

Report details hopeless conditions in Gaza

by [Paul Hobson](#)

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LONDON (ABP) -- Residents of Gaza see no hope for a brighter future -- and that's one of the most distressing aspects of the situation in the Middle East, according to an international Christian aid-and-development group's advocacy officer for the region.

Hanan Elmasu of the United Kingdom-based organization [Christian Aid](#) worked on a new briefing detailing the impact of Israel's measures to ease the blockade of Gaza after six months.

Elmasu, a regular visitor to Gaza, told the British Baptist newspaper *The Baptist Times*,

"Life for Gaza civilians is very traumatic. There is very little economic activity, high unemployment and much of the population are dependent on handouts."

She continued: "I've been going to Gaza for several years and have seen how life has changed. What's distressing is the destruction of the people there. There used to be a glimmer of hope but now there is an inability of people to plan for the future. Parents can't provide for their children, children aren't going to school because of a lack of construction materials and you put all that together and it's a hopeless position."

Christian Aid was part of an international coalition of 22 development, human-rights and peace-building organizations that compiled a report looking at the effects of Israel's measures to ease the blockade of Gaza. The Israeli government announced in June that it would soften the blockade to improve conditions in the tiny, densely populated strip of land that hugs the Mediterranean between Israel and Egypt.

The report, [Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade](#), says that little has changed for Gaza's 1.5 million residents, because “not only has Israel neglected to address major elements of the blockade in its easing measures, such as lifting the ban on exports from Gaza, but it has failed so far to live up to key commitments it did make.”

For instance, Israel promised to expand and accelerate imports of construction materials for U.N. and other international projects such as schools, health centers, houses and sewage plants. Many of those facilities were damaged or destroyed during the military attacks Israel [launched on Gaza](#) in December 2008 and January 2009.

But in reality progress has been “slow and limited” since Israel’s pledge, says the report.

An average of only 715 truckloads of construction materials have entered the Gaza Strip per month since the easing announcement. The United Nations has estimated that Gaza needs 670,000 truckloads of construction materials for housing alone.

Exports from Gaza remain banned, which continues to “cripple” the local economy, while the movement of people has also seen little change, adds the report.

The coalition is calling for renewed international action to ensure “an immediate, unconditional and complete lifting of the blockade.”

Israeli officials have criticized the report, saying the groups -- many of them international Christian organizations -- that compiled it are politically disposed in favor of the Palestinians and against Israel.

"The claims of the organizations, as they appear in the report, are biased and distorted and therefore mislead the public," Maj. Guy Inbar, spokesman for Israel's Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories, [told CNN](#) shortly after the report was released Nov. 30.

"The number of truckloads entering the Gaza Strip every day via the Kerem Shalom Crossing has increased by 92 percent," Inbar said. "Despite

the fact that Israel has increased the capacity so that 250 trucks could enter Gaza every day, the Palestinians themselves have not reached this capacity. From the beginning of August 2010, the average number of truckloads entering Gaza each day stands at 176."

But the report notes that, although Israel has allowed more goods into Gaza since June, it's not enough to repair the damage done by the 2008 and 2009 raids.

ABP managing editor Robert Marus contributed to this story.