



**Save the Children**  
UK

## FACT SHEET: GAZA BUFFER ZONE

October 2009

The so-called 'buffer zone' is a military no-go area that extends along the entire northern and eastern perimeter of Gaza, bordering with Israel, as well as the southern border with Egypt (known as the Philadelphi Corridor). Palestinian access is prohibited in the buffer zone, which extends anywhere from 300 metres to 2 kilometres at its widest point in North Gaza. Israeli military patrols enforce access restrictions by opening 'warning fire' at individuals who enter or come too close to the buffer zone. The lack of clarity around the delineation of the buffer zone has raised serious protection concerns for civilians who reside in close proximity to the border areas. The buffer zone encompasses an estimated 30 – 40% of Gaza's agricultural land and a significant number of water wells. Access restrictions and the ongoing threat to personal safety have had devastating consequences for families whose livelihoods depend on accessing land in the buffer zone for agricultural activities. These factors, coupled with the continuous threat of damage to houses as a result of frequent military actions in the buffer zone, have resulted in the displacement of families living near the border areas.

### Background

- The creation of a 50-metre-wide buffer zone in Gaza was agreed to as part of the security arrangements included in the Palestinian-Israeli Interim Agreement signed in 1995. [PLO Negotiations Affairs Department]
- Following the start of the second Intifada in September 2000, the area of the buffer zone was increased to 150 metres wide. [PARC]
- In May 2009, the Israeli military scattered thousands of leaflets warning residents to maintain a distance of at least 300 metres from the border or risk being fired upon. [OCHA]
- In reality, the buffer zone can extend up to 2 kilometres at its widest point in North Gaza. [UNDP/PAPP]
- A Save the Children UK research survey<sup>1</sup> indicates 42% of households living near the buffer zone own land. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]



A two-storey house in al Salam neighbourhood, North Gaza, destroyed during the Israeli military offensive in Dec 2008 - Jan 2009. PHOTO/Osama Damo

- 25% of households living near the buffer zone relied on agriculture or animal husbandry as their primary source of income. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

<sup>1</sup> In June 2009, Save the Children UK conducted a research survey through Near East Consulting (NEC) of 472 households located in areas at high risk of forced displacement in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), including the West Bank and Gaza but excluding East Jerusalem. The survey sample included 240 households in the Gaza buffer zone and 232 households in the West Bank. The survey also sampled more than 1,000 households among the general population in the OPT for comparative purposes. Publication of the research findings is forthcoming.

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Humanitarian Aid

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Complete destruction of a house in Izbet Abed Rabbu, North Gaza, an area particularly hard hit during the military offensive in Dec. 2008 - Jan. 2009. PHOTO/Osama Damo

## Impact

According to a recent Save the Children UK research study, up to 70% of surveyed households<sup>2</sup> living near the buffer zone have been either temporarily or permanently displaced at least once since the year 2000, primarily as a result of house demolitions and heightened concerns for personal safety and security. In addition, 50% of families have lost their source of income or livelihood during the same period. As a result, 42% of those families have changed their residence. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

## Forced Displacement:

- 57% of surveyed households changed residence temporarily and 14% permanently since the year 2000.<sup>3</sup> [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- The leading cause of displacement in the buffer zone was house demolition (48%) and concerns for personal security (28%). [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- Between 2000 and 2004, in the southern Gaza town of Rafah, more than 10% of the population (16,000 Palestinians) was displaced by house demolitions in the creation of the Philadelphi Corridor (buffer zone along the southern border between Gaza and Egypt). Most of the affected families are refugees who were displaced for a second or third time. [HRW]
- Since 2000, 50% of respondents have lost their sources of livelihood. Almost half of respondents considered changing their place of residence as a result while 42% did change their residence. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

- The Israeli military offensive in January 2009 resulted in the destruction of 3,540 homes and major damage to an additional 2,870 homes. The ongoing threat of Israeli military incursions in the border areas places further Palestinian families at risk of displacement. [OCHA]
- Save the Children UK's research<sup>3</sup> on the impact of house demolitions on families and children revealed that 28% of children surveyed in Gaza had witnessed the demolition of a friend's home and nearly 19% had witnessed the demolition of their own home, resulting in psychological distress. Children who have been forcibly displaced suffer from reduced academic performance and a variety of other difficulties associated with diminished social and economic conditions for families. [Save the Children UK, Broken Homes]

