

BACKGROUND PAPER



ARAB LEAGUE: ALLEVIATING THE BLOCKADE ON THE GAZA STRIP



1. Welcome Letter

Distinguished Delegates,

Welcome to the Arab League Council of GrunnMUN 2022. We are delighted to announce that, during this year's conference, the topic to address will be the blockade on the Gaza Strip.

The Arab League is a regional organisation in the Arab world for strengthening the ties between Arab States. The States unite their efforts to promote their welfare and realise their aspirations. The League allows its Member States to coordinate their political activities, safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and emphasise the interests of the Arab countries.¹ The organisation was formed in Cairo on March 22, 1945.²

GrunnMUN 2022 will be a day in which you will be put in the shoes of a State to passionately express and defend its views. Your task is to be a convincing delegate, offering proposals to a resolution on the topic at hand. Whether you are just starting with your MUN journey or whether this is your 100th conference, you will find that reaching a compromise will not be easy. GrunnMUN will be a day full of new experiences and lessons. You will not only practise the way you express yourself, but also broaden your horizon on the topic. To make GrunnMUN the best experience, make sure you read this background paper carefully, and research your country's position on the issue.

As your chairs, we would like to briefly introduce ourselves. I, Sophie, am a 3rd year student of International Relations at the University of Groningen. International politics is therefore something I am quite invested in. As a result, this Council and its topic are right up my alley. I, Catherine, am a 2nd year International and European Law student at the University of Groningen. My interest in studying law originates from having done MUN for many years, and as such, I believe that having a legal background makes this topic the perfect one for me.

We hope that you are as excited about GrunnMUN 2022 as we are. We are very much looking forward to meeting you all; we are certain that it will be a great experience for everyone!

Sincerely,

Catherine and Sophie

¹ "Pact of the League of Arab States, 22 March 1945". *The Avalon Project, Yale Law School*, 1998. Archived from the original on 25 July 2008.

² "Arab League". *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arab-League>.

2. Introduction

During GrunnMUN 2022, we will discuss the effects of the blockade of the Gaza strip and measures to alleviate them. The region is subject to an unlawful blockade on land, air, and sea that completed its 14th year in the month of June 2021. The blockade has an immense impact on the people living in Gaza. Furthermore, the economy of the region has deteriorated significantly because of the blockade, causing enormous destruction and cutting people off from the rest of the world. It has induced even more poverty in the region, and many Palestinians find themselves unemployed. Despite assistance offered to Palestinians in Gaza, a big part does not have enough food and 80% of Gaza's population relies on international humanitarian aid in order to survive.³ Due to the blockade imposed by Israel, the mobility of people, goods and services is severely restricted. As a result, it is essential to discuss the rights of Palestinians in Gaza and a potential dismantling of the blockade.

As this blockade has been going on for a long time in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has lasted for even longer, it is a difficult issue to discuss. There are a few issues that the two sides cannot seem to agree on, mostly regarding who has the right to live where. Although peace talks have been going on for over 25 years, there is still no solution for the conflict, and it does not look like there will be one in the near future.⁴

³ "Timeline: The Humanitarian Impact of the Gaza Blockade". *Oxfam International*, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/timeline-humanitarian-impact-gaza-blockade>.

⁴ "Israel-Gaza violence: The conflict explained". *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396>.

3. Problem Specification

The Israeli-Palestinian dispute is one of the longest-lasting and most controversial topics in modern history. It is primarily a conflict between two self-determination movements vying for the same territory; a Jewish Zionist aspiration versus a Palestinian nationalist cause with the two sides and their sympathisers squabbling over practically every statistic and historical detail.

