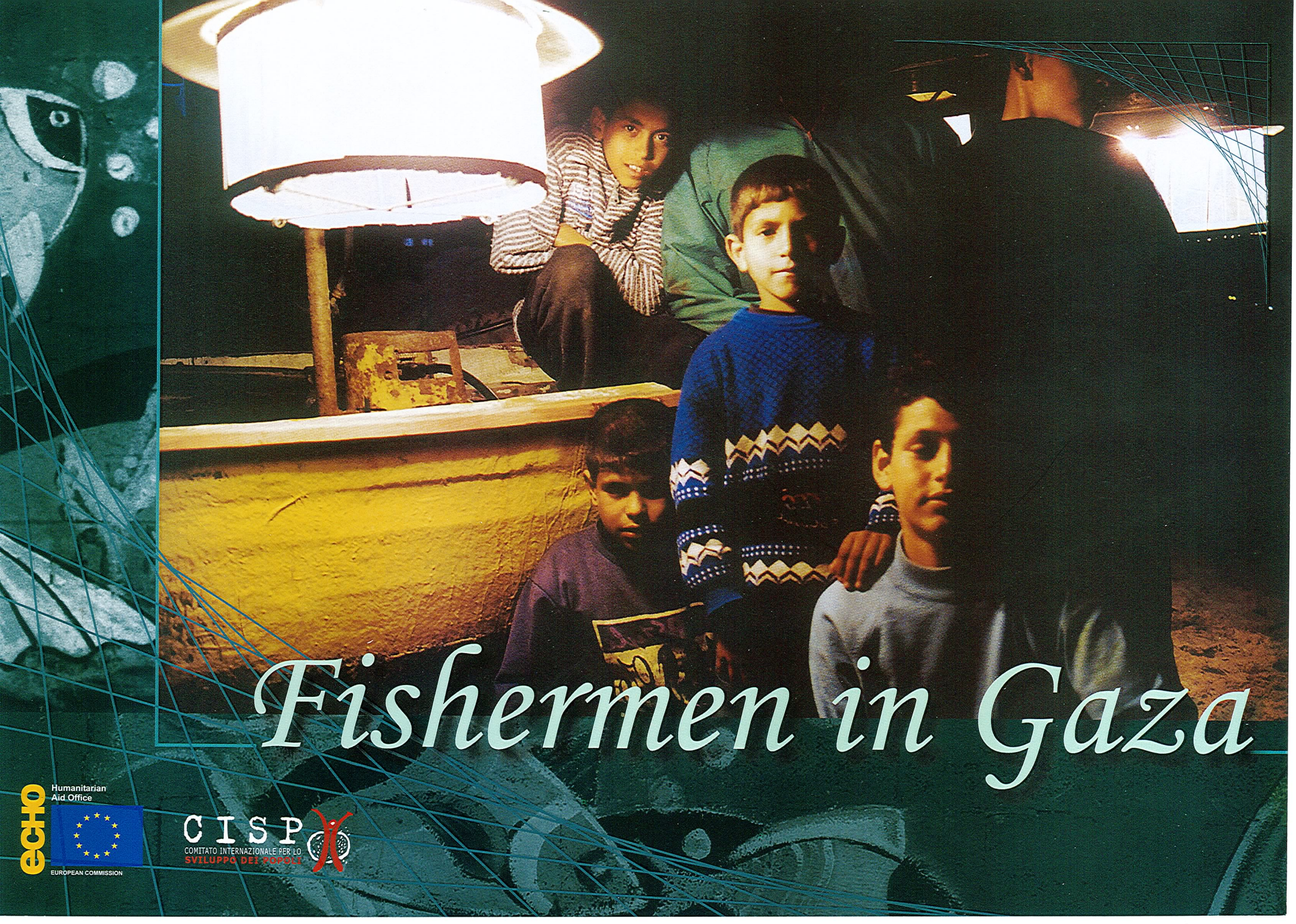


Fishermen in Gaza

echo Humanitarian Aid Office

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Photos of Mural, painted by:
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The fishermen



One hundred and three years living in Gaza. This is the story of Haj Mohammad Abdala Arafat Abu Hassira, who is Palestine's Old Man of the Sea.

He was born in 1901 in the western neighbourhood of Gaza city called Al Bahar "The Sea". In those days, Gaza was a small hamlet in the desert by the Mediterranean. Abu Hassira has 10 children, 6 sons and 4 daughters, with one hundred and thirty two grandchildren and great- grandchildren.

That is not unusual here. Fishermen have large families, and Gaza is one of the places in the world with the highest birth rates.

Abu Hassira has lost some of his hearing and sight, but he is still in good health and his memory remains sharp, especially for the smallest details of the history of Gaza and his family. He says his memories keep him young.

He started working when he was a child loading barley onto British boats, like his father. "They paid me a quarter-man salary, then they paid me as half-man, later on I got a full salary and finally, I became the Fishers' Chief", he says proudly.

"In those days, fishermen did not have boats. We fished with nets from the shore. Boats were used for transport, to load boats coming from abroad. These were rowing or sailing boats, with room for four to ten people".

At that time there was only a few fishermen in Gaza and they all knew each other. Abu Hassira says that in his grandfather's time, the fishermen in Gaza "could be counted with the fingers of one hand and in southern Gaza, which was nearly uninhabited, there was no one".

Currently Gaza has about 3,500 families, fishing in an area of 45 kilometres along the seashore, from Bet Lahyia in the north to Rafah in the south.

Abu Hassira narrates that in Turkish times, the land close to the sea was owned by the "mufti" Abdel Hay. He remembers those times were, "Like tar, a black life with many difficulties and hunger. The Turks took most of the males to fight the Empire's wars". But, he says, "it's worse now, because then there was no border in the sea. It was open from Ras Annaqura near Lebanon in the north to Port Sa'id in Egypt in the south".

When the British came, life in Gaza changed. During the first years, "The British horsemen carried food to be distributed among the people. Shortly afterwards, they started acting as occupiers forbidding the export of oranges, the most important product in Palestine at the time".

"I remember when the first refugees arrived in Gaza in 1948. I was in Khan Younis hunting 'Fer', which is what we call the birds that cross the sea during the migratory season. At that time, many refugees started arriving in very bad conditions, without a

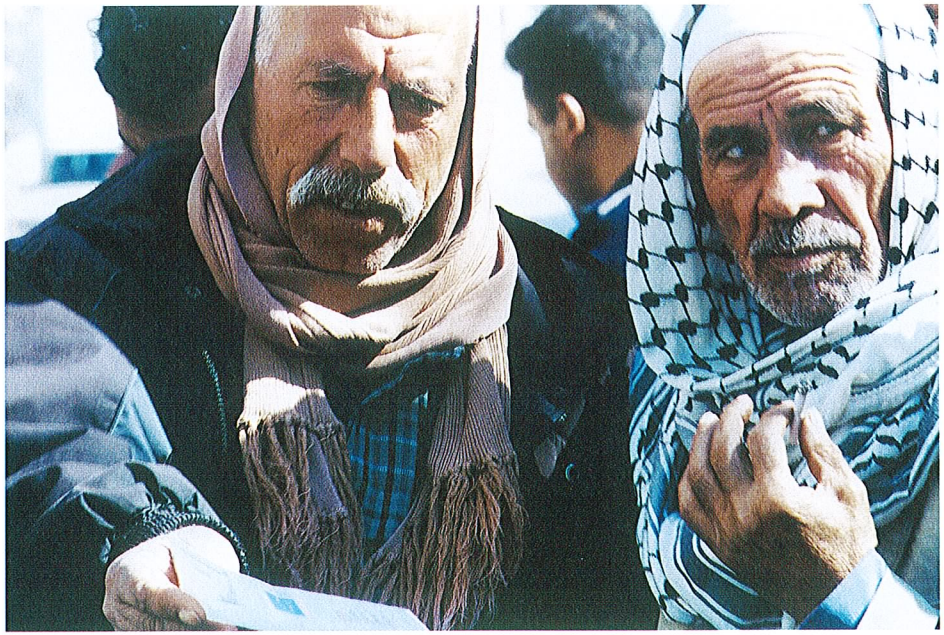
place to sleep. I took some of them to my house and to a local mosque. At the mosque, we divided the place using our boat sails so there was space for several families, and we collected food from families of Gaza to be distributed to the refugees".

Those refugees who came from Asqalan – now called Ashqelon by the Israelis - Jaffa, or Ashdod, increased the number of fishermen in Gaza. Many of their descendants now form the present fishing community.

"When the Israeli Army entered Gaza in 1967, we were loading oranges in the port. At that time, I was the chief of Gaza port. We left our work, ran to our houses and remained there for some weeks".

Then the Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, asked for a meeting with Abu Hassira, as the man responsible for the sea and the port area.

"With the Israeli occupation, the sea borders have been changed; in the South it was not possible to go further than Rafah, while nowadays it is not allowed to go behind Der al-Balah due to the Israeli settlements of Gush Katif".





Where are they?



The five main fishing areas of Gaza are Beit Lahyia, Gaza city, Der al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah.

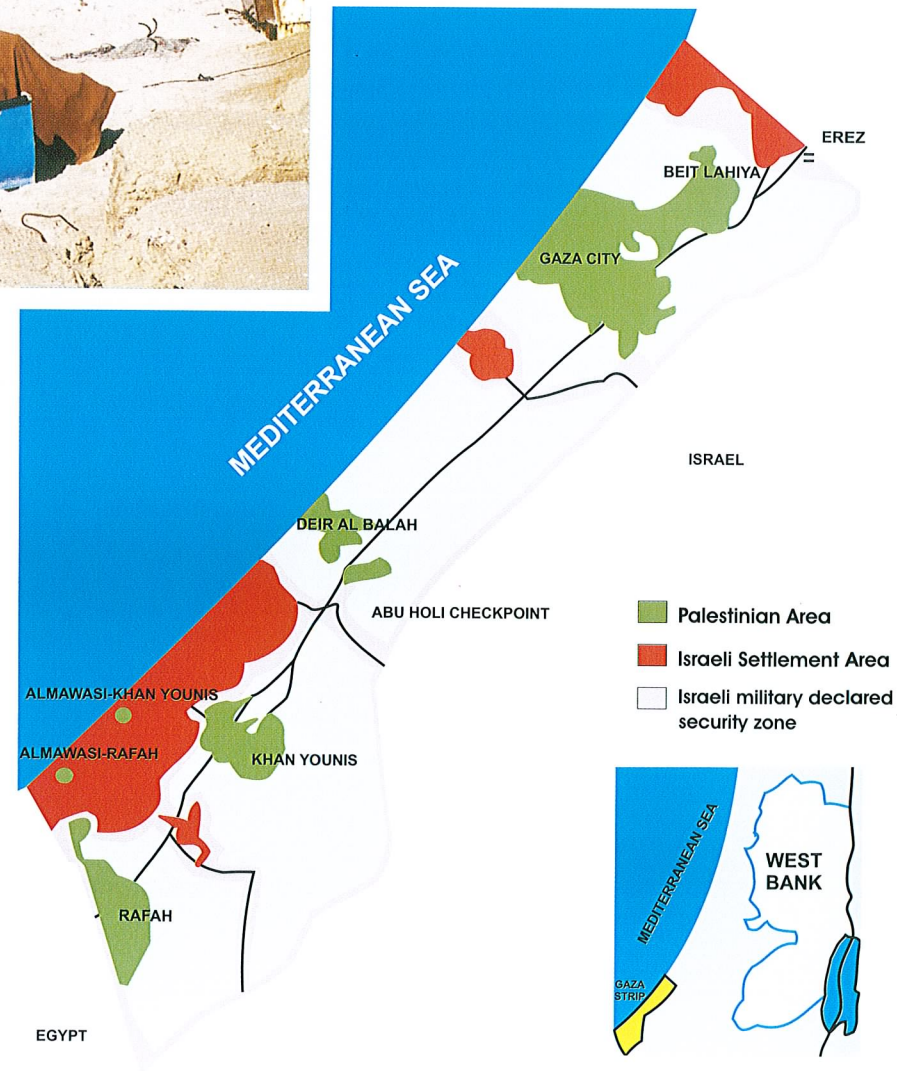
Since April 2002, a full ban has been in force on fishing in the South of the Gaza Strip, in Rafah, Khan Younis and Al Mawasi, and access restricted to Palestinian fishermen from the north of the Gaza strip, from Beit Lahyia, Gaza and Der al-Balah.