## Loss of Livelihoods:

- During the Israeli military offensive in January 2009, 17% of cultivated land was completely destroyed. [UNEP]
- Approximately 30 - 40% of Gaza's total agricultural land is located in the buffer zone [UNDP/PAPP]
- 55% of surveyed families cannot access the land that they own as a result of the buffer zone policy. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 88% of households in the buffer zone areas faced difficulty marketing their agricultural products or could not market them at all. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 50% of respondents in the buffer zone area reported losing their sources of livelihoods since 2000 in comparison with 33% for the general population in Gaza. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 73% of surveyed households near the buffer zone live below the poverty line<sup>5</sup> compared with 42% among the general population in Gaza. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

## Personal Security:

- Since the end of the Israeli military offensive in January 2009, the UN estimates five civilians have been killed and 20 injured in incidents involving Israeli gun and tank fire in areas near the buffer zone. Three of the fatalities and at least four of the injured were children. [OCHA]

**“When I saw the house I was shocked, I kept crying.” - Ghaida' (12), Beit Lahiya**

<sup>2</sup> The 240 households are located in the following buffer zone areas: North Gaza: Beit Hanoun, east of Beit Lahiya, Al Saifa, Al 'Atatra, Eastern cemetery area; Gaza city: east of Ash Shujaiyeh, Karni Crossing area, Nahal Oz Crossing area; Middle area: Johr al Deek area, east of Bureij refugee camp, east of Maghazi refugee camp; Khan Younis: Abasan al Kabira, Abasan al Saghira, Khoza'a; Rafah: Shoka, Gaza airport surroundings, Philadelphi Corridor.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of the survey, 22% of respondents were living in a partially destroyed house and 12% in a tent over the rubble of their damaged house.

<sup>4</sup> Save the Children UK, Broken Homes: Addressing the Impact of House Demolitions on Palestinian Children & Families, June 2009.

Available at: [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_8431.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_8431.htm)

<sup>5</sup> The poverty line is set by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) at 2,200 NIS (583 USD) per month for a family of two adults and four children.



Children engage in a recreational activity in the al Salam tent camp for internally displaced persons as part of Save the Children's emergency response in Gaza. PHOTO/Osama Damo

- Only 9% of respondents said they felt secure in their area of residence compared with 55% of respondents among the general population in Gaza. The main reason cited was military operations and policies and practices of the occupation. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 36% of respondents said they considered changing their current residence, citing greater personal security as one of the main reasons. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- More than one quarter changed their residence due to feelings of personal insecurity in their previous residence. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

### Access to Community Services:

- In a survey of households in the Gaza buffer zone, 49% responded that they had difficulty accessing education, stating it was 'somewhat available' or 'not available.' [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 65% of the surveyed population had difficulty accessing health services, including 11% of respondents who stated that health services were 'not available.' [Save the Children UK / NEC research]



Sixth grade students at the Ghassan Kanafani school in Rafah, South Gaza sit in a partially destroyed classroom. This school is one of the more than 280 schools damaged during the Gaza war in Dec. 2008 - Jan. 2009. PHOTO/Osama Damo

- 48% of respondents stated that water was 'somewhat available' with 15% stating water was 'not available.' In contrast, these figures were 19% and 3% respectively among the general population in Gaza. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 26% of respondents reported access to sanitation services, compared to 60% for the rest of Gaza. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

### Response

With funding from the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission (ECHO), Save the Children UK and its partner MA'AN Development Center has focused its work in six vulnerable communities<sup>6</sup> in Beit Lahiya (North Gaza) in order to prevent displacement, protect communities threatened by displacement and provide emergency responses to families that have been displaced in an effort to help them return to their communities.



The American International School in Beit Lahiya, North Gaza is one of 18 schools completely destroyed during the Israeli military offensive in Dec. 2008 - Jan. 2009. PHOTO/Hiba Qaraman

To date, Save the Children UK has worked to rehabilitate agricultural lands, benefitting 100 families, in addition to rehabilitation of access roads, which benefits the entire community of 20,000 individuals.