Despite the fact that the Jewish and Arab populations have both claimed the region for thousands of years, the current political conflict began in the early twentieth century. Jewish people escaping persecution in Europe sought to build a separate State in what was then Arab and Muslim-majority territory in the Ottoman, and subsequently British Empires.⁵ The Arabs however, objected, believing that the area belonged to them. An early solution to divide the region among the various groups fell through, which led to Israel and the neighbouring Arab nations fighting multiple wars over the disputed territory. As such, today's borders are shaped by the outcomes of two of these significant battles, one fought in 1948 and another in 1967.⁶

The 1967 war is especially relevant to the current developments of the dispute, as it granted Israel control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The West Bank is currently occupied by Israel and is ostensibly managed by the Palestinian Authority.⁷ This comes in the form of Israeli military imposing restrictions on any and all Palestinian movements and activities, as well as Israeli settlers creating ever-expanding settlements in the West Bank, thus denying the Palestinians access to the land entirely. The Gaza Strip, on the other hand, is governed by Hamas, an Islamist fundamentalist organisation, although it is under an Israeli blockade.⁸

For more than 14 years, the people of Gaza have been subjected to an Israeli-imposed siege that severely restricts all sorts of movement, trade, and day-to-day living. The blockade effectively prevents nearly all exports and severely restricts imports into Gaza, and shuts the Gaza border for people to either leave or outsiders to enter.⁹ The blockade has had disastrous effects. Today, Gazans do not have reliable access to clean water, power, and a range of other basic necessities.¹⁰ Construction is sparse, hospitals are under-funded, educational institutions have degraded, and the economy is in shambles.¹¹ The United

⁵ "History of the Question of Palestine - Question of Palestine". *Question Of Palestine*, 2022, <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>.

⁶ "Arab-Israeli Wars | History, Conflict, Causes, Summary, & Facts". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Israeli-wars>.

⁷ Haddad, Mohammed. "Mapping Israeli Occupation". *Aljazeera.Com*, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/18/mapping-israeli-occupation-gaza-palestine>.

⁸ "What Is Hamas?". *Council On Foreign Relations*, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-hamas>.

⁹ "Issues". *Gaza Unlocked*, 2022, <https://www.gazaunlocked.org/issues>.

¹⁰ "Issues". *Gaza Unlocked*, 2022, <https://www.gazaunlocked.org/issues>.

¹¹ "Issues". *Gaza Unlocked*, 2022, <https://www.gazaunlocked.org/issues>.

Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross have both declared the blockade to be an illegal form of collective punishment against the Gazan people.¹²

¹² Staff, Reuters. *U.N. Experts Say Israel's Blockade of Gaza Illegal*. 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-gaza-rights-idUSTRE78C59R20110913>.

4. Issue 1: Israel's Blockade on Gaza - A Question of Legality

Years after the foundation of the State of Israel, UN Member States are still grappling with the repercussions of the emergence of a Jewish nation in a region traditionally populated by Arab nationals. The right of the Palestinian population to self-determination is a fundamental tenet of international law, as well as a fundamental demand of the significant majority of UN Member States. For Arab League members, Israeli dominance over the Palestinian people is a fundamental violation of international values and a hindrance to regional stability. In their view, regional stability cannot be achieved until a completely independent Palestinian State is established. In UN resolution discussions, this stance bears the most weight.

4.1. Background: The Israeli Blockade

The Gaza Strip is situated between the borders of Israel and Egypt, having direct access to the Mediterranean Sea.¹³ Its international legal position was revised in 2005, following the departure of the Israeli army from Gaza as part of Israel's withdrawal plan. Nonetheless, Hamas's seizure of the Gaza Strip in 2007 exacerbated the situation, compelling Israel to establish a land blockade on the enclave, swiftly followed by a naval blockade in 2009.¹⁴ Since then, the Strip's already dire living conditions have deteriorated, and the region's dependency on international aid has grown. Several factors point to this, including a deterioration in drinking water quality, a rise in unemployment, and a significant exodus from the region.