Starting at the southern-most tip, **Rafah** is on the border with Egypt. The city of 140,000, looks grey, reflecting the color of its cement buildings.

It is possible, from the terrace of one of those buildings, to contemplate the sea, near but inaccessible for the Rafah residents because of the Israeli settlements of Gush Katif block.



Mr. Yousef Al-Zahhar





In April 2002, the Israeli Coast Guards declared Rafah shores a "closed water zone" and prevented Palestinian fishermen and bathers as well from going there.

Fishermen's boats and tools remained anchored on that inaccessible seashore. Yousef Al-Zahhar, President of the Rafah Union of Fishermen, says they got damaged by the long period of closure.

Khan Younis is the largest town in the southern Gaza Strip, located 25 km south of Gaza City. The city, its refugee camp and surrounding areas have an estimated population of 258,000. It is a central market for the agricultural products of the nearby villages.

It also houses the only entrance to Al-Mawasi, through which fishermen of Rafah and Khan Younis can reach the sea.

Al-Mawasi is a small area located between Gush Katif settlement block and the sea. It is a narrow strip of coastal land 1 km wide and 14 km long, inhabited by around 8,200 people. The main source of income was fishing and farming but for the last three years, fishing in Al Mawasi has been prohibited for Palestinians.

Israeli Authorities set up a checkpoint at the entrance of Al-Mawasi, therefore getting there is now solely via this military checkpoint. During the Second Intifada, the Israeli Army destroyed at least 120 Palestinian houses there, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. The Army destroyed houses adjacent to the Khan Younis refugee camp, that obstruct control over Al-Mawasi entrance.





The Israeli soldiers applied various control procedures that involve long waiting periods for delivery of vital goods, specifying certain days for the delivery of those goods, such as food, iron and wood. To do so, they adopted a "back to back" procedure, consisting of unloading the goods on one side of the checkpoint, having them checked by soldiers and dogs, and then loading them back up on the other side.

The closure of Al-Mawasi that was in force in April 2002, left fishermen living outside of this area with no possibility of fishing.

Following this closure, some fishermen from Khan Younis, who can no longer fish themselves, are now forced to sell fish coming from the northern areas of the Gaza Strip, like Der al-Balah or Gaza city.

Der al-Balah means "Monastery of the Date Palm". It is a small fishing town located between Khan Younis and Gaza city. Nowadays, a palm grove extends south of the town, towards Khan Younis.

The Israeli Authorities did not apply a total ban on fishing neither on Der al Balah nor on Bet Lahyia on the north, but they imposed restrictions, which day by day, minimized the activity of the fishermen in both areas.

Gaza City is the main city and administrative center of the Gaza Strip, and the most densely populated area in the world.





Gaza city has the largest fishing community in Gaza Strip, with more than 1,500 families living in the *Shati* "Beach" refugee camp.

Shati camp, with more than 77,000 inhabitants is oriented next to the sea. All over the camp people work on their boats, repairing nets on the beach, preparing the tools for the next day; children help here and there carrying gas bottles for the "hasaka" boats, fishing from small platforms, throwing nets from the shore or collecting the nets near the beach.

Shati camp is close to the only port in the Gaza strip. Small boats are anchored there, and it is the location of the fish market "Al- Hesba", the Directorate General of Fisheries and Al Tawfiq, the fishermen's cooperative, which provides services to its members, including ice to keep fish fresh.

Both the Directorate General of Fisheries and Al Tawfiq cooperative have projects and proposals that require support from international organizations, such as building the Gaza seaport, but these have been hindered by the restrictions and violence of the last 3 years. For example, work on the Gaza seaport, a funded project, has been suspended since October 2000.

All of these aspects compound Gaza city's worsening economic situation, deepening poverty, which is reflected in high unemployment rates. Gaza's main street has changed into a jobless avenue where people of the sea go to the city searching for jobs, while people of the city go to the sea looking for means of survival.

Beit Lahyia is a fishing village to the north of Gaza city. Here, some people farm in the family gardens, others practice fishing activities. The fishermen in Beit Lahyia fish from platforms made of fibreglass, similar to a surfboard, or they throw nets out from the coast to the sea.

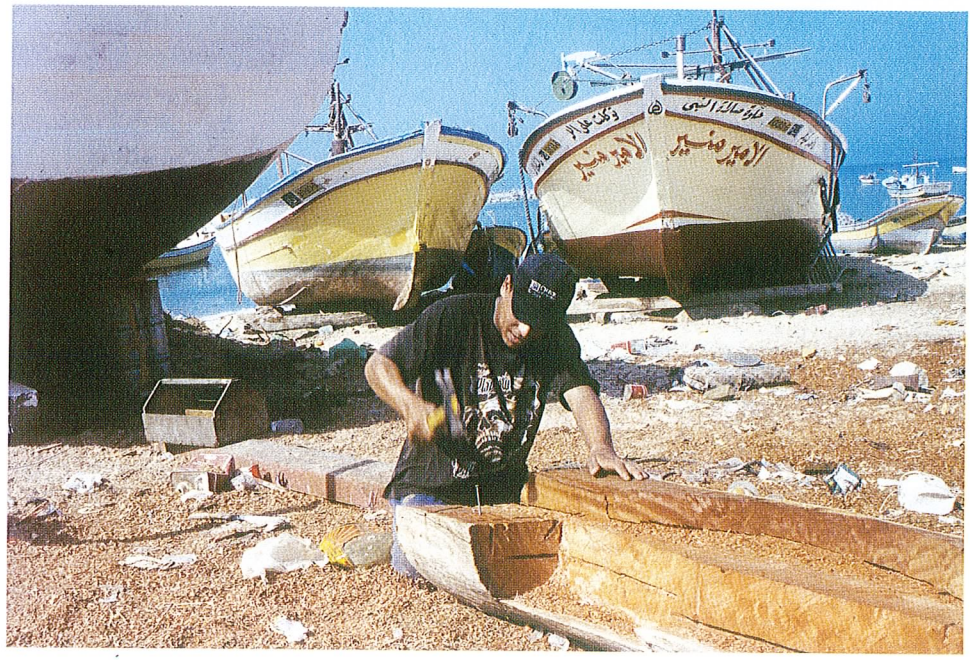
But Beit Lahyia's shore is close to the Jewish settlement of Dugit. Measures adopted by the Israeli Authorities to ensure security for the settlement hinders the daily work of the fishermen. At sunset, fishermen leave the area for fear of Israeli gunfire, thus they miss the best time for fishing which is at night.

Seasons

Fishermen in Gaza earn most of their annual income during the sardine seasons. The rest of the year their boats remain inactive.

"There are two main seasons for fishing sardines", says Nader Al Attar, a 52 year old fisherman from Bait Lahyia. The sardines' two seasons are spring and autumn, when banks of migrating sardines pass Gaza.

Fishery in Gaza



In Gaza, there is an old tradition of building boats where experts work by hand, in long sessions on the seashore, in front of the sawmill where timbers are prepared for building launches. They meet in groups of 6 or 7 to share knowledge and talk about complicated building techniques, but none of them will use a single map, computers or precision tools.

This way, traditional arts are transmitted between people of the sea, where experts in sailing techniques exchange knowledge with the construction expert. On the beach, workers cut thick wood trunks brought from Israel into pieces, using an electrical saw, and then timbers are joined together to form the frame of what will become a launch.

Several families will save money to construct such a handmade launch. They will build it together and work in it as partners.

The majority of Gaza fishermen use a boat called a "hasaka shanshula". It is powered by an outboard engine, and has five fishermen on board. They go out to sea at dark, using old gas lamps to attract fish towards the boat.

Four or five motorless boats are chained to the hasaka shanshula and tugged to the fishing spots. With its strong engine, the hasaka shanshula pulls these five motorless boats in order to reach the proper spot for fishing. The hasaka shanshula anchors surrounded by the 5 motorless boats in a circle, about 200 to 400 meters apart, to help the hasaka shanshula attract the fish with the light of their gas lamps. They also collect the nets and put the fish in the motorless boats.

Along the Gaza coast, you can see fishermen and children fishing with nets from a platform called a "hasaka mujdaf", which is rowed along the shore. Most of these fishermen do not own boats, so they do not have fishing permits. Later on, they realize the importance of obtaining fishing permits and start to apply for permits, which are normally issued by the Directorate General of Fisheries.

The Israeli Authorities require fishermen to be checked by the Palestinian military each time they go down to the sea. Israeli Coast Guard boats keep an open eye on the Palestinian fishermen's movements.

License numbers and boat colours identify the fishermen and the area to which they belong.

According to Abu Hassira, "Starting from the Israeli occupation of Gaza Strip in 1967, the boats had to be painted in each area with a different colour: Gaza boats are painted in yellow, Der al-Balah in green, Khan Younis in orange, and Rafah in white. Thus, Israeli coast guards will be able to know the area each boat belongs to and the area where it is allowed to fish". This measure is still in force.



Problems



Unlike other parts of the world, the major problem here is not over-fishing, but restrictions on fishing.

"When the Palestinian Authority was establised in 1994, in the beginning the boats were not allowed to cross Israeli settlements. The number of detained fishermen and shooting at boats by the Israeli Army has increased", said Abu Hassira.

"What was possible to fish in one day during Egyptian times is not possible to fish now in one month. I wish we could live in peace like before", the centenarian fisherman says with sorrow.

Environment

The Head of the Directorate of Fisheries, Mr. Tariq Saqr says that all the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, including the area near Gaza, yields poor fishing in comparison with the rest of the Mediterranean. The main reason is historical: the construction of the High Dam in 1970 at Aswan in Egypt. Before that, the annual flooding of the Nile River carried plankton to the Mediterranean sea, attracting large quantities of fish. After the dam was built, there was no flooding, and therefore no more plankton was washed down into the sea. The quantity of fish diminished. This scarcity of fish has forced fishermen in Gaza to be innovative, and to create tools which allow them to catch more fish, like wrap-around nets.

Social problems

The Israeli restrictions severely affected the fishing sector, leaving most of the Strip's 3,500 fishing families with no income. Hundreds of boats are lined up on the beach, permitted to do no more than just float offshore.

Atief Abaid Al-Quran is a fisherman from Der al-Balah and a father of twelve. "Most of the days we are fishing in shallow water. For almost a month, I used to go to sea from 5 am to 17 pm and did not catch one single fish. I have stopped going to sea", he says. "I depend entirely on humanitarian aid, but even this aid is not enough to feed my family".

Al-Quran complained of heavy household bills, especially because four of his children are in school. "This year I could not pay their school fees. The children went to school only after the Union of Fishermen helped me. I have no idea what will happen next year, probably I will not be able to send them to school. I chose this job because I have no other alternative. Since Israel has reduced the number of work permits, I have not been able to work inside the Israeli industrial area of Erez", he said.

Another fisherman from Der al-Balah, Al-Abed Al Quran, stands behind his large boat which he can use no more, watching his sons sitting on the beach. The 70 year old looks out at the sea, and says, "once it comfortably sustained my family of 50. This very large sea is now very tiny for me".

Al-Abed Al Quran is a father of seven boys, all of them fishermen. "Now we come to the sea from sunrise to sunset and sit on the shore without even thinking of going to sea, because we know in advance that we are not going to catch a single fish. We do not even have money to pay the fuel of our hasakas", he complained.

Al-Abed Al Quran and his sons own five hasakas. Currently, all are anchored on the beach of Der al-Balah. Fishermen hardly secure their daily food. Almost all fishermen in Gaza depend on fishing for income, and do not have other skills.