In addition, Save the Children UK has strengthened the capacity of local partners and communities to prevent and respond to displacement events with particular emphasis on the rights and needs of children. Save the Children UK has also designed a displacement assessment tool that considers and identifies the specific needs of children who have been displaced. The UN agency responsible for humanitarian coordination (UN OCHA) has approved and integrated this tool as part of its overall response planning for displacement events. Save the Children UK continues to work with coalitions of UN and international aid agencies to develop coordinated inter-agency response plans across the different sectors including child protection, housing, health and livelihoods support to provide immediate and sustained assistance to families who have been displaced.

<sup>6</sup> Includes Al Saifa, Al 'Atatra, Salateen, al-A'amal, al-Shaima'a, and Fad'ous.

## Case Study: Gaza buffer zone

During the Israeli military offensive in January 2009, the Ekhdair family lost their home in the al-'Atatra neighborhood of Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza. This predominantly agricultural area is adjacent to the buffer zone leaving it particularly vulnerable during Israeli military incursions. In the early days of the Israeli ground offensive, Ahmad Ekhdair sought shelter for his wife and six children in an UNRWA school to protect them from the heavy Israeli tank and artillery fire in their neighbourhood. When Ahmad returned to his home 13 days later, he found that it had been completely destroyed.

The Ekhdair family owns 1,700 square metres of land that is located 800 metres from the border with Israel. Since May 2009, when the Israel military restricted Palestinians from approaching within 300 metres from the border, Ahmad has been unable to access his agricultural land out of fear for his personal safety. Israel's restrictive buffer zone policy has for the Ekhdair family resulted in a loss of income source and leaves them vulnerable during military actions near the border areas.

Ahmad spoke with Save the Children UK about losing his home, sources of income and livelihood:

*The taxi dropped me approximately 3.5 to 4 km away from my house because the road was completely destroyed. As I walked, I saw destroyed houses and with every step, I grew more afraid that my home had met the same fate. I finally reached our home, and I saw years of work, resources and dreams in ruins. I expected that my home could be destroyed, but I did not believe it until I saw it with my own eyes. In addition to (losing) our two-storey home, my car was buried under the rubble, as well as a computer store that I had as an additional income source for the family.*

*Two days later, I brought my family to see what happened. My children asked me painful questions: 'Why did this happen to*



Ahmad stands in front of his destroyed two-storey house with three of his children. PHOTO/Osama Damo



Ghaida', 12 years old, holds her 2-year-old sister Raghad while standing in front of her demolished home in Beit Lahiya, North Gaza. PHOTO/Osama Damo

*our home?' My daughters asked me about their dolls, and my middle daughter asked about the poster she hung on the wall of her room, but I had no answers.*

*Now, we are staying in a rented apartment, which costs me 200 US dollars per month. The apartment is very small in comparison to my home, but what can I do, this is the best option I have.*

*I am now almost without income, as my agricultural land is close to the buffer zone, and was bulldozed several times by the Israeli military. Last November and December, I planted carrots on my land. During the offensive however, the Israeli military bulldozed half of my land, destroying a water well and fertilizer stores resulting in a loss of more than \$28,000 US. Now, because of the buffer zone, I cannot harvest the carrots I planted. The buffer zone complicated my catastrophe. Now I do not have a home, and I cannot even build another house on the land I own because it is in the buffer zone, so I am renting a house that is away from my land, and I cannot even plant my land to earn income! What a combination!*

*12-year-old Ghaida', the eldest of her siblings, completed the 6th grade in June 2009 with the highest overall marks in her school. She describes how she felt when she saw her destroyed home and conditions in their new home:*

*I came two days after my dad first came to see the house. I learned that our house was destroyed when I was in the UNRWA shelter. When I saw the house I was shocked, I kept crying.*

*I felt so sad for my bedroom; I used to sleep with one of my sisters on nice comfortable beds and we had our tidy dresser. Now in the rented apartment, I'm sleeping with my two sisters and three brothers in one room on uncomfortable mattresses, and all of our clothes are on wooden shelves instead of a dresser.*



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**Addendum: Full citations for Save the Children UK Fact Sheet  
Gaza Buffer Zone  
October 2009**

**Background**

1. 1995 Palestinian-Israeli Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, PLO Negotiations Affairs Department.

