**Gaza: View from the Inside**

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### Sr. Bridget Tighe, FMDM

Sr Bridget Tighe, of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, is Executive Director in Gaza of Caritas Jerusalem. For many years she worked as a nurse and midwife with Palestinian refugees in Jordan. Later she was Founding Principal of the Margaret Beaufort Institute, a theological college for Catholic women associated with the University of Cambridge. After that she was vice rector in Tantur for five years followed by Regional Leader of her congregation in the UK.



* + - 1. Introduction. Bridget lives in “Shati Camp.”
1. “The largest open prison in the world.” That’s what Sr. Bridget called Gaza when she arrived in 2014. She saw many houses destroyed in Shajeeah. A dairy farm was bombed with the cattle inside. In Beit Hanoun, she visited a family who were living in their bombed-out house. There are three crossings still open: Erez, Karni, and Rafah.
2. Despair or Christian Optimism. Sr. Bridget said that she came to Gaza in order to make a preferential option for the poor and to show solidarity. But she said that it is not enough to be in solidarity – one must also have something to do, and her duties at Caritas do not fill up her time. She spoke of other groups of religious women who are running orphanages and carrying for babies. Those women, at least, are fully occupied.
3. Facts about the Gaza Strip (taken from Wikipedia).

Definition. The Gaza Strip ([Arabic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): قطاع غزة), or simply Gaza, is a region of the [State of Palestine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Palestine) on the eastern coast of the [Mediterranean Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea) that borders Egypt on the southwest for 11 kilometers (6.8 mi) and Israel on the east and north along a 51 km (32 mi) border. Gaza is part of the [Palestinian territories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_territories) (including the [West Bank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank)) claimed by the State of Palestine.

Land Mass. The territory is 41 kilometers (25 mi) long, and from 6 to 12 kilometers (3.7 to 7.5 mi) wide, with a total area of 365 square kilometers (141 sq mi). With around 1.8 million [Palestinians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian) on some 360 square kilometers, Gaza is among the regions with the highest [population density](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_density#By_political_boundaries) in the world. Moreover, a substantial part of the territory is depopulated because of the imposition of a large buffer zone, maintained by Israel within the Gaza border. If Gaza city itself is compared, the density is half of the population density of New York City, and similar to the density of numerous US cities like Boston, or that of Singapore or [Hong Kong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hong_Kong), with the difference that Hong Kong’s wealth permits it to maintain a far higher standard of living.

Population. Gaza has an annual population growth rate of 2.91% (2014 est.), the [13th highest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_growth_rate) in the world. It is often referred to as overcrowded.

Lack of Freedom. Due to the Israeli–Egyptian blockade, the population is not free to leave or enter the Gaza Strip, nor allowed to freely import or export goods. [Sunni Muslims](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunni_Muslim) make up the predominant part of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.

War of 2007. After a violent intra-Palestinian battle in 2007 followed by [Hamas' takeover of Gaza](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas%27_takeover_of_Gaza) and the expulsion of Fatah-allied officials and security members from Gaza, Hamas established a [Hamas Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas_government_of_June_2007) in place of the [Palestinian Authority Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Government_of_June_2007) appointed by President Abbas.

Unity? On September 25, 2014, Hamas agreed to let the PA resume control over the Gaza Strip and its border crossings with Egypt and Israel. But in an article on March 20, 2015, *Al-Monitor’s* Ahmed Melhem wrote that the consensus government hasn’t worked. “The [consensus government was sworn](http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=175665" \t "_blank) in last June 2, yet it has failed to conduct the task of preparing for presidential and legislative elections, as required. . . . Furthermore, the institutions of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were to be unified under the supervision of a government based on popular support.”

* + - 1. The City Itself. Almost two million reside in Gaza Strip.
1. Scenic Views. Gaza City has handsome sights, such as the bank of Palestine.
2. History. Ownership of Gaza has been passed from one conquering people to another. See Jean Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History*.

General Allenby entered on Nov. 9, 1917. He then marched on to Jerusalem. The Balfour Declaration had declared that the Jews have a right to a homeland.

The British created a railway and cemeteries containing 3,700 soldiers’ graves, that are beautifully kept within sight of the squalor of Gaza.

