



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان  
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

# Right to Work in the **Gaza Strip** Between **Permanent Siege** & Unrelenting Restrictions

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## Preamble:

The right to work is one of the most important economic and social human rights. It provides job opportunities for persons capable of working and ensuring fair and satisfactory working conditions. This right is considered a basic right and necessary for the implementation and realization of a wide range of other human rights, especially the right of humans to enjoy a decent standard of living, which is an integral rooted part of human dignity. Without the right to work, people are unable to meet their basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing and other human requirements that a dignified life requires. Many international human rights instruments stipulate the necessity of implementing the right to work for all human beings, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23 of which stipulates that “Everyone has the right to work, to freedom to choose his work, just and satisfactory work conditions, and in protection against unemployment,” besides the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which stipulates in Article 6 that every individual has the right to work, which includes the right of every person to have the possibility of earning his living by his freely chosen work.

There is a close connection between the right to work and the right to enjoy just and satisfactory conditions of work and related trade union rights. States should therefore commit to ensuring fair wages, respecting the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, and equal pay for work of equal value. It should also be ensured that workers receive a minimum wage that is sufficient to secure a decent standard of living for themselves and their families. Moreover, workers must enjoy safe and healthy working conditions that do not infringe on human dignity. A reasonable number of working hours must be determined for employees, in addition to their enjoyment of rest and leisure time and periodic paid vacations.

Although international human rights instruments have guaranteed the right to work for all individuals without discrimination, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, however, the right to work and protection from unemployment continues to face widespread violations in many countries worldwide. In the Gaza Strip, for example, repeated Israeli military attacks, as well as the siege and restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities on the movement of goods and

individuals from and to Gaza nearly 16 years ago, caused and increase in the unemployment rates to unprecedented levels. According to the latest official statistics of Maat in this context, the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip has reached about 46% due to the siege and restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities, meaning that the unemployment rate in the besieged Gaza Strip is among the highest levels in the world.

Within the framework of the **30 x 50 Human Rights for All Campaign launched by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** to raise awareness of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and coinciding with the wave of systematic violence unleashed by the Israeli occupation forces on the Gaza Strip, Maat presents this report, which focuses on the implementation of Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding the right to work and protection from unemployment, by focusing in particular on the impact of the siege and restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities on the right to work in Gaza Strip. In light of the above, Maat addresses two main axes, the first axis focuses on the right to work in international human rights conventions, while the second axis focuses on the impact of the siege on the right to work in the Gaza Strip, which we will discuss in detail in the two axes covered by the report.

## **Axis I: Right to Work under International Human Rights Conventions**

Many international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, guarantee the right to work for all individuals without discrimination. In this context, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 includes the right to work as a basic human right in Article 23, even though it is not a binding treaty, as this article stipulates that:”

1. Every person has the right to work and freedom to choose his work, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment.
2. All individuals, without any discrimination, have the right to equal pay for equal work

3. Every working individual has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity and supplemented, where necessary, by other means of social protection.
4. Every person has the right to establish and join trade unions with others to protect his interests.”<sup>1</sup>

We conclude from the above that every individual has the right to search for work and engage in gainful employment of his choice, and no one should be deprived of the opportunity to work, or choose the job they want, as well as the need for all individuals to be able to choose their profession without undue restrictions or coercion, and the need for government mechanisms to protect individuals from involuntary unemployment, such as unemployment benefits or programs that help people find new job opportunities, besides the need for men and women to receive the same wage for doing the same work, and the need for wages to be sufficient to cover the basic needs of workers and their families so that they can maintain a decent standard of living, with the need to enable workers to establish and join unions to protect their interests and improve their own working conditions.

Moreover, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, an international agreement legally binding on its parties, guarantees the right to work for all individuals without discrimination, as Article VI of the Covenant stipulates that “States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes: Everyone has the right to the possibility of earning his living by work that he freely chooses or accepts.”<sup>2</sup> The International Labor Organization conventions, including Convention No. 122 on employment policy and Convention No. 111 on discrimination in

#### ARTICLE 23 OF THE UDHR

GUARANTEES EVERYONE  
“THE RIGHT TO WORK,  
FREEDOM OF CHOICE OF  
EMPLOYMENT, JUST AND  
FAVORABLE CONDITIONS  
OF WORK AND  
PROTECTION AGAINST  
UNEMPLOYMENT.”

<sup>1</sup> الإعلان العالمي لحقوق الإنسان، جامعة منيسوتا، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/43CGDCf>  
<sup>2</sup> العهد الدولي الخاص بالحقوق الاقتصادية والاجتماعية والثقافية، الامم المتحدة، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3L3kICh>

employment and occupation, have included provisions referring to the right of individuals to access decent work.

## Axis II: Impact of Israeli Siege and Restrictions on the Right to Work in the Gaza Strip

The Israeli occupation authorities imposed a strict siege on Gaza Strip since 2006, restricted the movement of goods and individuals to and from the Strip for more than 16 years, and repeatedly carried out military operations on the Strip, which had a profound impact on the economic conditions there, as industrial, agricultural and commercial activities declined as a result of the military actions and the land, sea and air siege imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities on Gaza Strip, which led to unemployment levels in the Gaza Strip rising to unprecedented levels. According to the latest official statistics issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of unemployed people in Gaza Strip during the second quarter of 2023 due to the siege and restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities reached about 379000 unemployed people, which means that the unemployment rate in Gaza Strip reached about 46% compared to the average, which was 34.8% in 2006<sup>3</sup>. The unemployment rate among youth in the Strip also reached 70%, meaning that the unemployment rate in the besieged Gaza Strip is among the highest levels in the world.

