

UN: Gaza may be uninhabitable by 2020 on current trends

New report reveals impact of 2014 Israel war on strip, which sent "almost all of the population into destitution".

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Gaza could be "uninhabitable" in less than five years if current economic trends continue, according to a new United Nations report.

The report released on Tuesday by the UN Conference on Trade and Development points to the eight-year economic blockade of Gaza as well as the three wars there over the past six years.

Last year's Israeli war on Gaza displaced half a million people and left parts of the strip destroyed.

The war "has effectively eliminated what was left of the middle class, sending almost all of the population into destitution and dependence on international humanitarian aid," the new report says.

Gaza's GDP dropped 15 percent last year, and unemployment reached a record high of 44 percent. Seventy-two percent of households are food insecure.

The wars have shattered Gaza's ability to export and produce for the domestic market and left no time for reconstruction, the report says. It notes that Gaza's "de-development," or development in reverse, has been accelerated.

Israel and Egypt have maintained a blockade of Gaza since the armed group Hamas seized control of the territory in 2007.

"The humanitarian catastrophe is man-made. The answer is only through are man-made policies," Hamdi Shaqqura, the deputy director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, told Al Jazeera.

Shaqqura said that donations from the international community have been "very useful", but need to be coupled with "real political policies" to effectively help Gaza.

"The answer to Gaza is not dumping money into it. We have great potentials in Gaza for economic policies. What hinder economic development is merely Israeli policies, the closure (blockade) and other restrictions imposed on Gaza."

A year after the war on Gaza, less than 2 percent of the required materials have been allowed into Gaza.

The report comes as Egyptian military bulldozers press ahead with a project that effectively would fill Egypt's border with the Gaza Strip with water and flood the last remaining cross-border underground smuggling tunnels, which have brought both commercial items and weapons into Gaza.

The report calls the economic prospects for 2015 for the Palestinian territories "bleak" because of the unstable political situation, reduced aid and the slow pace of reconstruction.

Source: Al Jazeera and agencies