"Two weeks ago, the municipal employees cut off the electricity at my house because I did not have money to pay my bills", said Al-Abed. He has worked in fishing for more than 50 years. That is why the sea is his entire world.

"I open my eyes to the sea", he said. "I have no other place to go. I was born here and my intention is to die here too".

Physical threats

Since the beginning of the Second Intifada, fishermen from Al-Mawasi, Der al-Balah and Gaza city have been exposed to almost daily assaults, confiscation of boats, arrests and gunfire from Israeli coastal guards several times a day according to fishermen and eyewitnesses reports, including aid workers.



Adnan Al-Aqra', a 42 year old fisherman from Der al-Balah, stated that Palestinian fishermen could not enter the sea for many days because of the Israeli attacks. "Israeli coastal guards detained at least 30 of my colleagues. They also confiscated boats, nets and motors and dragged them to Ashkelon prison".

Salim Attar, a 54 year old fisherman from Beit Lahyia, sips tea as he relates how he was apprehended by the Israeli navy earlier this year. "I was on my boat fishing in the limited area. An Israeli military patrol boat approached me and started shooting at the boat. The soldiers ordered me through loudspeakers to undress and swim towards them. They arrested me and held me at the Erez industrial area and forced me to pay a fine of about $200 before releasing me a week later". He has never been given a reason for any of this unjustified treatment.

"The Israeli patrols destroy the anchored fishing boats and the fixed nets. Sometimes they drag the nets and throw them beyond the limited area or throw a heavy anchor over the nets damaging them severely", said Hisham el-Attar, a 25 year old from Beit Lahyia who has worked as a fisherman for 7 years. "They only want to bother us during the fishing seasons. Even during the period in which we are allowed to go to sea, the permitted fishing area is very limited, not more than two nautical miles. It is shallow water with no rocks for fish to gather in", Hisham added.

Thus for the past three years the Gaza fishermen have not been able to fish during the sardine seasons, because the area where most of the sardines are, is located beyond this 3 - 6 mile limit.

Marketing

Fishermen face difficulties in marketing their catch, because the majority of Gaza inhabitants are now too poor to buy fish. Fishermen used to sell their fish locally or in the Gaza fish market Al Hesba, near the port.

Hisham el-Attar, a 25 year old fisherman from Beit Lahyia sells his catch in his village at low prices: "People here in the village are very poor. They do not have money to buy fish. At the same time I cannot go and sell my fish in Gaza, because transportation from here to Gaza is expensive", Hisham explains.



Siege



The whole of Gaza strip which is only 360 square kilometres in area, is the home of one and a quarter million Palestinians. The 7,500 Israeli settlers, who live in 23 settlements is an obstacle for the Palestinian fishermen because they occupied the coastal area of Gaza.

In 2000, after the eruption of the Second Intifada, Israel imposed closures over all crossing points and a nautical siege from the west. The Army thus completely controls movement of residents in and out of the Strip, trapping most people inside Gaza, including fishermen.

Most restrictive for the fishery sector is the nautical siege imposed over the 45 kilometres coastal line, depriving Gaza fishermen of their only source of income.

Yousef al Zahhar, president of the Union of Fishers in Rafah, complained about the Israeli embargo, imposed on the southern Gaza strip in April 2002 and said: "Fishermen are facing very harsh circumstances because they are deprived of income and not even allowed to take care of their boats, on the shore of the closed area".

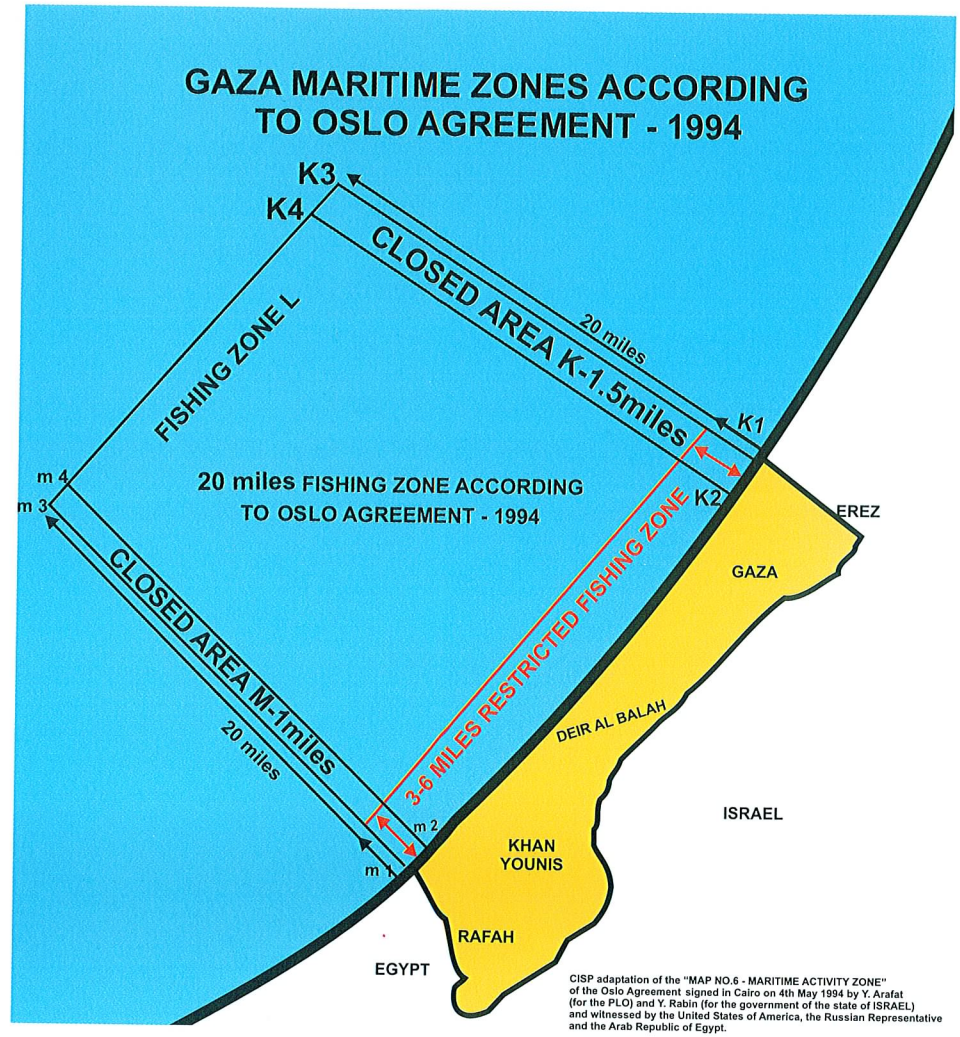
In the north areas of the Strip where access to the sea is permitted to fishermen, Israeli authorities have frequently cut off such access for periods of weeks or months even.

Over the past 3 years, Israeli authorities have also reduced the Palestinian fishing area from 20 nautical miles from the shoreline, as agreed in the Oslo accords, to 3 to 6 nautical miles. "But fish in those areas is very scarce", explains Atief Aqra', a fisherman from Der al-Balah.

These restrictive measures have severely affected the quantity of the catches, reduced the sale of fish to the local market, and increased its price.

Gaza fish used to be distributed in the West Bank. However, due to the current restrictive measures, fish from Gaza can no longer be transported there. The catches are too small, and not sufficient even for the local market, in addition to the problem of border closures with Israel.

These restrictions have reduced the fishery sector's contribution to the national economy by seventy five per cent. Fishing used to provide almost 4% of the economy. Now it is only 1%.





The Union of Fishermen



Mr. Nizar Ayyash

Nizzar Ayyash has worked as a fisherman for 36 years. He lives now in Der al-Balah and is president of the General Union of Fishermen in Gaza Strip.

He volunteers to do this in addition to his own work as a fisherman, and sees the opportunity to utilize the prohibited fishing days to do the Union work.

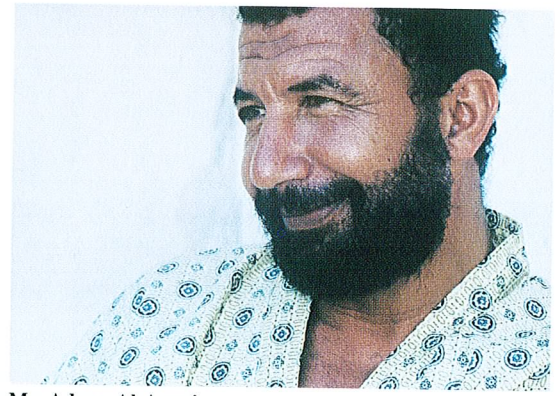
From Der al-Balah, Ayyash coordinates with the presidents of the other regional Unions, in Gaza city, Khan Younis and Rafah. The Union's executive is elected every four years.


Mr. Mohammed Basalah

Most Union work is done by telephone, since Israeli soldiers often close the main checkpoint of Abu Holy, which divides Gaza into two parts. This cuts the only access to Khan Younis and Rafah, and makes it difficult for Ayyash to reach his colleagues in the south of the Gaza Strip.

"Financially, the Union is supported by membership fees", says Union Treasurer Adel Migdad. He adds that there is a need to raise funds for the Union, in order to cover fishermen's labour rights and social problems. The Union of Fishermen presently provides health insurance services, in spite of its limited budget.

Adnan Al-Aqra', Head of Social Affairs, confirms that Union members suffer social problems due to lack of income, affecting all aspects of their lives. He says the Union tries to help large families who live in few rooms by providing them with health care and paying school fees also.


Mr. Adnan Al-Aqra'

President Ayyash states that the Union supports its members through emergency aid and international cooperation projects. He says that the Union strengthened its management abilities by their participation in implementing a food distribution project funded by ECHO.

It is worth mentioning that the visit of two ECHO European delegations was highly appreciated by the Union, says Ayyash. "They met us and expressed their solidarity with our problems".



Directorate of Fisheries


Mr. Tariq Saqr

The General Directorate of Fisheries was established in 1995, not long after the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. It is part of the Ministry of Agriculture, and its Gaza director, Mr. Tariq Saqr, says it plays an important role in developing fishery in Gaza.

"At the very beginning of the Palestinian Authority, the progress of investment in the fishery sector rapidly grew. That means every 13 months, one fisherman would earn back from fishing what he paid into buying a boat and its equipment. Due to the current situation, the fisherman needs 8 years to make the same amount of money; nowadays he cannot even pay for the fuel, nets or other basic equipment".

"This situation pushed us to find alternative jobs through organizing special workshops to teach them boat maintenance, solving technical problems and rebuilding boats, and there is a Danish project that provides them with material needed for maintenance", Mr. Saqr says. "Fishermen will be able to do maintenance work by themselves. The aim of such projects is to alleviate the suffering of fishermen during this bad situation".

Director Saqr stresses on the importance of developing the Gaza seaport.

"The problem of not having a seaport obliged us to use bulldozers to pull boats from the sea, damaging the boats as they are made of wood. The seaport will allow us to use boats made of iron. Inside the port we are busy now establishing a railway system for pulling the boats and returning them back to sea, so as not to use bulldozers in the future, and reduce damage to the boats".

Women

There is a project for the fishermen's wives.

Fishermen's wives have given alternative sources of income generation, such as sewing and food production. The training also includes leadership skills, with the aim of establishing a women organization similar to the Union of Fishermen.

The aim of the Women's Union will be teaching them new skills for earning money to support their families during the sea closures.

"We reached an agreement with the World Food Program to buy the food produced by the women and include them in the World Food Program food baskets, which will be distributed to the needy beneficiaries", says Director Saqr.