*Israel's blockade means deferred dreams, crushed hopes and no way to plan your future - the IMEU.*¹⁵

4.2. History: The Gaza Strip

On May 14, 1948, Israel was proclaimed a State, thus establishing the first Jewish country in over 2,000 years.¹⁶ However, just a day later, Israel launched an attack on five Arab countries: Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon. At the end of this battle, which is referred to as the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Egypt was delegated powers over the Gaza Strip. Moreover, as a result of the battle, it is reported that around 700,000 Palestinians left or were forced to flee their homes in the newly formed Jewish Israel.¹⁷ Thousands of Palestinian refugees had resettled in Gaza, essentially caught between two countries that

¹³ "Gaza Strip | Definition, History, Facts, & Map". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gaza-Strip>.

¹⁴ *Idf.il*, 2022, <https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/hamas/hamas/short-history-of-hamas-in-gaza/>.

¹⁵ "IMEU Video: How Israel's Blockade Turned Gaza into An Open-Air Prison | IMEU". *Imeu.Org*, 2022, <https://imeu.org/article/imeu-video-how-israels-blockade-turned-gaza-into-an-open-air-prison>.

¹⁶ "State Of Israel Proclaimed". *HISTORY*, 2022, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/state-of-israel-proclaimed#:~:text=On%20May%2014%2C%201948%2C%20in,Gurion%20became%20Israel's%20first%20pr,emier>.

¹⁷ "The Palestinian Exodus Of 1948". *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2536718>.

would not give them easy access. Egypt ruled Gaza until the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel conquered the territory, along with numerous other significant territories. The Oslo Peace Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995 by Palestinian and Israeli leaders, mediated Israel's disengagement from Gaza and other vital territories, which occurred only in 2005. Nonetheless, since 2007, following Hamas' victory in the internationally-monitored elections for the Palestinian Authority Parliament, Israel enforced a severe blockade and a naval siege on Gaza in an act of public retribution.

4.3. Recent Developments

In May 2021, the Israeli military bombarded Gaza for eleven days, killing at least 242 Palestinians, including 63 children.¹⁸ A ceasefire has been established, however the result for Palestinians in Gaza has been loss of life, destruction of homes, and immense despair. While the bombing has stopped, the anguish caused by these attacks, as well as the siege on Gaza and Israel's occupation, will remain. During the attack, Israel destroyed many industries as well as a number of enterprises. This comes on top of a 14-year siege that has wreaked havoc on the Palestinian economy. Even before the strikes, the unemployment rate in Gaza was over 50%, and more than 80% of the population was reliant on international aid to survive.¹⁹

4.3.1. Different Positions in the Dispute

Israel has been active in the West Bank for over 50 years. The Israeli side refers to it as "civil administration," whereas the rest of the world refers to it as an occupation. Several attempts have been made during the last 25 years to end the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians on the premise of two States for two nations. Nonetheless, peace remains difficult, and the occupation continues. The Israelis, Palestinians, the European Union, UNRWA, the Jewish Israel lobby in the United Nations, and Arab League Member States have been the most prominent actors in this dispute.²⁰

4.5. International Approaches That Have Already Been Undertaken

The occupied Palestinian territories comprise the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, which have been occupied by Israel since June 1967. Together with Israel, these territories comprise the former British Mandate for Palestine, which was supposed to be split into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution of 1947. Since Israel's annexation of the territories, the international community has repeatedly stressed the need of enforcing

¹⁸ Haddad, Mohammed. "Mapping Israeli Occupation". *Aljazeera.Com*, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/18/mapping-israeli-occupation-gaza-palestine>.

¹⁹ "Gaza Strip | UNRWA". *UNRWA*, 2022, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>.

²⁰ "Actors In the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". *Ssoar.Info*, 2022, https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/58087/ssoar-2018-lintl-Actors_in_the_Israeli-Palestinian_conflict.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2018-lintl-Actors_in_the_Israeli-Palestinian_conflict.pdf.

Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call on Israel to completely withdraw from the seized territories. Since 1993, peace treaties between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and the Israeli government have attempted to resolve decades of hostility by pursuing a two-State solution. However, the escalation of the conflict, the siege of Gaza since June 2007, and the proliferation of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian lands have disrupted the peace process and imperilled the establishment of a Palestinian State. Nonetheless, the recognition of Palestinian statehood has long been backed by the United Nations General Assembly, and Security Council Resolution 1397 in 2002 reinforced the international community's goal of two nations existing within safe and defined territories.