**Below we discuss the most prominent restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities on the Gaza Strip, which have contributed to high unemployment rates and the lack of job opportunities in the Strip:**

### **1. Severe Restrictions on the Movement of Goods to and from the Gaza Strip:**

The Israeli occupation authorities fully controlled all crossings between the Gaza Strip and Israel since 2007, which enabled them to impose severe restrictions on the movement of goods to and from the Gaza Strip over 16 years. In this context, the Israeli occupation authorities imposed strict restrictions on the marketing of goods from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank and Israel, besides preventing the entry of goods to the Gaza Strip, especially dual-use goods that Israel believes pose a security risk

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<sup>3</sup> Press Release On The Results Of The Labour Force Survey Second Quarter (April– June, 2023) Round, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), link: <https://bit.ly/3SeoQhi>

due to the possibility of using them for both civilian and military purposes. According to the latest statistics announced in this context, the number of trucks that entered the Gaza Strip carrying goods during the first five months of 2022 amounted to only about 8,000 trucks per month, which is a rate 30% lower than the monthly average during the first half of 2007, that is, before the imposition of the siege, despite the increase in the population of Gaza Strip by more than 50%. These strict restrictions imposed on the movement of goods to and from Gaza led to the impediment of commercial and economic growth, and the closure of many companies and commercial and industrial activities, which had a direct impact on the decline in job opportunities and the rise in unemployment rates in the Strip.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Restrictions on Access to Agricultural Land:**

The Israeli occupation authorities imposed strict restrictions on the access of farmers from the Gaza Strip to agricultural lands, especially in the buffer zones established by Israel along the border areas, and areas near the border fence separating Israel from the Gaza Strip. In this context, reliable international reports indicated that the Israeli occupation authorities have prevented Palestinian farmers from accessing their agricultural lands located within 1,500 meters of the border fence separating Israel from the Gaza Strip, which has led to a decrease in the area of arable land and the loss of jobs in the agricultural sector. According to the latest statistics of Maat, about 113,000 people from the Gaza Strip were affected by the restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities on access to agricultural lands.<sup>5</sup>

## **3. Restrictions on Access to Beaches and Fishing Areas:**

The Israeli occupation authorities imposed severe restrictions on fishermen's access to beaches and fishing areas, which has had a profound impact on the fishing industry. According to reliable UN statistics, the Israeli occupation authorities allow fishermen from the Gaza Strip to access only 50% of the fishing areas limited by the Oslo Accords

<sup>4</sup> 15 عاما على حصار غزة: 62% من سكان القطاع بحاجة إلى مساعدات غذائية ونسبة البطالة من بين الأعلى في العالم، أخبار الأمم المتحدة، 30 يونيو 2022، الرابط: <https://bit.ly/3A58VHK>

<sup>5</sup> Access Restrictions Area in the Gaza Strip , European Union, link: <https://bit.ly/477gaNZ>

to a distance of up to 20 nautical miles, which limited the ability of these fishermen to catch fish and led to losing their jobs in the fishing sector.<sup>6</sup>

### **Conclusion & Recommendations:**

In conclusion, despite the guarantees provided by numerous international human rights conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Israeli occupation authorities have consistently ignored these conventions and violated the rights of the Palestinian people, particularly those residing in the Gaza Strip, to decent work and protection from unemployment. The combination of repeated military actions, ongoing siege, and imposed restrictions on the movement of goods, and access to agricultural lands, beaches, and fishing areas over the past 16 years has led to an alarming increase in unemployment rates, reaching unprecedented levels. Official statistics indicate that the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip, due to the siege and restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities, stands at approximately 46%, making it one of the highest rates globally.

Based on the aforementioned circumstances, Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights proposes the following recommendations to the international community and the Israeli occupation authorities:

### **Recommendations for the International Community:**

1. Utilize diplomatic channels to exert pressure on Israel, demanding an immediate cessation of military actions and the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip. Additionally, advocate for the easing or removal of restrictions on the movement of goods and access to economic activities, including agricultural land, beaches, and fishing areas, which will facilitate trade and generate job opportunities.
2. Contribute to reconstruction and development efforts in Gaza, with a particular focus on areas where infrastructure and agricultural land have been damaged or destroyed. This support will help rebuild the economy and create employment opportunities.

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<sup>6</sup> The Gaza Strip | The humanitarian impact of 15 years of blockade - June 2022, link: <https://uni.cf/3Qi2A3L>

3. Ensure that humanitarian assistance is effectively and efficiently delivered to the people of Gaza, without being hindered by restrictions. This includes providing essential food, medical supplies, and other necessary humanitarian aid.
4. Advocate for an expansion of the fishing zone off the coast of Gaza, enabling Palestinian fishermen to access a larger area. This will increase their catch and improve their livelihoods.
5. Encourage the removal of buffer zones and restrictions on access to agricultural land, allowing farmers to cultivate their land near the border without fear of harm.
6. Support programs and initiatives aimed at creating employment opportunities and developing professional skills for Palestinians in Gaza. These efforts will help mitigate the impact of unemployment and address economic challenges.

### **Recommendations for the Israeli Occupation Authorities:**

1. Immediately cease military operations in the Gaza Strip and lift the blockade, enabling the free flow of goods and people.
2. Expand the fishing zone off the coast of Gaza, granting Palestinian fishermen access to a larger area and improving their catch and livelihoods.
3. Remove restrictions that impede the movement of goods to and from the Gaza Strip, while granting Palestinians access to agricultural lands, beaches, and fishing areas.
4. Encourage and support economic development initiatives in Gaza, focusing on creating job opportunities and stimulating economic growth.
5. Engage in meaningful negotiations to find a long-term solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such a resolution will enhance security, stability, and the human rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to work.