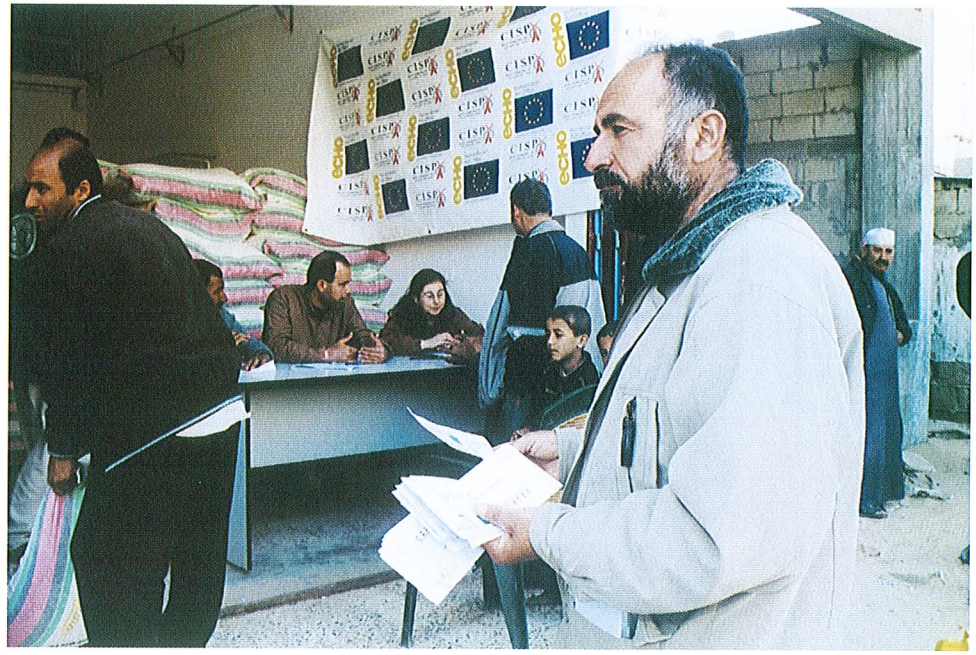
Levels of consumption

The Directorate statistics shows that the level of individual fish consumption in Gaza was 3.8 kilograms of fish per year. Now it is less than 1 kilogram.

"We hope that we will be able to restore the normal production level very soon", says Director Saqr.



Fishers Project



"We live near the sea, but we can no longer live from fishing", reported Mohammed Basalah, a fisherman for almost 30 years, who has succeeded in keeping good relationships with Gaza's fishermen's families, through his job as Secretary of the Union of Fishermen.

Fishermen's families in Gaza, are suffering from insufficient daily food intake. The heavy restrictions imposed on fishery by Israel brings down the level of the fishermen's families food consumption. "Many days men return home empty handed, without money nor fish... in fact, they come back indebted from buying fuel for nothing", says Zahera Hassan Abu Jayab, a fisherman's wife.



Mr. Omar Salah

Fishermen's wives are responsible for organizing food for their extended families; accustomed to include fish daily, now they face difficulties in doing that.

Fatmah Mahmoud Ayyash, mother of nine, needs to use her creativity to feed them when there is no fish at home: "In the last two months, my husband did not catch even one fish for the house. Until the next season of sardines we will not eat fish".

Khairya Mustafa Basalah goes to Der al-Balah market to search for food. "The best vegetables come from Khan Younis and Rafah, but if the checkpoint of Abu Holy is closed, we have to rely on Der al-Balah's vegetables, which are meagre and expensive. I cook traditional Palestinian dishes: "Mjaddara", which is mixed of rice and lentils, "mulukhyia", a green vegetable similar to spinach or "bamia" ,okra with rice, and once a day I bake enough bread for the nine members of my family".

The daily uncertainty of being able to provide food for tomorrow, worries parents and raises their stress levels. In order to alleviate the insecurity of fishermen families, CISP began a food distribution project. It was implemented with the cooperation of the Union of Fishermen and funded by the European Union Humanitarian Aid Office ECHO. Each food basket contains olive oil, rice, flour, lentils, salt and sugar and was distributed to 3,500 families living on fishing, all over the Gaza Strip.

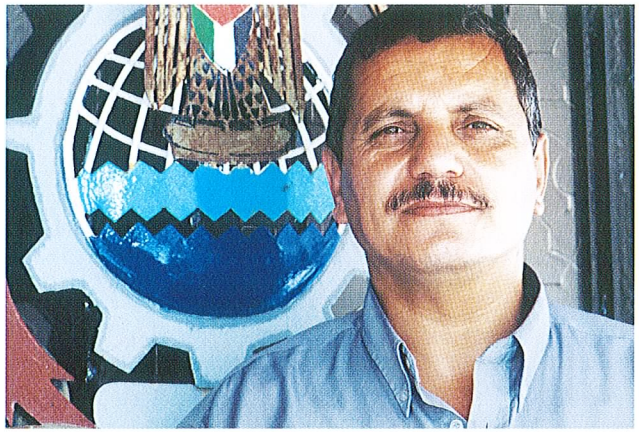
Implementation

The executive of the Union of Fishermen and its representatives in Rafah, Khan Younis, Der al-Balah and Gaza city, took part in the project implementation actively. A fishermen's committee from Beit Lahyia was also involved in it.

This project received services and support from many Palestinian organizations and institutions, like the Union of Agricultural Work Committees -UAWC, Al Azhar and the Islamic University of Gaza, the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaza and Ramallah and the Directorate General of Fisheries.

CISP has worked closely with Mr. Abdel Nasser Madi, an expert from the Directorate General of Fisheries, in preparing information and reports submitted to the International organizations, concerning the problems of the fishing sector in Gaza.

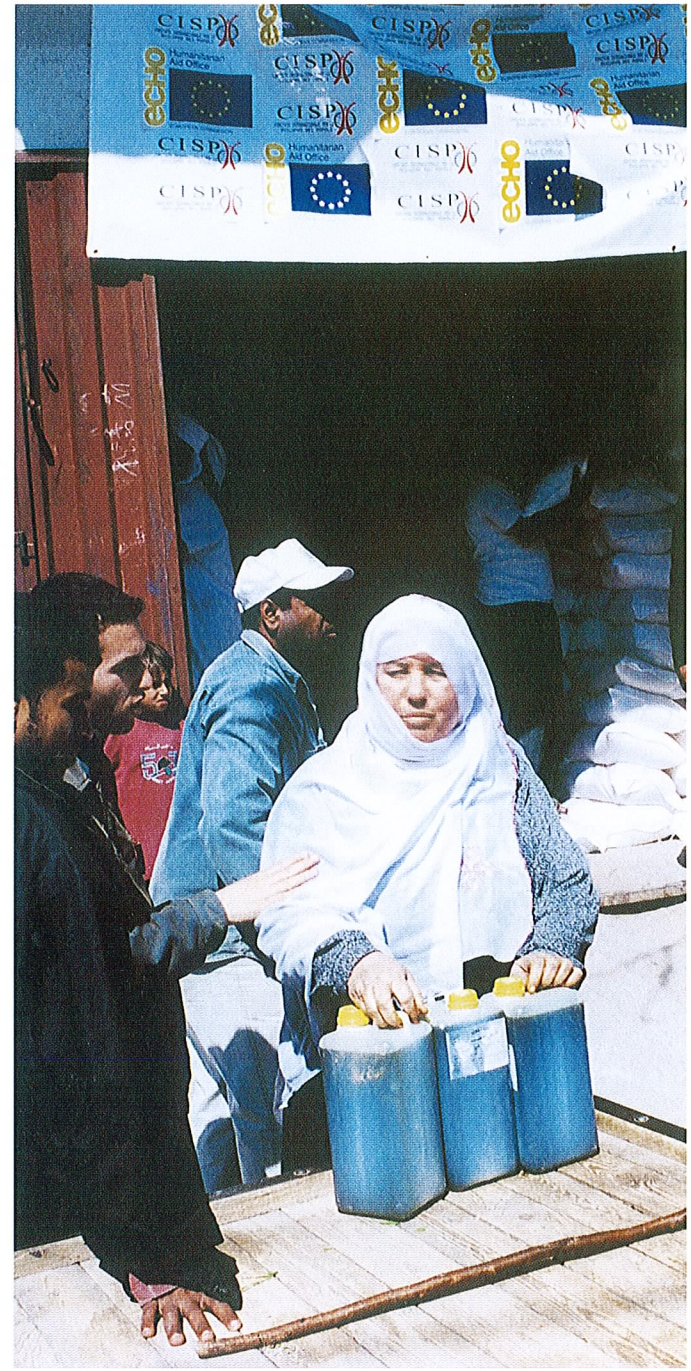
A joint committee of the Union of Fishermen and CISP staff worked in the food distributions. Different teams were organized for the distribution of coupons, loading and unloading of food baskets and one team for co-ordinating and controlling the distribution process.



Mr. Abdel Nasser Madi

This project was a good opportunity for the fishing community of Beit Lahyia to make contact with the Union of Fishermen and the Directorate General of Fisheries.

For CISP, the implementation of this project has been a valuable opportunity to work directly with the fishermen of Gaza. The positive exchange of work experiences encouraged CISP to request donors to continue giving their assistance to the fishery sector in Gaza. It is also a base for the implementation of future projects to develop the Gaza fishing community.



Food security in Palestine.
A priority for ECHO



The food security situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is paradoxical. Although food commodities are generally available, access is increasingly limited because of physical and economic constraints. Among these are restrictions on the free movement of goods and people (farmers face difficulties accessing their lands and moving products to markets), physical damage to household assets and property, and reduced access to employment in Israel and with the Palestinian private sector where investment has been put on hold in particular in the agricultural field. Unemployment in the occupied Palestinian territories has risen to dramatic levels and about 60% of the population currently lives below the poverty line.

If some households have until now been able to manage in difficult circumstances, albeit with dwindling resources, the resilience of many has been weakened and coping mechanisms have been strained to the limit. Families are forced to reduce spending on food, affecting both the quantity and quality of the food consumed, as well as on healthcare. This has had debilitating effects on their food security status, the elderly and children proving particularly vulnerable.

According to United Nations estimates, approximately 40% of the West Bank and Gaza population (1.4 million people) are now "food insecure"; a further 30% (1.1 million people) are under threat of becoming food insecure should current conditions persist. Overall, food insecurity is a real or near constant threat for about 70% of those living in the Territories.

The response to this alarming situation by the European Union's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) combines the provision of basic food commodities and measures reducing the pressure on the budget of the most vulnerable households.

With ECHO support, emergency food aid is distributed to chronically poor families through UNRWA, the World Food Programme and non-governmental organisations – CISP's assistance to the Gaza fishing communities being one example among others. Food baskets include locally made products such as olive oil, with the additional benefit of supporting the local economy in general, and impoverished farmers in particular.

These programmes complement similar interventions supported by the Food Security Unit of the European Commission, as well as other activities funded by ECHO such as improving access to safe drinking water and adequate health services for the most impoverished – which also contribute to improving food security.

From the start of the Intifada in 2000 until mid-2004, ECHO has provided more than 148 million Euros in aid to the most needy in the West Bank and Gaza and to Palestinian refugees in neighbouring countries. The European Commission is one of the largest donors of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians.

Humanitarian action worldwide

ECHO is the European Union's Humanitarian Aid Office, a service of the European Commission. Since 1992, ECHO has funded relief to millions of victims of both natural disasters and man-made crises outside the EU. Aid is channeled impartially, straight to victims, regardless of their race, religion and political beliefs. ECHO works with around 160 operational partners, mainly organisations that have signed a framework partnership agreement with the Commission. Its partners include specialist United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as CISP.

ECHO is one of the biggest sources of humanitarian aid in the world, providing more than 600 million euro in 2003. ECHO's funding, taken together with the aid allocated by EU Members States, makes the European Union the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world. Since it was set up, ECHO has supported projects in more than 100 countries. The funds are spent on goods and services such as food, clothing, shelter, medical provisions, water supply systems, sanitation, emergency repairs and mine clearing. ECHO also funds disaster preparedness and mitigation projects in regions prone to natural catastrophes.