4.6. Conclusion

As aforementioned, Gaza, along with the West Bank and East Jerusalem, has been under Israeli military control since 1967. Despite the fact that Israel decided to withdraw its forces from the small but highly populated coastal strip in 2005, Israel retains control over virtually all entry and exit points, as well as Gaza's airspace and shoreline. As a result, Israel exerts "effective control" over Gaza, meeting the legal definition of an occupying power.²¹ This raises the question of whether the blockade is lawful, and as such, a resolution would need to address these concerns in order to be as effective as possible.

²¹ "Chapter 3: Israeli Settlements and International Law". *Amnesty International*, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/01/chapter-3-israeli-settlements-and-international-law/>.

5. Issue 2: A Closer Look at the Human Rights Violations in Gaza

In 2020, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had completed its 72nd year. As such, Palestinians mourned 72 years of displacement and injustice as Israel embraced its anniversary. Oppression and injustice are the result of systematic structural inequities, which are at the root of this conflict. These structural factors have been employed to consolidate control and authority in the hands of a single ethnic group: Israel's Jewish majority. Palestinians in Gaza are frequently referred to as prisoners in the world's greatest prison, with borders completely controlled by Egypt's and Israel's blockades, including a naval blockade of its coastline.²² The fundamental goal of Gazans and their sympathisers, prominently in the Arab world, is to abolish the blockade entirely.

5.1. Background: Restrictions Imposed on the People of Gaza

Due to Israel's siege, Palestinians' mobility in and out of Gaza, as well as their access to essential utilities, housing, education, job, health, and an appropriate quality of living, remains severely restricted.²³ Israel began restricting Gazans' freedom of movement, as well as imports and exports to and from Gaza, in the 1990s. Following Hamas' takeover, those measures were intensified. Numerous remarks made by Israeli officials have made it known that the siege was being implemented to put pressure on the illegitimate authority in reaction to activities perpetrated by the various organisations in Gaza.²⁴ The blockade and accompanying limitations, on the contrary, are focused at and invoke hardship on the civilian population, thereby punishing them for activities they did not undertake.

5.1.1. Examples of Human Rights Violations - Gaza Strip

Israel's illegal occupation of Gaza and the West Bank is represented by a number of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law: war crimes, forced relocation, oppressive detention, the siege of Gaza and other unwarranted restrictions on mobility, and the creation of settlements, as well as ancillary prejudicial reforms that burden Palestinians.

(a) Unlawful Killings

During the 2008-09, 2012, and 2014 Gaza uprisings, the Israeli military martyred well over 2,000 Palestinian civilians.²⁵ Many of these killings violate international humanitarian law by

²² "Life In The World's Largest Open-Air Prison". *Warchildholland.Org*, 2022, [https://www.warchildholland.org/stories-of-children/rami/#:~:text=Rami%20\(10\)%20is%20Growing%20Up,mercy%20of%20life%20under%20blockade](https://www.warchildholland.org/stories-of-children/rami/#:~:text=Rami%20(10)%20is%20Growing%20Up,mercy%20of%20life%20under%20blockade).

²³ "Issues". *Gaza Unlocked*, 2022, <https://www.gazaunlocked.org/issues>.

²⁴ "A Threshold Crossed". *Human Rights Watch*, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>.

²⁵ "Gaza Crisis: Toll Of Operations In Gaza". *BBC News*, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28439404>.

failing to take all reasonable attempts to safeguard civilian lives. Some even constitute war crimes, such as the targeting of prominent civilian residences.