1. 1945, The Muslim Brotherhood. Between Raffah and Egypt, there was a kibbutz in 1945-46. All Israelis were pulled out of Gaza and 2005. Hamas is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and it is the *de facto* government of Gaza.
2. The kibbutzim, said Bridget, are the ancestors of today’s Jewish settlements. In Gaza, they occupied the most fertile land. They closed in 2005.
3. In 1948, states Filiu, “A methodical census” was made. The 80,000 residents of Gaza were joined by 200,000 Palestinians, relocated from other parts of the land by the Israelis.
4. One Gazan’s mother, now in her 80s, once owned 200 dunams of land near Ashkelon. She can see her land, but has no access to it.
5. The native Gazans share with the relocated people the same despair and deprivation. There were once more Palestinians in the Gaza area than the West Bank.
6. The Israeli Strategy: create settlements to occupy the land.
7. In 1948, Ben-Gurion initiated Operation Uvda (“facts on the ground”) to annex the Negev. Today’s policy against Gaza is the direct consequence. When Jewish settlers arrived, they were offered immediate protection by the State of Israel. The newcomers are the “facts on the ground.”
8. Ariel Sharon established settlements to contain the land that might otherwise have gone to the Palestinians. In the E-1 area, the Israelis have already established roads and a police station. The E-1 zone or area (short for East 1) ([Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language): מְבַשֶּׂרֶת אֲדֻמִּים) is an area of the [West Bank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank) within the municipal boundary of the [Israeli settlement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_settlement) of [Ma'ale Adumim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma%27ale_Adumim). It is located adjacent to and northeast of [East Jerusalem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Jerusalem) and to the west of Ma'ale Adumim.
9. The 1948 Resolutions 194 and 181 of the UN both have the weight of law. 181 established Israel. 194 was supposed to guarantee land to Palestine, but was never implemented.
10. Gaza Strip. The term was first used in 1955. Israel encouraged Gazans to leave Gaza for Jordan. Despite that, the population of Gaza has risen. Tribal and political infighting, as well as aggression by Israel, have plagued Gaza.
11. Early Jewish leaders wondered whether the Gazans could be transferred to Iran or Iraq.
12. Gaza has been a fertile breeding ground for terrorism. UN Resolution 194 was never implemented.
13. There is a one-kilometer buffer zone between Gaza and Israel, but the zone is within the fence, so it means less agricultural land.
	* + 1. The Gaza-Israeli Conflict of 2008-2009 (This section is from Wikipedia).
14. Hamas Takeover in 2005. Hamas was elected in 2005 and labeled (by Israel, the USA, Europe and Australia) a “terrorist organization.” Israel chose to pull all Israelis out of Gaza.
	* + 1. Israeli Control. As part of its 2005 [disengagement plan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel%27s_unilateral_disengagement_plan), Israel retained exclusive control over Gaza's airspace and territorial waters, continued to patrol and monitor the external land perimeter of the Gaza Strip, with the exception of its southernmost border (where Egypt retained control of the border and border crossings were supervised by European monitors) and continued to monitor and [blockade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007%E2%80%93present_blockade_of_the_Gaza_Strip) Gaza's coastline.
			2. Infrastructure. Israel largely provides and controls Gaza's water supply, electricity and communications infrastructure. According to [Human Rights Watch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Rights_Watch) and [Amnesty International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amnesty_International), Israel remains an [occupying power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_occupation) under international law.
15. Hamas Government. After a violent intra-Palestinian battle in 2007 (followed by [Hamas' takeover of Gaza](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas%27_takeover_of_Gaza) and the expulsion of Fatah-allied officials and security members from Gaza), Hamas established a [Hamas Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas_government_of_June_2007) in place of the [Palestinian Authority Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Government_of_June_2007) appointed by President Abbas.
16. War of 2008-09. The conflict escalated with the split of the [Palestinian Authority](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Authority) into the [Fatah government in the West Bank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah_government_in_the_West_Bank) and the [Hamas government in Gaza](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas_government_in_Gaza) and the following violent [ousting of Fatah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gaza_%282007%29) after Fatah lost the election to Hamas. [Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_rocket_attacks_on_Israel) and the joint Egyptian-Israeli [blockade of Gaza](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blockade_of_the_Gaza_Strip) have exacerbated the conflict. The [international community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_community) considers indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian structures that do not discriminate between civilians and military targets [illegal under international law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva_conventions#Protocols).
17. Politics. The [Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Jihad_Movement_in_Palestine), also known as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) is a Palestinian militant organization operating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The group has been labelled as a terrorist group by the United States and other countries. Iran is a major financial supporter of the PIJ. Islamic Jihad is the second largest militant Islamic group in Gaza with 8,000 fighters present in the Gaza strip. In June 2013, the Islamic Jihad broke ties with Hamas leaders after Hamas police fatally shot the commander of Islamic Jihad's military wing.
18. Israeli Occupation. The international community regards all of the [Palestinian territories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_territories) including Gaza as occupied.
	* + 1. Israeli Control. The [Oslo Accord](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accord) authorizes Israel to control the [airspace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airspace) and the [territorial sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territorial_sea). Israel states that it does not exercise effective control or authority over any land or institutions in the Gaza Strip and thus the Gaza Strip is no longer subject to the former [military occupation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_occupation).
			2. Israel’s View. [Tzipi Livni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzipi_Livni) stated (Jan. 2008): "Israel got out of Gaza. It dismantled its settlements there. No Israeli soldiers were left there after the disengagement."
			3. The Plight of Gaza.
19. UN Resolution 194 was never implemented.
20. It was adopted on December 11, 1948, near the end of the [1948 Arab–Israeli War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab%E2%80%93Israeli_War). The Resolution defined principles for reaching a final settlement and returning Palestine refugees to their homes. It called for an establishment of a U.N. [Conciliation Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Conciliation_Commission) to facilitate peace between Israel and Arab states, continuing the efforts of UN Mediator [Folke Bernadotte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folke_Bernadotte), following his assassination. The resolution was adopted by a majority of 35 countries from among the 58 members of the United Nations at that time; however all six Arab countries then represented at the UN voted against it (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. They were parties to the conflict.
21. Three crossings out of Gaza:

Erez. This is for people.