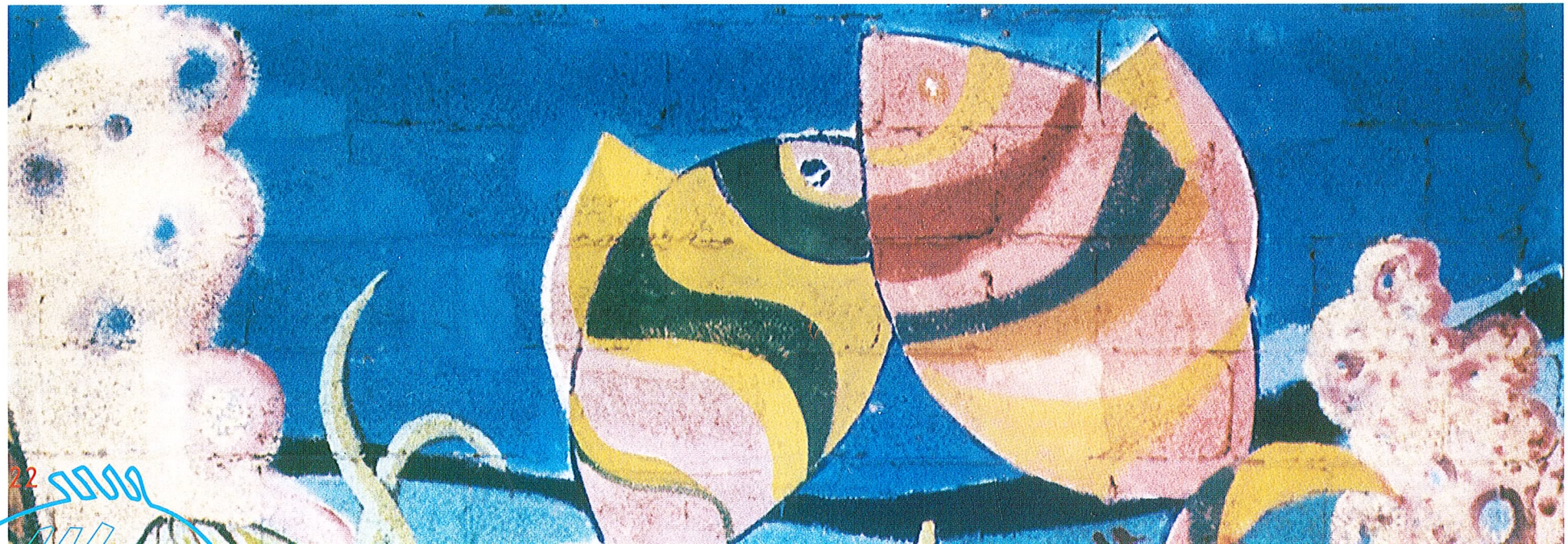
Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)

The International Committee for the Development of Peoples is a European non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1982 active in international co-operation. Its goals are mentioned in a Declaration of Intent where the following main priorities are stressed:

- basic rights: food security, combating poverty and exclusion, enhancing natural resources;
- the other fundamental rights of the individual and local communities, such as education, vocational training, health care and healthy environment;
- support for peacemaking process and overcoming complex emergencies.

Within the field of emergency and humanitarian aid, until now CISP has had the following priorities: global attention to refugee communities, returnees and displaced people, health services, disaster preparedness, reactivation and reconstruction after natural catastrophes or conflict.

CISP applies a Code of Conduct consistent with its strategic and methodological guidelines when formulating and implementing its humanitarian, rehabilitation or development co-operation projects. This enhances the work of the management group and all those who, in Europe and abroad, identify, implement and monitor the projects while in progess.



The fishermen



One hundred and three years living in Gaza. This is the story of Haj Mohammad Abdala Arafat Abu Hassira, who is Palestine's Old Man of the Sea.

He was born in 1901 in the western neighbourhood of Gaza city called Al Bahar "The Sea". In those days, Gaza was a small hamlet in the desert by the Mediterranean. Abu Hassira has 10 children, 6 sons and 4 daughters, with one hundred and thirty two grandchildren and great- grandchildren.

That is not unusual here. Fishermen have large families, and Gaza is one of the places in the world with the highest birth rates.

Abu Hassira has lost some of his hearing and sight, but he is still in good health and his memory remains sharp, especially for the smallest details of the history of Gaza and his family. He says his memories keep him young.

He started working when he was a child loading barley onto British boats, like his father. "They paid me a quarter-man salary, then they paid me as half-man, later on I got a full salary and finally, I became the Fishers' Chief", he says proudly.

"In those days, fishermen did not have boats. We fished with nets from the shore. Boats were used for transport, to load boats coming from abroad. These were rowing or sailing boats, with room for four to ten people".

At that time there was only a few fishermen in Gaza and they all knew each other. Abu Hassira says that in his grandfather's time, the fishermen in Gaza "could be counted with the fingers of one hand and in southern Gaza, which was nearly uninhabited, there was no one".

Currently Gaza has about 3,500 families, fishing in an area of 45 kilometres along the seashore, from Bet Lahyia in the north to Rafah in the south.

Abu Hassira narrates that in Turkish times, the land close to the sea was owned by the "mufti" Abdel Hay. He remembers those times were, "Like tar, a black life with many difficulties and hunger. The Turks took most of the males to fight the Empire's wars". But, he says, "it's worse now, because then there was no border in the sea. It was open from Ras Annaqura near Lebanon in the north to Port Sa'id in Egypt in the south".

When the British came, life in Gaza changed. During the first years, "The British horsemen carried food to be distributed among the people. Shortly afterwards, they started acting as occupiers forbidding the export of oranges, the most important product in Palestine at the time".

"I remember when the first refugees arrived in Gaza in 1948. I was in Khan Younis hunting 'Fer', which is what we call the birds that cross the sea during the migratory season. At that time, many refugees started arriving in very bad conditions, without a

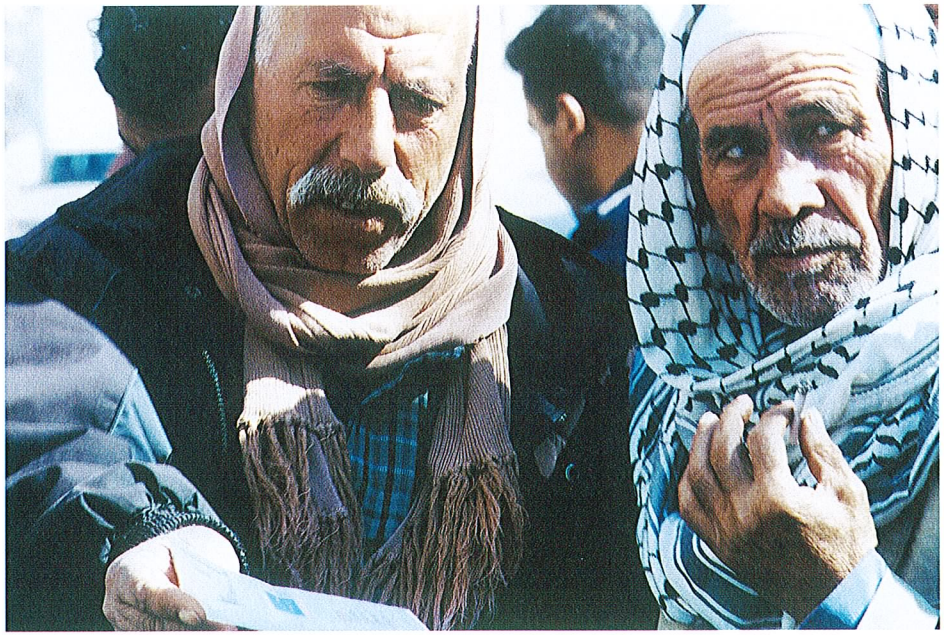
place to sleep. I took some of them to my house and to a local mosque. At the mosque, we divided the place using our boat sails so there was space for several families, and we collected food from families of Gaza to be distributed to the refugees".

Those refugees who came from Asqalan – now called Ashqelon by the Israelis - Jaffa, or Ashdod, increased the number of fishermen in Gaza. Many of their descendants now form the present fishing community.

"When the Israeli Army entered Gaza in 1967, we were loading oranges in the port. At that time, I was the chief of Gaza port. We left our work, ran to our houses and remained there for some weeks".

Then the Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, asked for a meeting with Abu Hassira, as the man responsible for the sea and the port area.

"With the Israeli occupation, the sea borders have been changed; in the South it was not possible to go further than Rafah, while nowadays it is not allowed to go behind Der al-Balah due to the Israeli settlements of Gush Katif".





Where are they?



The five main fishing areas of Gaza are Beit Lahyia, Gaza city, Der al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah.

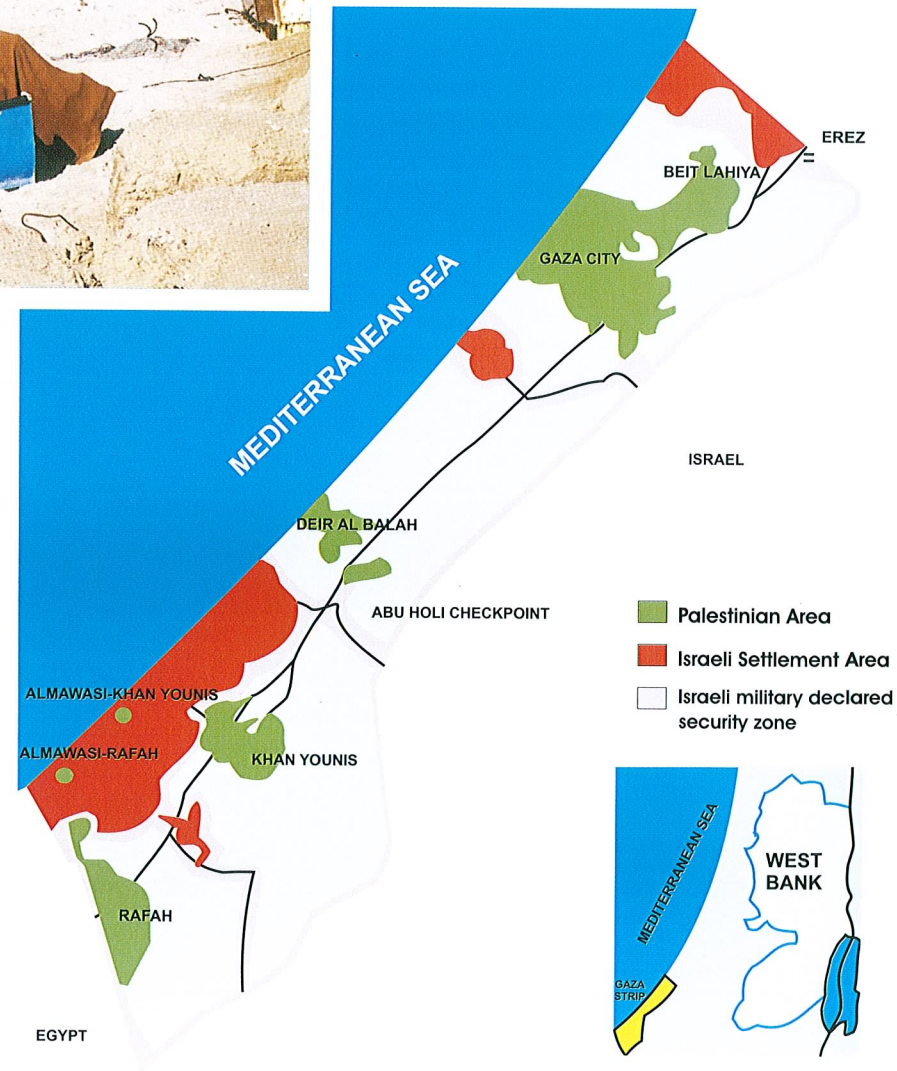
Since April 2002, a full ban has been in force on fishing in the South of the Gaza Strip, in Rafah, Khan Younis and Al Mawasi, and access restricted to Palestinian fishermen from the north of the Gaza strip, from Beit Lahyia, Gaza and Der al-Balah.

Starting at the southern-most tip, **Rafah** is on the border with Egypt. The city of 140,000, looks grey, reflecting the color of its cement buildings.

