

# *Council of Europe Says Israel's Gaza Blockade 'Collective Punishment'*

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Brussels, January 27 (RHC)-- The leading European human rights organization, Council of Europe, has slammed both Israel and Egypt over the blockade against Gaza in a new report, branding the policy a form of “collective punishment” against Gazans. The report also accuses Israel of the unlawful killing of innocent Gazan residents along the border.

“The nine-year blockade of Gaza by both Israel and Egypt has subjected its population to collective punishment in contravention of international human rights and humanitarian law,” the organization's internal report states.

The report was made public after a vote by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in favor of adopting its findings and ascribes the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza to the blockade as well as three Israeli wars on Palestinian territory.

The organization expressed concerned over the “deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza,” where 75,000 people are still displaced and 43 percent of Gaza’s population is unemployed, “a figure which rises

to 60 percent among young people.” The report notes that 80 percent of Gaza’s nearly two million people relies on humanitarian aid, adding the enclave “is suffering from insufficient power supply and a lack of drinking water.” It also cites a terrifying prediction by the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, which suggests “Gaza is in danger of becoming unlivable by 2020.”

The last Israeli war on Gaza took place in summer 2014 and lasted seven weeks. Since then, however, “the situation has worsened significantly: over 2,200 people have died, of whom most were civilians, including 551 children; more than 11,000 people have been injured; over 12,620 houses have been totally destroyed and 6,455 severely damaged; and 28 percent of the population of Gaza has been displaced.”

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has also been heightened by Israel's targeting and “destruction of hospitals” and a “lack of drugs and medical equipment,” according to the report, which has resulted in a “significant increase in chronic diseases and cases of cancer and an urgent need for more surgeries.”

The blockade is also affecting access to education in Gaza, as “many schools have been destroyed or damaged and others are being used as emergency shelters for displaced persons.” The report calls for an end to the blockade, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the return to the negotiations table by Israeli and Palestinian leaders to realize the Palestinian dream of statehood.

Europe, unlike successive U.S. governments, has voiced public criticism of Israel and its occupation of Palestine, drawing anger from the right-wing government in Tel Aviv, though the bloc has largely failed to adopt concrete policies against Israeli expansionism.

Meanwhile, Israel, which receives US\$3.8 billion in military aid from the United States, is unlikely to listen to calls from the EU to end the Gaza blockade or the occupation in the West Bank.

The election of Donald Trump as U.S. president will be used by the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu to sabotage efforts for a Palestinian state and to further expand Tel Aviv's illegal settlements policy.

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