efforts to initiate a legal framework to establish a specialised court competent to try alleged perpetrators for international crimes.

I urge the Iraqi Government to prioritise advancing accountability and also repeat my call for the Government of Iraq to become a party to the Statute of the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)), he said.

Colombia: Security Council authorizes UN mission to monitor reintegration of FARC-EP

10 July 2017 – The Security Council today decided to establish a new United Nations political mission in Colombia that will succeed the current one and will shift from monitoring the disarmament of former combatants to verifying their political, economic and social reintegration.

According to a unanimously adopted resolution, the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia will, on 26 September 2017, replace the current mission, which is responsible for monitoring and verifying the [laying down of arms](#) by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) and the bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities between the Government and the FARC-EP. In November last year, the two sides signed a peace deal, ending a 50-year conflict.

The new political mission, to be headed by a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for an initial period of 12 months, is expected to verify implementation of several measures of the Final Agreement, including political, economic and social reincorporation of the FARC-EP; the implementation of personal and collective security guarantees; and comprehensive programmes on security and protection measures for communities and organisations in conflict-affected areas.

The resolution calls on the current UN Mission in Colombia to start “provisional work anticipated by the Verification Mission...within its current configuration and capacity” up until the time its mandate ends on 25 September, and requests the Secretary-General to present detailed recommendations to the Security Council regarding the size and operational aspects and mandate of the Verification Mission, within 45 days of this resolution’s adoption.

Read more on: [Colombia: With arms laid down, focus now on reintegration – UN envoy](#)

Jean Arnault, Head of the current [UN Mission in Colombia](#), issued a statement from Bogota welcoming the decision, including the Council’s request that the Mission “begin these verification tasks as of the present date, within available resources.”

He said the Mission [stands ready](#) to carry out these new tasks, and, as it has done for the ceasefire and laying down of arms, will: present an impartial balance on compliance with the commitments so far to the parties and to society; aim to propose solutions and combine forces for its implementation; seek to generate confidence and contribute to securing the support of the international community for the peace process in Colombia.

“To fulfill these commitments, the Mission is reassigning a part of its resources and personnel to local sites and regional offices, without undermining the execution of its tasks related to the ceasefire and laying down of weapons,” added Mr. Arnault.

[Low food prices foreseen in 2017-2026, but countries need to keep markets stable – UN-OECD report](#)

10 July 2017 – Noting projections of low prices for food commodities over the next decade on the back of abundant stocks of cereal and other staples, the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report have underlined the need for governments continue efforts to provide stability to world food markets.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#))-OECD Agricultural Outlook 2017-2026 projections, per capita demand for food staples may not rise (except in least developed countries), growth in demand for meat may slow, and additional calories and protein consumption could come mainly from vegetable oil, sugar and dairy products.

Furthermore, with estimates that by 2026, the average calorie availability could reach 2,450 kilo-calorie (kcal) per person per day in least developed countries and exceed 3,000 kcal in other developing countries, food insecurity and malnutrition would still remain a persistent global problem, requiring a coordinated international approach, noted the Outlook.

“[Food alone is not enough to eliminate undernourishment](#) and other forms of malnutrition,” said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, at the launch of the report.

“Access to the additional calories is extremely important. More challenging is the fight against malnutrition: Fighting malnutrition requires a diversified, safe and nutritious diet, ideally produced with a lower environmental footprint,” he added.

The report also points to potential higher crop yields. For instance, up to 90 per cent of the increase in maize production is expected from increased yields and just 10 per cent from expansion of area under cultivation. Similarly, yield gains are projected to account for 85 per cent of the increase in wheat production.

Additionally, growth in meat and dairy production is expected to come from both larger herds and higher output per-animal and it is foreseen that aquaculture would dominate growth in the fish sector and farmed fish

production will be the fastest-growing protein source among all commodities analysed in the Outlook.

Continued vigilance needed on part of governments

The Outlook, however, also calls on all countries to remain vigilant to shocks and instability.

“As we have seen in the past, unexpected events can easily take markets away from these central trends, so it is essential that governments continue joint efforts to provide stability to world food markets,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría at the launch.

“It is equally important that we look ahead as we seek to meet the fundamental challenge facing world food and agriculture: to ensure access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food for a growing world population, while at the same time using natural resources more sustainably and making an effective contribution to mitigating climate change,” he added.

The focus of this edition of the Agricultural Outlook is the south-east Asian region.

The region has seen strong economic growth and rapid development in agriculture and fishery sectors, which the report notes, has enabled it to significantly reduce undernourishment in recent years.

However, the growth of agriculture and fisheries, in particular in the export-oriented fish and palm oil sectors, has led to rising pressure on natural resources.

Improved resource management and increased research and development will, therefore, be needed to achieve sustainable productivity growth across the sectors and, given the region’s sensitivity to climate change, investments will be required to facilitate adaption, highlighted the report.