It is possible, from the terrace of one of those buildings, to contemplate the sea, near but inaccessible for the Rafah residents because of the Israeli settlements of Gush Katif block.



Mr. Yousef Al-Zahhar





In April 2002, the Israeli Coast Guards declared Rafah shores a "closed water zone" and prevented Palestinian fishermen and bathers as well from going there.

Fishermen's boats and tools remained anchored on that inaccessible seashore. Yousef Al-Zahhar, President of the Rafah Union of Fishermen, says they got damaged by the long period of closure.

Khan Younis is the largest town in the southern Gaza Strip, located 25 km south of Gaza City. The city, its refugee camp and surrounding areas have an estimated population of 258,000. It is a central market for the agricultural products of the nearby villages.

It also houses the only entrance to Al-Mawasi, through which fishermen of Rafah and Khan Younis can reach the sea.

Al-Mawasi is a small area located between Gush Katif settlement block and the sea. It is a narrow strip of coastal land 1 km wide and 14 km long, inhabited by around 8,200 people. The main source of income was fishing and farming but for the last three years, fishing in Al Mawasi has been prohibited for Palestinians.

Israeli Authorities set up a checkpoint at the entrance of Al-Mawasi, therefore getting there is now solely via this military checkpoint. During the Second Intifada, the Israeli Army destroyed at least 120 Palestinian houses there, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. The Army destroyed houses adjacent to the Khan Younis refugee camp, that obstruct control over Al-Mawasi entrance.





The Israeli soldiers applied various control procedures that involve long waiting periods for delivery of vital goods, specifying certain days for the delivery of those goods, such as food, iron and wood. To do so, they adopted a "back to back" procedure, consisting of unloading the goods on one side of the checkpoint, having them checked by soldiers and dogs, and then loading them back up on the other side.

The closure of Al-Mawasi that was in force in April 2002, left fishermen living outside of this area with no possibility of fishing.

Following this closure, some fishermen from Khan Younis, who can no longer fish themselves, are now forced to sell fish coming from the northern areas of the Gaza Strip, like Der al-Balah or Gaza city.

Der al-Balah means "Monastery of the Date Palm". It is a small fishing town located between Khan Younis and Gaza city. Nowadays, a palm grove extends south of the town, towards Khan Younis.

The Israeli Authorities did not apply a total ban on fishing neither on Der al Balah nor on Bet Lahyia on the north, but they imposed restrictions, which day by day, minimized the activity of the fishermen in both areas.

Gaza City is the main city and administrative center of the Gaza Strip, and the most densely populated area in the world.





Gaza city has the largest fishing community in Gaza Strip, with more than 1,500 families living in the *Shati* "Beach" refugee camp.

Shati camp, with more than 77,000 inhabitants is oriented next to the sea. All over the camp people work on their boats, repairing nets on the beach, preparing the tools for the next day; children help here and there carrying gas bottles for the "hasaka" boats, fishing from small platforms, throwing nets from the shore or collecting the nets near the beach.

Shati camp is close to the only port in the Gaza strip. Small boats are anchored there, and it is the location of the fish market "Al- Hesba", the Directorate General of Fisheries and Al Tawfiq, the fishermen's cooperative, which provides services to its members, including ice to keep fish fresh.

Both the Directorate General of Fisheries and Al Tawfiq cooperative have projects and proposals that require support from international organizations, such as building the Gaza seaport, but these have been hindered by the restrictions and violence of the last 3 years. For example, work on the Gaza seaport, a funded project, has been suspended since October 2000.

All of these aspects compound Gaza city's worsening economic situation, deepening poverty, which is reflected in high unemployment rates. Gaza's main street has changed into a jobless avenue where people of the sea go to the city searching for jobs, while people of the city go to the sea looking for means of survival.

Beit Lahyia is a fishing village to the north of Gaza city. Here, some people farm in the family gardens, others practice fishing activities. The fishermen in Beit Lahyia fish from platforms made of fibreglass, similar to a surfboard, or they throw nets out from the coast to the sea.

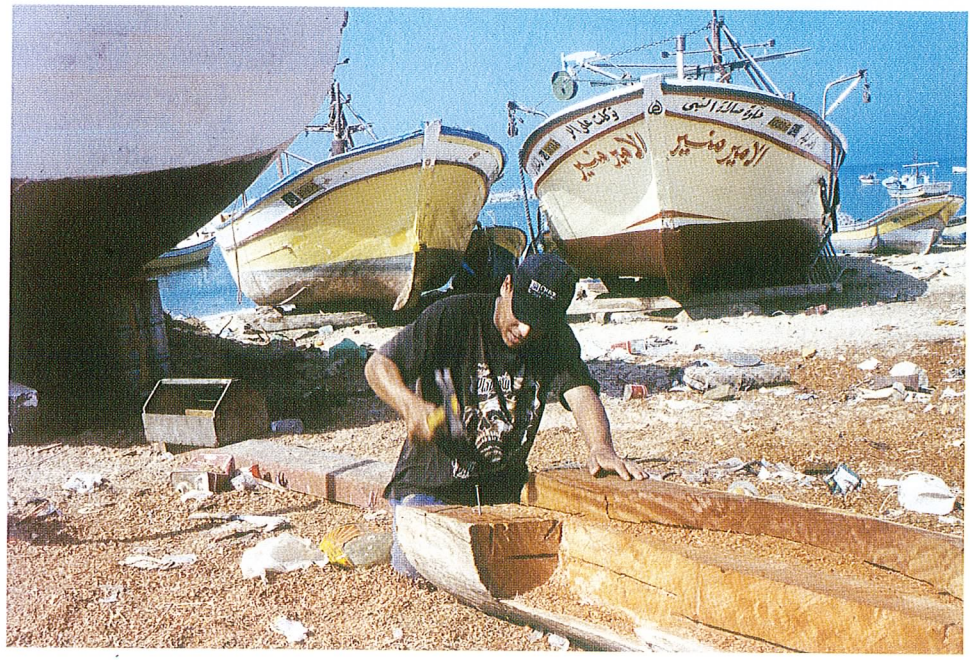
But Beit Lahyia's shore is close to the Jewish settlement of Dugit. Measures adopted by the Israeli Authorities to ensure security for the settlement hinders the daily work of the fishermen. At sunset, fishermen leave the area for fear of Israeli gunfire, thus they miss the best time for fishing which is at night.

Seasons

Fishermen in Gaza earn most of their annual income during the sardine seasons. The rest of the year their boats remain inactive.

"There are two main seasons for fishing sardines", says Nader Al Attar, a 52 year old fisherman from Bait Lahyia. The sardines' two seasons are spring and autumn, when banks of migrating sardines pass Gaza.

Fishery in Gaza



In Gaza, there is an old tradition of building boats where experts work by hand, in long sessions on the seashore, in front of the sawmill where timbers are prepared for building launches. They meet in groups of 6 or 7 to share knowledge and talk about complicated building techniques, but none of them will use a single map, computers or precision tools.

This way, traditional arts are transmitted between people of the sea, where experts in sailing techniques exchange knowledge with the construction expert. On the beach, workers cut thick wood trunks brought from Israel into pieces, using an electrical saw, and then timbers are joined together to form the frame of what will become a launch.

Several families will save money to construct such a handmade launch. They will build it together and work in it as partners.

The majority of Gaza fishermen use a boat called a "hasaka shanshula". It is powered by an outboard engine, and has five fishermen on board. They go out to sea at dark, using old gas lamps to attract fish towards the boat.

Four or five motorless boats are chained to the hasaka shanshula and tugged to the fishing spots. With its strong engine, the hasaka shanshula pulls these five motorless boats in order to reach the proper spot for fishing. The hasaka shanshula anchors surrounded by the 5 motorless boats in a circle, about 200 to 400 meters apart, to help the hasaka shanshula attract the fish with the light of their gas lamps. They also collect the nets and put the fish in the motorless boats.

Along the Gaza coast, you can see fishermen and children fishing with nets from a platform called a "hasaka mujdaf", which is rowed along the shore. Most of these fishermen do not own boats, so they do not have fishing permits. Later on, they realize the importance of obtaining fishing permits and start to apply for permits, which are normally issued by the Directorate General of Fisheries.

The Israeli Authorities require fishermen to be checked by the Palestinian military each time they go down to the sea. Israeli Coast Guard boats keep an open eye on the Palestinian fishermen's movements.

License numbers and boat colours identify the fishermen and the area to which they belong.

According to Abu Hassira, "Starting from the Israeli occupation of Gaza Strip in 1967, the boats had to be painted in each area with a different colour: Gaza boats are painted in yellow, Der al-Balah in green, Khan Younis in orange, and Rafah in white. Thus, Israeli coast guards will be able to know the area each boat belongs to and the area where it is allowed to fish". This measure is still in force.



Problems



Unlike other parts of the world, the major problem here is not over-fishing, but restrictions on fishing.

"When the Palestinian Authority was establised in 1994, in the beginning the boats were not allowed to cross Israeli settlements. The number of detained fishermen and shooting at boats by the Israeli Army has increased", said Abu Hassira.

"What was possible to fish in one day during Egyptian times is not possible to fish now in one month. I wish we could live in peace like before", the centenarian fisherman says with sorrow.

Environment

The Head of the Directorate of Fisheries, Mr. Tariq Saqr says that all the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, including the area near Gaza, yields poor fishing in comparison with the rest of the Mediterranean. The main reason is historical: the construction of the High Dam in 1970 at Aswan in Egypt. Before that, the annual flooding of the Nile River carried plankton to the Mediterranean sea, attracting large quantities of fish. After the dam was built, there was no flooding, and therefore no more plankton was washed down into the sea. The quantity of fish diminished. This scarcity of fish has forced fishermen in Gaza to be innovative, and to create tools which allow them to catch more fish, like wrap-around nets.

Social problems

The Israeli restrictions severely affected the fishing sector, leaving most of the Strip's 3,500 fishing families with no income. Hundreds of boats are lined up on the beach, permitted to do no more than just float offshore.

Atief Abaid Al-Quran is a fisherman from Der al-Balah and a father of twelve. "Most of the days we are fishing in shallow water. For almost a month, I used to go to sea from 5 am to 17 pm and did not catch one single fish. I have stopped going to sea", he says. "I depend entirely on humanitarian aid, but even this aid is not enough to feed my family".

Al-Quran complained of heavy household bills, especially because four of his children are in school. "This year I could not pay their school fees. The children went to school only after the Union of Fishermen helped me. I have no idea what will happen next year, probably I will not be able to send them to school. I chose this job because I have no other alternative. Since Israel has reduced the number of work permits, I have not been able to work inside the Israeli industrial area of Erez", he said.

Another fisherman from Der al-Balah, Al-Abed Al Quran, stands behind his large boat which he can use no more, watching his sons sitting on the beach. The 70 year old looks out at the sea, and says, "once it comfortably sustained my family of 50. This very large sea is now very tiny for me".

Al-Abed Al Quran is a father of seven boys, all of them fishermen. "Now we come to the sea from sunrise to sunset and sit on the shore without even thinking of going to sea, because we know in advance that we are not going to catch a single fish. We do not even have money to pay the fuel of our hasakas", he complained.

Al-Abed Al Quran and his sons own five hasakas. Currently, all are anchored on the beach of Der al-Balah. Fishermen hardly secure their daily food. Almost all fishermen in Gaza depend on fishing for income, and do not have other skills.

"Two weeks ago, the municipal employees cut off the electricity at my house because I did not have money to pay my bills", said Al-Abed. He has worked in fishing for more than 50 years. That is why the sea is his entire world.

"I open my eyes to the sea", he said. "I have no other place to go. I was born here and my intention is to die here too".

Physical threats

Since the beginning of the Second Intifada, fishermen from Al-Mawasi, Der al-Balah and Gaza city have been exposed to almost daily assaults, confiscation of boats, arrests and gunfire from Israeli coastal guards several times a day according to fishermen and eyewitnesses reports, including aid workers.



