



# Palestinians face growing food crisis



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RAMALLAH, 30 January 2013 (IRIN) – Fluctuating prices, poverty and border restrictions mean growing numbers of Palestinians are facing food insecurity this year – one of the key priorities in the humanitarian community’s annual appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

This year’s is for US\$401.6 million, a slight decrease on last year’s \$416.7 million, only 68 percent of which was financed.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which helped coordinate the CAP, estimates that 1.3 million Palestinians do not have enough food.

The latest figures show the number of households without sufficient access to food has risen by 7 percent since 2011, a trend which – if continued – would have left an estimated 41 percent of Palestinians without the necessary resources to get sufficient, safe and nutritious food at the end of 2012.

“Palestinian wages have not kept pace with inflation... Many poor Palestinians have exhausted their coping mechanisms (taking on loans, cutting back consumption) and are now much more vulnerable to small price increases than they were,” said a recent World Food Programme .

According to the CAP, the situation is further worsened by restrictions on the movement of people and goods, which have resulted in higher prices of basic food commodities and reduced the purchasing power of many vulnerable families.

## Restricted access

Humanitarian agencies hope to carry out 157 projects in 2013 – 58 implemented by UN agencies, 82 by international NGOs and 17 by local NGOs.

But doing this type of work is becoming increasingly difficult, according to aid workers who say getting access to vulnerable communities became tougher in 2012 because of lengthy Israeli planning procedures and restrictions on mobility and authorization.

In 2011, UN reconstruction projects had to wait an average of eight months for approval from Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in Territories (COGAT – a unit in the Israeli Ministry of Defense that engages in coordinating civilian issues between the government of Israel, the Israel Defense Forces, international organizations, diplomats, and the Palestinian Authority). By the end of 2012, the average waiting time more than doubled to 20 months, according to the CAP report.

In addition, aid workers lost some 1,959 working hours due to 535 access incidents while attempting to pass Israeli checkpoints in 2012, Maria José Torres, OCHA deputy head of office in OPT, told IRIN.

This trend is expected to worsen once the Israeli Crossing Points Administration (CPA), a civilian department linked to the Defence Ministry, begins to operate all checkpoints.

The CPA requires regular searches of UN vehicles, unless the driver is an international staff member, and national UN staff are subject to body searches and required to walk through the crossings the CPA operates. It remains unclear, however, when exactly CPA will take over.

## Impact of recent political events

The recent escalation in violence in Gaza at the end of 2012 only increased humanitarian needs and added an extra \$26 million to the CAP as communities try to rebuild : this year's appeal has a tighter focus on strictly humanitarian projects that would immediately tackle suffering, said Torres.

The indebted Palestinian government in the West Bank is also struggling to provide basic services due to a shortfall in revenue provoked by declining donor support, and also the holding back of tax revenues by Israel, which objected to the State of Palestine being given the status of a non-member observer state at the UN.

## A man-made crisis?

These incidents highlight the close correlation between politics and humanitarian needs in OPT.

At the CAP presentation in Ramallah, several speakers on the podium criticized Israel for provoking what they said was a man-made humanitarian crisis in OPT.

“The UN has repeatedly called upon the State of Israel to meet its obligations as an occupying power, including halting demolitions and addressing humanitarian needs. Unfortunately, these have not been met,” said the resident humanitarian coordinator in OPT, James W. Rawley.

“The international community tries to fill the gap, and this humanitarian action is essential. But it is no substitute to political action.”

Many of the Palestinian officials and humanitarian staff present told IRIN they had become frustrated by the man-made and largely unchanged humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

“After 20 years of a useless peace process with Israel, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. The status quo is not working,” said Estephan Salameh, an adviser to the Palestinian Ministry of Planning in the West Bank.

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