



Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism : Enforcement and Legitimization of Gaza Blockade



The Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) is a temporary agreement created by the United Nations and agreed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel in September 2014. The mechanism is designed to address Israel's security concerns while allowing the entry of construction materials (aggregate, cement & steel bars only) into the Gaza Strip. Such materials are necessary to enable the type of large scale construction and reconstruction work that is necessary in Gaza after the 2014 Israeli war. Israel defines these necessary types of construction materials, as well as many other goods, as 'dual use' and thus severely restricts their entry into Gaza.

Entrenching Israel's control over Gaza

The GRM, claimed to be an important step towards lifting the blockade, calls for a highly intricate monitoring system, with restrictive measures on the import and distribution of building materials. Thus, the GRM actually puts Gaza under an even tighter blockade¹.

According to the Mechanism:

- Israel has access to the data base of owners of damaged/demolished houses, which include confidential information like family ID card numbers, GPS coordinates of the family's home and other personal information.
- Israel has case-by-case approval power over all applications for construction materials, hence, an effective veto power over who receives the much-needed aid.
- Israel must approve all vendors of construction materials and maintains veto power over vendors who have been nominated by the PA and inspected by the UN.
- Construction materials are stored in special facilities under 24-hour closed-circuit television² supervision, with footage accessible to Israel.
- Israel monitors the reconstruction sites by surveillance drones.³

'Critics argue that plans for monitoring the import, storage and sales of building materials - including installing video cameras, setting up a team of international inspectors and the creation of a database of suppliers and consumers - are more appropriate for a suspect nuclear program than a postwar reconstruction effort'. (The guardian)

¹ See Gaza Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *Reconstruction Mechanism Goes into Effect*, date N/A
<http://www.fespal.org/?infographic=gaza-reconstruction-mechanism-goes-into-effect>

² Closed-circuit television (CCTV) is a TV system in which signals are not publicly distributed but are monitored, primarily for surveillance and security purposes.

³ Electronic Intifada, *Under Cover of Reconstruction, UN and PA Become Enforcers of Israel's Gaza Siege*, October 2014. Available from <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/under-cover-reconstruction-un-and-pa-become-enforcers-israels-gaza-siege>

‘Harming’ the Palestinians while profiting Israel:

- The GRM violates the fundamental principles of humanitarian action through maintaining the blockade and legitimizing Israel’s veto power over who can receive construction materials to rebuild their houses.
- Around **65%** of construction materials purchased through the mechanism come from Israeli companies⁴, thus giving huge financial gains to Israel.
- Tens of international inspectors have been recruited under the GRM to oversee the rebuilding of major reconstruction zones in Gaza. The high cost of these inspectors will siphon resources intended for needy Palestinians.⁵
- The intense coordination required between the parties to the agreement has caused delays in the distribution of materials, leading to a great deal of frustration among the affected population.
- The GRM is designed as a temporary solution. However, past experiences, such as the 1993 Oslo agreement, show that “temporary” solutions have a tendency to never be revisited and de facto situations become permanent.
- The only construction materials allowed under the GRM are aggregate, cement and steel bars. Other essential reconstruction materials are not included in the agreement despite not being sufficiently available in local markets. Additionally, many of the affected people in Gaza do not have the funds to buy these materials or the manpower necessary for construction.⁶
- The mechanism has increased opportunities for black markets in the Gaza Strip. A bag of cement bought through the mechanism for roughly \$6 is now being sold for four times that amount⁷, due to the lack of construction materials in the strip. Some people are forced to decide between rebuilding their homes or reselling such materials in order to earn money to feed their families.
- The GRM provides for Israel’s security concerns while failing to meet the minimum needs for Gaza’s reconstruction:

- **800.000** truckloads of construction materials are needed for the reconstruction of Gaza. (Shelter Cluster)
- A minimum of **606** truckloads of construction materials are needed **per day** to complete reconstruction of Gaza within **five** years. However, Israel allows the entry of **only around 24** truckloads of construction materials **per day** for the reconstruction of Gaza **through the GRM. (Gisha)**
- Less than **1%** of the construction materials required to rebuild Gaza have entered through the mechanism so far.
- **Not a single** completely destroyed infrastructure has been rebuilt so far, including houses.
- **100,000** individuals in Gaza remain homeless.
- Reconstruction of Gaza would take more than a **century**, if the rate of material entry remains as it is.

Recommendation:

- The United Nations must exert political efforts to resolve the underlying injustice inflicted on the residents of the Gaza Strip rather than creating temporary, complex solutions to manage a crisis derived from Israel’s denial policies, and risk further entrenchment of Palestinians’ rights.
- The international community, including the UN, must pressure Israel to lift its unlawful blockade of Gaza and allow for unimpeded and unconditional flow of construction materials into Gaza. The GRM legitimizes Israel’s blockade of Gaza and threatens to delay further the need for political pressure on Israel to comply with International Law.

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⁴Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *Gaza after the War: Why is a Political Solution Necessary and Why it Should not be Only about Reconstructing the Prison*, February 2015.

⁵Brooking Doha Center, *Back to Gaza: A New Approach to Reconstruction*, January 2015

⁶Information collected from the field on 15 of July 2015.

⁷. The Washington Institute for Near East policy, *Gaza Reconstruction Stalled by Fatah-Hamas Deadlock*, February 2015.