

End the blockade of the Gaza Strip

The time has come to end Israel's failed policy of closure and give hope to despairing Gazans.

Haaretz Editorial | Dec. 26, 2014 | 2:12 PM |  12

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Since the end of the war in the last summer, the number of Gazans who attempted to sneak into Israel in order to look for work increased. Their willingness to risk arrest, injury or even death attests to their despair. Israel cannot ignore this despair and treat it as merely a security issue requiring some technical solution.

Although only a few dozen people have attempted to cross the fence since the end of the summer they reflect the distress and despair felt by most of the inhabitants of the Palestinian enclave. Almost half of Gazans are unemployed, 70 percent of families receive humanitarian aid and around 120,000 people are waiting for their ruined homes to be rebuilt. The tap water in the Gaza Strip is not fit to drink, and the supply of electricity is limited to only a few hours a day.

At the rate at which building supplies are currently entering the Strip it will take a decade to rebuild buildings that were destroyed last summer. Even if the pace picks up, the key problem will remain: Some 1.8 million people are crammed into a 365-square-kilometer enclave, cut off from the rest of the world and above all from their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank. Denying Gaza's residents freedom of movement directly accounts for their collective sense of humiliation, purposelessness and loss of interest in living.

The Gaza Strip is not a sovereign entity. Its inhabitants are listed in a population registry that is controlled by Israel. By restricting movement and by controlling the land, sea and air space surrounding and above Gaza, Israel controls its economy and dictates its poverty.

Israel embarked on its policy of cutting off the Strip in the 1990s, before the wave of suicide bombings and much before Hamas' rise to power. If the objective was to guarantee more security for Israelis, this policy was an abysmal failure. It only added an additional element of instability and uncertainty for both Palestinians and Israelis.

One more truck or one more donation will not change things. Israel must rescind its policy of closure and of cutting the Gaza Strip off from the world and recognize the fact that the residents of the Gaza are part of the Palestinian people, whose official leadership is striving to establish a state alongside Israel.