(b) Forced Displacement

Vast areas of Palestinian land have been confiscated by Israeli authorities in order to be replaced by illegal Israeli settlements. Discriminatory barriers, such as making it exceedingly difficult for Palestinians to get building permits, have ultimately led Palestinians to leave their houses at the threat of having their homes be destroyed.²⁶

(c) The Blockade

In recent years, Israel has tightened limitations on the mobility to and from the Gaza Strip in ways that go well beyond any credible Israeli safety requirement. These limits affect practically every aspect of everyday life, isolating families, minimising access to medical care, educational and economic prospects, and increasing unemployment and poverty.²⁷

5.2. Recent Developments

On May 10, 2021, the Israeli army launched a massive armed strike on the Gaza Strip that lasted 11 days and entailed hundreds of bombings and airstrikes on the small, restricted area of 2 million people. The brutal attacks killed 254 Palestinians, including children and women, demolished thousands of homes and business establishments, severely damaging infrastructure.

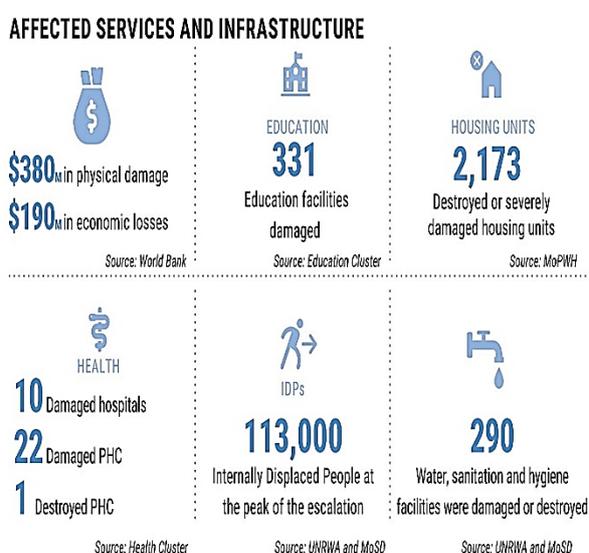


Figure 1: “IMEU Policy Analysis #4: Why Israel Must Be Held Accountable for Policies Toward the Gaza Strip | IMEU”. *Imeu.Org*, 2022, <https://imeu.org/article/imeu-policy-analysis-4-why-israel-must-be-held-accountable-for-policies-tow>.

²⁶ "Israel: 50 Years of Occupation Abuses". *Human Rights Watch*, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/04/israel-50-years-occupation-abuses>.

²⁷ "Israel: 50 Years Of Occupation Abuses". *Human Rights Watch*, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/04/israel-50-years-occupation-abuses>.

5.3. International Approaches That Have Already Been Undertaken

The United Nations Human Rights Council has announced its intention to launch an international investigation into offenses perpetrated during the 11-day uprising in Gaza between Israel and Palestinian activist groups, as well as systematic crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory and within Israel.

As a result, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on guaranteeing respect for International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law, in which it established an international committee to examine such infringements, as well as all alleged violations and abuses prior to and since April 13, 2021.²⁸

5.4. Conclusion

For the past several years, Israel has implemented a total blockade on the Gaza Strip, which, notwithstanding Israel's voluntary decision on the withdrawal of its military from the territory in 2005, is still considered occupied territory under international law because it maintains effective military control over it. As a result of the siege and the multiple uprisings that have occurred over the years, the Palestinian people's human rights have been violated on several instances. As a result, an effective resolution must include a strategy to not only hold the appropriate parties accountable for these breaches, but also strategies to de-escalate the tension and avoid future infringements.

²⁸ "Human Rights Council Establishes International Commission of Inquiry to Investigate Violations In The Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, And In Israel - Occupied Palestinian Territory". *Reliefweb*, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/human-rights-council-establishes-international-commission>.