Adnan Al-Aqra', a 42 year old fisherman from Der al-Balah, stated that Palestinian fishermen could not enter the sea for many days because of the Israeli attacks. "Israeli coastal guards detained at least 30 of my colleagues. They also confiscated boats, nets and motors and dragged them to Ashkelon prison".

Salim Attar, a 54 year old fisherman from Beit Lahyia, sips tea as he relates how he was apprehended by the Israeli navy earlier this year. "I was on my boat fishing in the limited area. An Israeli military patrol boat approached me and started shooting at the boat. The soldiers ordered me through loudspeakers to undress and swim towards them. They arrested me and held me at the Erez industrial area and forced me to pay a fine of about $200 before releasing me a week later". He has never been given a reason for any of this unjustified treatment.

"The Israeli patrols destroy the anchored fishing boats and the fixed nets. Sometimes they drag the nets and throw them beyond the limited area or throw a heavy anchor over the nets damaging them severely", said Hisham el-Attar, a 25 year old from Beit Lahyia who has worked as a fisherman for 7 years. "They only want to bother us during the fishing seasons. Even during the period in which we are allowed to go to sea, the permitted fishing area is very limited, not more than two nautical miles. It is shallow water with no rocks for fish to gather in", Hisham added.

Thus for the past three years the Gaza fishermen have not been able to fish during the sardine seasons, because the area where most of the sardines are, is located beyond this 3 - 6 mile limit.

Marketing

Fishermen face difficulties in marketing their catch, because the majority of Gaza inhabitants are now too poor to buy fish. Fishermen used to sell their fish locally or in the Gaza fish market Al Hesba, near the port.

Hisham el-Attar, a 25 year old fisherman from Beit Lahyia sells his catch in his village at low prices: "People here in the village are very poor. They do not have money to buy fish. At the same time I cannot go and sell my fish in Gaza, because transportation from here to Gaza is expensive", Hisham explains.



Siege



The whole of Gaza strip which is only 360 square kilometres in area, is the home of one and a quarter million Palestinians. The 7,500 Israeli settlers, who live in 23 settlements is an obstacle for the Palestinian fishermen because they occupied the coastal area of Gaza.

In 2000, after the eruption of the Second Intifada, Israel imposed closures over all crossing points and a nautical siege from the west. The Army thus completely controls movement of residents in and out of the Strip, trapping most people inside Gaza, including fishermen.

Most restrictive for the fishery sector is the nautical siege imposed over the 45 kilometres coastal line, depriving Gaza fishermen of their only source of income.

Yousef al Zahhar, president of the Union of Fishers in Rafah, complained about the Israeli embargo, imposed on the southern Gaza strip in April 2002 and said: "Fishermen are facing very harsh circumstances because they are deprived of income and not even allowed to take care of their boats, on the shore of the closed area".

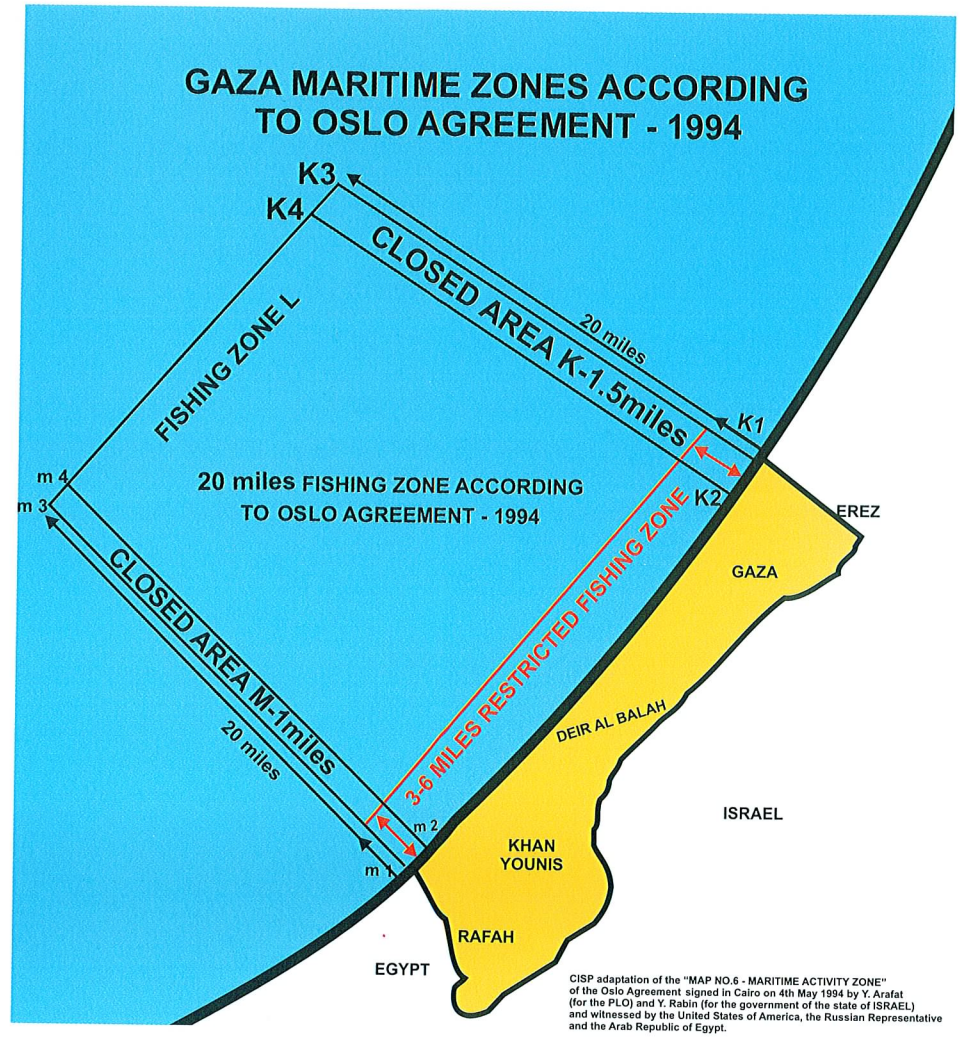
In the north areas of the Strip where access to the sea is permitted to fishermen, Israeli authorities have frequently cut off such access for periods of weeks or months even.

Over the past 3 years, Israeli authorities have also reduced the Palestinian fishing area from 20 nautical miles from the shoreline, as agreed in the Oslo accords, to 3 to 6 nautical miles. "But fish in those areas is very scarce", explains Atief Aqra', a fisherman from Der al-Balah.

These restrictive measures have severely affected the quantity of the catches, reduced the sale of fish to the local market, and increased its price.

Gaza fish used to be distributed in the West Bank. However, due to the current restrictive measures, fish from Gaza can no longer be transported there. The catches are too small, and not sufficient even for the local market, in addition to the problem of border closures with Israel.

These restrictions have reduced the fishery sector's contribution to the national economy by seventy five per cent. Fishing used to provide almost 4% of the economy. Now it is only 1%.





The Union of Fishermen



Mr. Nizar Ayyash

Nizzar Ayyash has worked as a fisherman for 36 years. He lives now in Der al-Balah and is president of the General Union of Fishermen in Gaza Strip.

He volunteers to do this in addition to his own work as a fisherman, and sees the opportunity to utilize the prohibited fishing days to do the Union work.

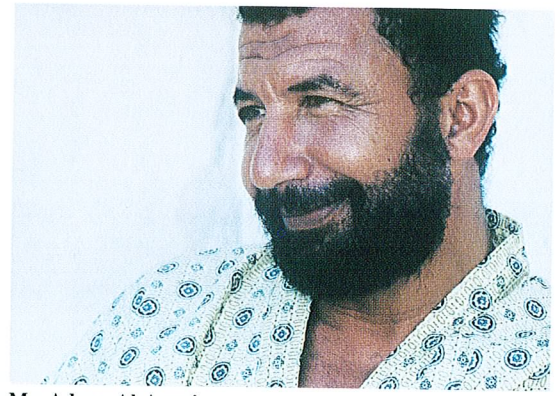
From Der al-Balah, Ayyash coordinates with the presidents of the other regional Unions, in Gaza city, Khan Younis and Rafah. The Union's executive is elected every four years.


Mr. Mohammed Basalah

Most Union work is done by telephone, since Israeli soldiers often close the main checkpoint of Abu Holy, which divides Gaza into two parts. This cuts the only access to Khan Younis and Rafah, and makes it difficult for Ayyash to reach his colleagues in the south of the Gaza Strip.

"Financially, the Union is supported by membership fees", says Union Treasurer Adel Migdad. He adds that there is a need to raise funds for the Union, in order to cover fishermen's labour rights and social problems. The Union of Fishermen presently provides health insurance services, in spite of its limited budget.

Adnan Al-Aqra', Head of Social Affairs, confirms that Union members suffer social problems due to lack of income, affecting all aspects of their lives. He says the Union tries to help large families who live in few rooms by providing them with health care and paying school fees also.


Mr. Adnan Al-Aqra'

President Ayyash states that the Union supports its members through emergency aid and international cooperation projects. He says that the Union strengthened its management abilities by their participation in implementing a food distribution project funded by ECHO.

It is worth mentioning that the visit of two ECHO European delegations was highly appreciated by the Union, says Ayyash. "They met us and expressed their solidarity with our problems".



Directorate of Fisheries


Mr. Tariq Saqr

The General Directorate of Fisheries was established in 1995, not long after the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. It is part of the Ministry of Agriculture, and its Gaza director, Mr. Tariq Saqr, says it plays an important role in developing fishery in Gaza.

"At the very beginning of the Palestinian Authority, the progress of investment in the fishery sector rapidly grew. That means every 13 months, one fisherman would earn back from fishing what he paid into buying a boat and its equipment. Due to the current situation, the fisherman needs 8 years to make the same amount of money; nowadays he cannot even pay for the fuel, nets or other basic equipment".

"This situation pushed us to find alternative jobs through organizing special workshops to teach them boat maintenance, solving technical problems and rebuilding boats, and there is a Danish project that provides them with material needed for maintenance", Mr. Saqr says. "Fishermen will be able to do maintenance work by themselves. The aim of such projects is to alleviate the suffering of fishermen during this bad situation".

Director Saqr stresses on the importance of developing the Gaza seaport.

"The problem of not having a seaport obliged us to use bulldozers to pull boats from the sea, damaging the boats as they are made of wood. The seaport will allow us to use boats made of iron. Inside the port we are busy now establishing a railway system for pulling the boats and returning them back to sea, so as not to use bulldozers in the future, and reduce damage to the boats".

Women

There is a project for the fishermen's wives.

Fishermen's wives have given alternative sources of income generation, such as sewing and food production. The training also includes leadership skills, with the aim of establishing a women organization similar to the Union of Fishermen.

The aim of the Women's Union will be teaching them new skills for earning money to support their families during the sea closures.

"We reached an agreement with the World Food Program to buy the food produced by the women and include them in the World Food Program food baskets, which will be distributed to the needy beneficiaries", says Director Saqr.

