

# *Infant Mortality in Gaza Rises for First Time in Over 50 Years*

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Gaza City, August 27 (RHC)-- The United Nations aid agency for Palestinian refugees says the infant mortality rate in besieged Gaza Strip has dramatically risen for the first time in more than half a century. "The number of babies dying before the age of one has consistently gone down over the last decades in Gaza, from 127 per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 20.2 in 2008," the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said in a statement.

"At the last count, in 2013, it had risen to 22.4 per 1,000 live births," the Palestinian relief agency added. The statement further said the number of babies who die before reaching the age of four weeks in the blockaded sliver rose from 12 per 1,000 live births in 2008 to 20.3 in 2013.

It was also noted that the UNRWA conducts a survey of infant mortality across the region every five years. Akihiro Seita, the director of the UN agency's health program, described the sudden increase as unprecedented in the Middle East.

"When the 2013 results from Gaza were first uncovered, UNRWA was alarmed by the apparent increase. So we worked with external independent research groups to examine the data, to ensure the increase could be confirmed," he said. "That is why it took us so long to release these latest figures."

The UN director went on to blame the Israeli blockade of the territory as one of the main likely causes in the rise of child mortality in Gaza. "It is hard to know the exact causes behind the increase in both neonatal and infant mortality rates, but I fear it is part of a wider trend," he said, adding, "We are very concerned about the impact of the long-term blockade; on health facilities, supplies of medicines and bringing equipment in to Gaza."

Since 2007, the Tel Aviv regime has launched three wars on the impoverished Palestinian enclave which is home to more than 1.8 million people.

Israel launched its latest onslaught against Gaza in early July 2014. The offensive ended in late August 2014, with a truce that took effect after indirect negotiations between Hamas and Israeli officials in the Egyptian capital city of Cairo.

Over 2,200 Palestinians were killed and some 11,100 others wounded in Israel's 50-day military aggression.

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