6. Issue 3: Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

The blockade on the Gaza strip has had an enormous impact on the people living there. Many Palestinians indicate that they experience poor living conditions, and therefore want to leave the Gaza Strip. According to the humanitarian needs overview of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1.6 million people in the Gaza Strip needed humanitarian help in 2021.²⁹

6.1. Background of the Problem

Water, energy and agriculture infrastructures have been targeted in the conflict, either by restrictions on access, confiscations or destruction. This has negatively affected the security of the people living in the Gaza strip.³⁰ The crisis is defined by 53 years of Israeli military occupation, human rights violations, internal political divisions and continued armed escalations between Israeli and Palestinian groups.³¹ The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip could be called unique, as it has been going on for a long time, and the blockade made it even worse. This puts an enormous burden on the inhabitants. Providing humanitarian support in this sense is also difficult, as there is a need for both emergency and development assistance. At the same time, plans need to be laid down to prepare for an occasion in which infrastructures are attacked or blocked. The Israeli government does not want to coordinate efforts of construction with Hamas, which means that humanitarian actors are crucial in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, the conflict continues, meaning there is no emergency relief, while Gaza only becomes more dependent on humanitarian aid actors.³²

6.2. Recent Developments

The number of people needing help in the Gaza Strip has only increased in 2021 compared to the year before. In 2020 the severity of humanitarian needs also significantly increased due to two factors. The first one is the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus and the restrictions this has imposed. The lockdowns, travel restrictions, school closures and more, have undermined the living conditions of the Palestinians further. Additionally, the pandemic causes the Palestinian economy to shrink significantly and the portion of poor households to increase. The second factor that has impacted the conditions of the Palestinians, is the Palestinian National Authority's (PNA) decision to stop almost all bilateral contacts with Israel, as a result of Israel's plan to annex parts of the West Bank. This has even caused more

²⁹ OCHA. "Humanitarian needs overview". 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/hno_2021.pdf.

³⁰ Weinthal, Erika, and Jeannie Sowers. "Targeting infrastructure and livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza." *International Affairs* 95.2 (2019): 319-340.

³¹ OCHA. "Humanitarian needs overview".

³² Weinthal, Erika, and Jeannie Sowers. "Targeting infrastructure and livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza."

economic slowdown and has meant a loss of the largest portion of the PNA's income. Consequently, the Authority has less money to maintain its social safety net, further affecting the Palestinians.³³

6.3. Relevant Actors and Institutions

The most important actors in providing aid to the people in the Gaza Strip are the PNA government, local non-governmental actors and international organisations. These local actors are mainly religious charitable organisations, usually associated with Hamas' network of social organisations. The most important international organisation that provides help is the United Nations, mainly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose aid is targeted at Palestinian refugees. The World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organisation also contribute in providing food, cash transfers and services.³⁴ However, despite the aid that is provided, poverty is increasing, the economy is deteriorating and social inequality is growing. A critique on for instance the European Union's development is the lack of focus on sustainable structures.³⁵

6.4. International Approaches That Have Already Been Undertaken

The UNRWA's humanitarian assistance and development projects support the Palestinians and provide a basic level of provision. The work under the UNRWA under the UN is one of the most important international approaches being taken to prevent further escalation of the humanitarian crisis in the region. Still, because the UNRWA provides aid for Palestinian refugees, also in neighbouring countries, this creates tensions with Israel. For Israel, the cooperation is beneficial, as it means the Israeli government has a decreased burden to provide for the Palestinian population.³⁶

6.5. Conclusion

Recently, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has deteriorated. With the pandemic complicating the situation further, the economy has shrunk and the Palestinian inhabitants are hit even harder by poverty and poor living conditions. Due to the prolonged nature of the conflict, there is a large burden on the people. However, there is mainly a focus on emergency aid, while there could be a bigger focus on sustainable projects. At the same time, as a result of ongoing tensions these are harder to realise. After decades of conflict, the humanitarian crisis the people face remains present.

³³ OCHA. "Humanitarian needs overview".

³⁴ Loewenthal, Amit, Sami H. Miaari, and Anke Hoeffler. "Aid and Radicalization: The Case of Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza." (2021).

³⁵ "Actors In the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". *Ssoar.Info*.

³⁶ "Actors In the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". *Ssoar.Info*.

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