

Humanitarian Crisis: Israel's Open Dams Flood Gaza, Hundreds Evacuated

By [al Akhbar](#)

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[Al-Akhbar](#)

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Since this story was first published there have been reports to the effect that Israel has no dams in Southern Israel bordering on Gaza. According to reports, the crisis was not caused by Israel opening the dams, as claimed by the Gaza Ministry of the Interior. Below is an excerpt of a report published by [Buzz Feed News](#):

“There are no dams in the southern Israel. This is a false story that circulates every winter. There are flash floods across southern Israel, but there are simply no dams in southern Israel,” said Hadar Horn, a spokesperson for Israel’s coordination office for the Palestinian territories. “This is a lie.”

In Gaza, the story of the dams has [long been circulated](#) as an explanation for why the central Gaza Strip floods during the winter. One Palestinian official, who spoke to BuzzFeed on condition of anonymity, said the rumor could be traced back more than a decade.

“It is easy to say it is dams, easier than saying that the problem is infrastructure — not having infrastructure, having bad infrastructure, having what little infrastructure Gaza destroyed each time there is way — that is the truth,” said the official, who spoke by phone from Gaza. He asked to remain anonymous as his statements did not coincide with those made by Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. “If we could rebuild Gaza, we could build a system that dealt with these horrible floods. But Gaza is in ruins, there is nowhere for the water to go, and each year it will be the same unless someone helps us.”

At least 80 Palestinian families were evacuated this week after water levels in the Gaza Valley (Wadi Gaza) rose to almost three meters. The original AFP story quoted Gaza’s Ministry of Interior which claimed, “By [Israel] opening the channels they flooded many homes... We had to evacuate as quickly as possible.”

Original Report by Al Akhbar

Hundreds of Palestinians were evacuated from their homes Sunday morning after Israeli authorities opened a number of dams near the border, flooding the Gaza Valley in the wake of a recent severe winter storm.

The Gaza Ministry of Interior said in a statement that civil defense services and teams from the Ministry of Public Works had evacuated more than 80 families from both sides of the Gaza Valley (Wadi Gaza) after their homes flooded as water levels reached more than three

meters.

“Opening the levees to the canal has led to the flooding of several Palestinian homes, and we had to quickly evacuate the afflicted citizens,” the statement said.

Gaza has experienced flooding in recent days amid a major storm that saw temperatures drop and frigid rain pour down. The storm displaced dozens and caused hardship for tens of thousands, including many of the approximately 110,000 of Gaza’s 1.8 million residents left homeless by Israel’s assault over summer.

For 51 days this summer, Israel pounded the Gaza Strip by air, land and sea, destroying as many as 80,000 Palestinian homes. According to the UN, some 30,000 Gazans are still living in emergency shelters.

Gaza civil defense services spokesman Mohammed al-Midana warned that further harm could be caused if Israel opens up more dams in the area, noting that water is currently flowing at a high speed from the Israeli border through the valley and into the Mediterranean sea.

Evacuated families have been sent to shelters sponsored by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, in al-Bureij refugee camp and in al-Zahra neighborhood in the central Gaza Strip.

The Gaza Valley is a wetland located in the central Gaza Strip between al-Nuseirat refugee camp and al-Moghraqa. It is called HaBesor in Hebrew, and it flows from two streams — one whose source runs from near Beersheba, and the other from near al-Khalil.

Israeli dams on the river that collect rainwater have dried up the wetlands inside Gaza, and destroyed the only source of surface water in the area.

Lacking any alternative means, locals have continued to use it to dispose of their waste, creating an environmental hazard.

Gaza is also prone to severe flooding, exacerbated by a chronic lack of fuel that limits how much water can be pumped out of flood-stricken areas. The fuel shortages are a result of the eight-year Israeli blockade, which limits the import of fuel for the electric power station in Gaza, as well as other kinds of machinery related to pumping and sewage management that could help Gazans combat the floods. The most recent war has worsened the crisis.

Gaza’s sole power station, which was damaged during the war, is struggling with a severe lack of fuel and is only able to supply the enclave with six hours of power per day.

Gazans are now living by candlelight and wood fire because of electricity shortages, and rely on sandbags to stop their ruined homes from flooding.

This is not the first time Israeli authorities have opened the Gaza Valley dams.

In December 2013, Israeli authorities also opened the dams amid heavy flooding in the Gaza Strip. The resulting floods damaged dozens of homes and forced many families in the area from their homes.

In 2010, the dams were opened as well, forcing 100 families from their homes. At the time,

civil defense services said that they had managed to save seven people who had been at risk of drowning.

Following a ceasefire agreement that ended the seven-week summer assault, which left more than 2,160 Gazans dead and over 11,000 injured, Israel said it would reopen Gaza's border crossings with Israel and allow construction material into Gaza.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon said during a visit to the Gaza Strip in October that the devastation he had seen was "beyond description" and "far worse" than that caused in the previous Israel-Gaza conflict of 2012.

According to the Palestinian Authority, rebuilding Gaza will cost \$7.8 billion.

However, Israel had repeatedly blocked the entry of building material, prompting the UN in September to broker another deal. The reconstruction of Gaza has yet to begin.

Israel routinely bars the entry of building materials into the embattled coastal enclave on grounds that Palestinian resistance faction Hamas could use them to build underground tunnels or fortifications.

For years, the Gaza Strip has depended on construction materials smuggled into the territory through a network of tunnels linking it to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

However, a crackdown on the tunnels by the Egyptian army after it overthrew then-President Mohammed Mursi has effectively neutralized hundreds of tunnels, severely affecting Gaza's construction sector.

(Ma'an, Anadolu, Al-Akhbar)

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