Karni. Mostly vehicles and goods.

Rafah (to Egypt). Closed when Morsi was overthrown.

1. Election of Hamas (2005).
2. Israel refused to accept the election, and Hamas was sealed off. The former head of Mossad in Tel Aviv said, “Israel made a big mistake in not recognizing the election.” Every few years, Israel “mows the lawn,” and kills off the Hamas leaders.
3. Living in Gaza today calls to mind Mazlow’s Hierarchy of Needs.
4. Self-actualization, esteem needs, belongingness and love needs, safety needs, physiological needs. Physiological needs are not met:
	* 1. Food. Israel has calculated how much food is needed for the Gazans. It is said that the Israelis have chosen, “Not to starve them, but to put them on a diet.” Restriction on food was lifted after the Turkish flotilla in 2010. Food insecurity affects many Gazans.
		2. Water. 95% of water is undrinkable due to overextraction from wells and pollution from sewage. People drink desalinated water, the rest is used for everything else, including showers. The water infrastructure is crumbling. Electricity is irregular, about eight hours per day. Untreated waste is dumped into the sea. The aquifer will soon be destroyed.
		3. Rest. The Israelis come into the Gazan area to demolish homes. Cropland and olive trees are destroyed. Gaza is famous for perishable items – flowers – and export policies. There are no cinemas. There are demonstrations every night. Televisions are run off batteries. In the Caritas staff, no one takes vacations. “What would I do at home?” asked one. “At least work keeps my mind occupied.”
5. Security and Safety.
	* 1. Hamas is the *de facto* government, but its fundamentalist ideology restricts freedom. Many officials are not regularly paid. Fatah officials are paid to do nothing. By contrast, the Hamas officials are not paid. There are “layers upon layers” of corruption.
		2. Since 2007 (the blockade), exports are almost banned. The flow of goods is severely restricted.
		3. Streets are clean, schools and shops are open. But this is “a superficial veneer of normality.” Family feuds & domestic violence are common.
6. Belonging and Love Needs.
	* 1. High literacy, but few employment opportunities.
		2. People feel that they have “nothing to lose.”
7. The UN Report: Palestinians live on donor aid, and it has produced lassitude; Caritas, CRS, they are all necessary. But they have produced a “donor economy” that demoralizes people.
	* + 1. The Gazans has created a sense of entitlement. They need a right to development under international law more than they need donations. Aid should not be viewed as a substitute for ending the blockade and calling for Israel to honor Resolution 194.
			2. The De-Development of Gaza. Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke of Rabin’s assassination. See the article from the “Times of Israel” on October 26, 2015: “Reiterating points he made earlier Monday — during a ceremony at Rabin’s graveside on Jerusalem’s Mount Herzl — Netanyahu said Israel is combating “incitement and terror with all our strength. We all know: Peace needs to be anchored in security,” Netanyahu told lawmakers, past and present, and Rabin’s family, who sat in the Knesset gallery. “We need to negate the hope of the Palestinians and all our enemies, who one day will subdue us with the force of the sword. Will we forever live by the sword? If we loosen our grip on what’s ours, their sword will vanquish us.”

Coffee Break

* + - 1. Christianity in Gaza.
				1. The number of Christians is low. Out of two million Gazans, 1,200 are Christians (mostly Greek Orthodox).
				2. There are no indigenous clergy (Christians are served by two Brazilian priests of the Incarnate Word and a number of sisters).
				3. Christian attitudes. “If Hamas were not in charge, the Christians would probably live more freely.
			2. Today’s Situation.
1. Daesh and Hamas. Today, Hamas is keeping wahabi fundamentalism in control. So Israel supports Hamas surreptitiously, because it keeps Daesh at bay.
	* + 1. The wahabi sect of (Saudi) Islam is fundamentalist and suppresses women. In Bethlehem today, the Saudis offer scholarships to young people to study. When they return, they have a wahabi brand of Islam. Wahabism is connected to Daesh in Sinai.
			2. Recently there was a bombing in Rafah, initiated by the wahabis and Daesh. The destruction of the Russian plane is attributed to Daesh. Hamas is, in the eyes of the wahabis, insufficiently radical. One night, the Gazans shot rockets into Israel. The Israelis retaliated, but “moderately.” Why? Because they need Hamas as a buffer against Daesh.
2. Israeli Destruction of the Gazan Economy.
	* + 1. The blockade of 2006-07 has stopped most exports except strawberries and flowers.
			2. The Israelis have bombed factories and destroyed “The American School.”
			3. International agencies employ thousands, and they are well paid, but the ordinary Gazans are economically depressed. “The middle class has been destroyed,” said Bridget, and “there is no hope.” The dream of Netanyahu has been realized: “We must negate the hope of the Palestinian people.”