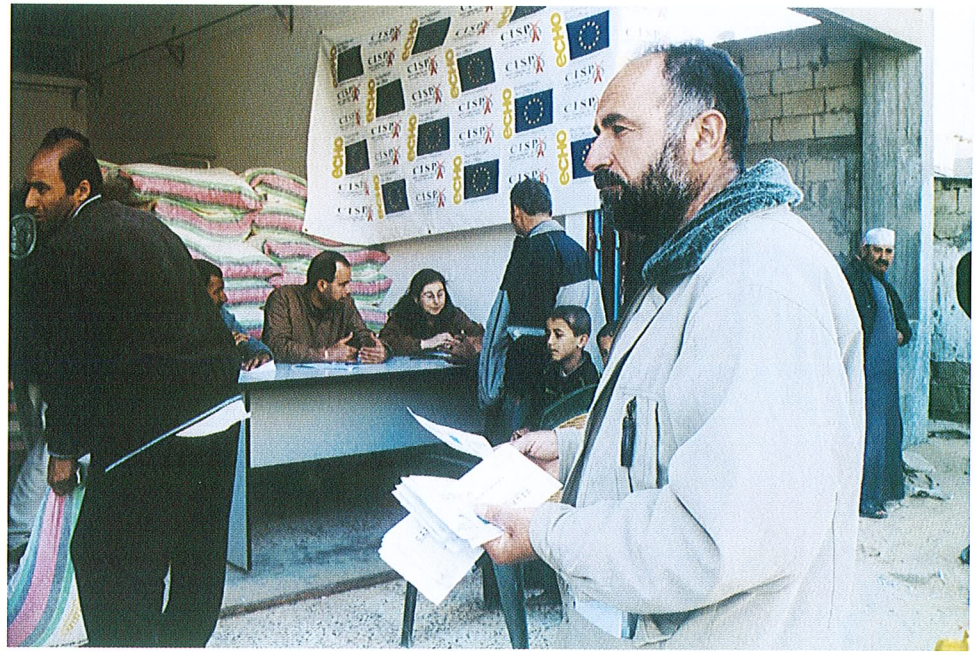
Levels of consumption

The Directorate statistics shows that the level of individual fish consumption in Gaza was 3.8 kilograms of fish per year. Now it is less than 1 kilogram.

"We hope that we will be able to restore the normal production level very soon", says Director Saqr.



Fishers Project



"We live near the sea, but we can no longer live from fishing", reported Mohammed Basalah, a fisherman for almost 30 years, who has succeeded in keeping good relationships with Gaza's fishermen's families, through his job as Secretary of the Union of Fishermen.

Fishermen's families in Gaza, are suffering from insufficient daily food intake. The heavy restrictions imposed on fishery by Israel brings down the level of the fishermen's families food consumption. "Many days men return home empty handed, without money nor fish... in fact, they come back indebted from buying fuel for nothing", says Zahera Hassan Abu Jayab, a fisherman's wife.



Mr. Omar Salah

Fishermen's wives are responsible for organizing food for their extended families; accustomed to include fish daily, now they face difficulties in doing that.

Fatmah Mahmoud Ayyash, mother of nine, needs to use her creativity to feed them when there is no fish at home: "In the last two months, my husband did not catch even one fish for the house. Until the next season of sardines we will not eat fish".

Khairya Mustafa Basalah goes to Der al-Balah market to search for food. "The best vegetables come from Khan Younis and Rafah, but if the checkpoint of Abu Holy is closed, we have to rely on Der al-Balah's vegetables, which are meagre and expensive. I cook traditional Palestinian dishes: "Mjaddara", which is mixed of rice and lentils, "mulukhyia", a green vegetable similar to spinach or "bamia" ,okra with rice, and once a day I bake enough bread for the nine members of my family".

The daily uncertainty of being able to provide food for tomorrow, worries parents and raises their stress levels. In order to alleviate the insecurity of fishermen families, CISP began a food distribution project. It was implemented with the cooperation of the Union of Fishermen and funded by the European Union Humanitarian Aid Office ECHO. Each food basket contains olive oil, rice, flour, lentils, salt and sugar and was distributed to 3,500 families living on fishing, all over the Gaza Strip.

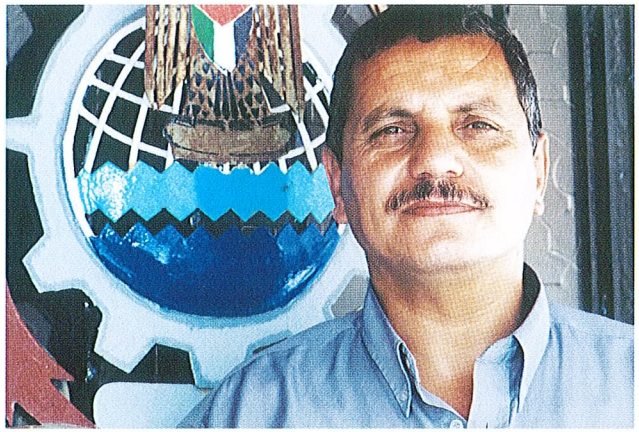
Implementation

The executive of the Union of Fishermen and its representatives in Rafah, Khan Younis, Der al-Balah and Gaza city, took part in the project implementation actively. A fishermen's committee from Beit Lahyia was also involved in it.

This project received services and support from many Palestinian organizations and institutions, like the Union of Agricultural Work Committees -UAWC, Al Azhar and the Islamic University of Gaza, the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaza and Ramallah and the Directorate General of Fisheries.

CISP has worked closely with Mr. Abdel Nasser Madi, an expert from the Directorate General of Fisheries, in preparing information and reports submitted to the International organizations, concerning the problems of the fishing sector in Gaza.

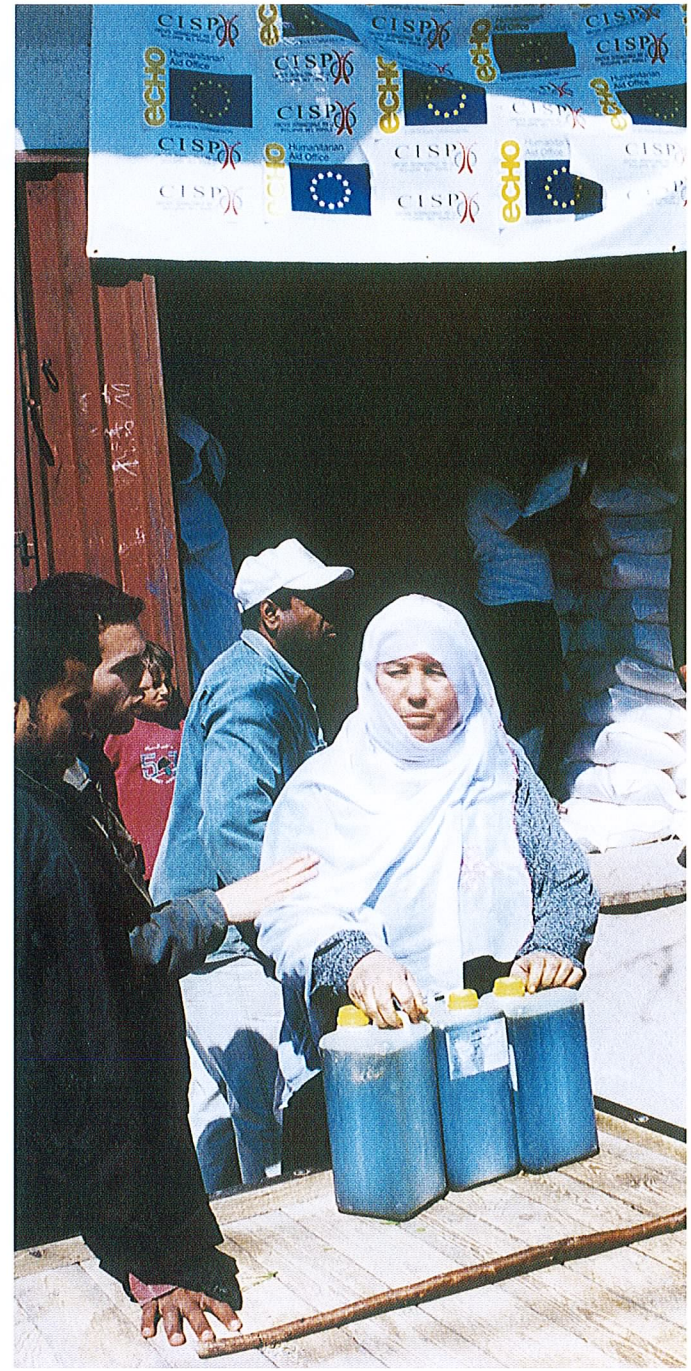
A joint committee of the Union of Fishermen and CISP staff worked in the food distributions. Different teams were organized for the distribution of coupons, loading and unloading of food baskets and one team for co-ordinating and controlling the distribution process.



Mr. Abdel Nasser Madi

This project was a good opportunity for the fishing community of Beit Lahyia to make contact with the Union of Fishermen and the Directorate General of Fisheries.

For CISP, the implementation of this project has been a valuable opportunity to work directly with the fishermen of Gaza. The positive exchange of work experiences encouraged CISP to request donors to continue giving their assistance to the fishery sector in Gaza. It is also a base for the implementation of future projects to develop the Gaza fishing community.



Food security in Palestine.
A priority for ECHO



The food security situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is paradoxical. Although food commodities are generally available, access is increasingly limited because of physical and economic constraints. Among these are restrictions on the free movement of goods and people (farmers face difficulties accessing their lands and moving products to markets), physical damage to household assets and property, and reduced access to employment in Israel and with the Palestinian private sector where investment has been put on hold in particular in the agricultural field. Unemployment in the occupied Palestinian territories has risen to dramatic levels and about 60% of the population currently lives below the poverty line.

If some households have until now been able to manage in difficult circumstances, albeit with dwindling resources, the resilience of many has been weakened and coping mechanisms have been strained to the limit. Families are forced to reduce spending on food, affecting both the quantity and quality of the food consumed, as well as on healthcare. This has had debilitating effects on their food security status, the elderly and children proving particularly vulnerable.

According to United Nations estimates, approximately 40% of the West Bank and Gaza population (1.4 million people) are now "food insecure"; a further 30% (1.1 million people) are under threat of becoming food insecure should current conditions persist. Overall, food insecurity is a real or near constant threat for about 70% of those living in the Territories.

The response to this alarming situation by the European Union's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) combines the provision of basic food commodities and measures reducing the pressure on the budget of the most vulnerable households.

With ECHO support, emergency food aid is distributed to chronically poor families through UNRWA, the World Food Programme and non-governmental organisations – CISP's assistance to the Gaza fishing communities being one example among others. Food baskets include locally made products such as olive oil, with the additional benefit of supporting the local economy in general, and impoverished farmers in particular.

These programmes complement similar interventions supported by the Food Security Unit of the European Commission, as well as other activities funded by ECHO such as improving access to safe drinking water and adequate health services for the most impoverished – which also contribute to improving food security.

From the start of the Intifada in 2000 until mid-2004, ECHO has provided more than 148 million Euros in aid to the most needy in the West Bank and Gaza and to Palestinian refugees in neighbouring countries. The European Commission is one of the largest donors of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians.

Humanitarian action worldwide

ECHO is the European Union's Humanitarian Aid Office, a service of the European Commission. Since 1992, ECHO has funded relief to millions of victims of both natural disasters and man-made crises outside the EU. Aid is channeled impartially, straight to victims, regardless of their race, religion and political beliefs. ECHO works with around 160 operational partners, mainly organisations that have signed a framework partnership agreement with the Commission. Its partners include specialist United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as CISP.

ECHO is one of the biggest sources of humanitarian aid in the world, providing more than 600 million euro in 2003. ECHO's funding, taken together with the aid allocated by EU Members States, makes the European Union the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world. Since it was set up, ECHO has supported projects in more than 100 countries. The funds are spent on goods and services such as food, clothing, shelter, medical provisions, water supply systems, sanitation, emergency repairs and mine clearing. ECHO also funds disaster preparedness and mitigation projects in regions prone to natural catastrophes.

Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)

The International Committee for the Development of Peoples is a European non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1982 active in international co-operation. Its goals are mentioned in a Declaration of Intent where the following main priorities are stressed:

- basic rights: food security, combating poverty and exclusion, enhancing natural resources;
- the other fundamental rights of the individual and local communities, such as education, vocational training, health care and healthy environment;
- support for peacemaking process and overcoming complex emergencies.

Within the field of emergency and humanitarian aid, until now CISP has had the following priorities: global attention to refugee communities, returnees and displaced people, health services, disaster preparedness, reactivation and reconstruction after natural catastrophes or conflict.

CISP applies a Code of Conduct consistent with its strategic and methodological guidelines when formulating and implementing its humanitarian, rehabilitation or development co-operation projects. This enhances the work of the management group and all those who, in Europe and abroad, identify, implement and monitor the projects while in progess.