Available at: [http://www.nad-plo.org/listing.php?view=nego\\_nego\\_SiAgreem\\_si-agr](http://www.nad-plo.org/listing.php?view=nego_nego_SiAgreem_si-agr)

2. Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC). See <http://www.pal-arc.org/index.html>

3. OCHA Special Focus, Locked In: The Humanitarian Impact of Two Years of Blockade on the Gaza Strip, August 2009.

Available at: [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/Ocha\\_opt\\_Gaza\\_impact\\_of\\_two\\_years\\_of\\_blockade\\_August\\_2009\\_english.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/Ocha_opt_Gaza_impact_of_two_years_of_blockade_August_2009_english.pdf)

4. UNDP/PAPP, Agriculture Sector Impact Assessment Report, March 2009.

Available at: [http://www.ochaopt.org/gazacrisis/infopool/opt\\_agric\\_cluster\\_Agriculture\\_Sector\\_Report\\_Mar\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/gazacrisis/infopool/opt_agric_cluster_Agriculture_Sector_Report_Mar_2009.pdf)

5. Save the Children UK, Life on the Edge: The struggle to survive and the impact of forced displacement in high risk areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, Summary of Research Findings, October 2009.

Available at [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_9515.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_9515.htm)

6. See note #5 in this section.

**Impact**

1. Save the Children UK, Life on the Edge: The struggle to survive and the impact of forced displacement in high risk areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, Summary of Research Findings, October 2009.

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**Forced Displacement**

1. Save the Children UK, Life on the Edge: The struggle to survive and the impact of forced displacement in high risk areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, Summary of Research Findings, October 2009.

Available at [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_9515.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_9515.htm)

2. See note #1 in this section.

3. Human Rights Watch, Razing Rafah: Mass Home Demolitions in the Gaza Strip, October 2004.

Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/rafah1004/rafah1004text.pdf>

4. See note #1 and #2 in this section.

5. OCHA Special Focus, Locked In: The Humanitarian Impact of Two Years of Blockade on the Gaza Strip, August 2009.

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6. Save the Children UK, Broken Homes: Addressing the impact of house demolitions on Palestinian children and families, June 2009.

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### **Loss of Livelihoods**

1. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Environmental Assessment of the Gaza Strip Following the Escalation of Hostilities in December 2008 – January 2009, September 2009.

Available at [http://www.unep.org/PDF/dmb/UNEP\\_Gaza\\_EA.pdf](http://www.unep.org/PDF/dmb/UNEP_Gaza_EA.pdf)

2. UNDP/PAPP, Agriculture Sector Impact Assessment Report, March 2009.

Available at: [http://www.ochaopt.org/gazacrisis/infopool/opt\\_agric\\_cluster\\_Agriculture\\_Sector\\_Report\\_Mar\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/gazacrisis/infopool/opt_agric_cluster_Agriculture_Sector_Report_Mar_2009.pdf)

3. Save the Children UK, Life on the Edge: The struggle to survive and the impact of forced displacement in high risk areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, Summary of Research Findings, October 2009.

Available at [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_9515.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_9515.htm)

4. See note #3 in this section.

5. See note #3 and #4 in this section.

6. See note #3 - #5 in this section.

### **Personal Security**

1. Data verified by UN OCHA. See <http://www.ochaopt.org/> for more information.

2. Save the Children UK, Life on the Edge: The struggle to survive and the impact of forced displacement in high risk areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, Summary of Research Findings, October 2009.

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3. See note #2 in this section.

4. See note #2 and #3 in this section.

### **Access to Community Services**

1. Save the Children UK, Life on the Edge: The struggle to survive and the impact of forced displacement in high risk areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, Summary of Research Findings, October 2009.

Available at [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_9515.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_9515.htm)

2. See note #1 in this section.

3. See note #1 and #2 in this section.

4. See note #1 - #3 in this section.