





Gaza Strip Fishermen: Continued steadfastness under Israeli occupation collective punishment

Introduction:

General data

-  **3606** Fisherman
-  **1705** boats
-  **< 2Kg** Per Capita consumption in Gaza and 20.2 Kg worldwide
-  **137** nautical miles the average fishing area (41% of the area according to the Oslo Agreement)
- 1.96 Million persons** Gaza Population
- 365 Km²** The Area Gaza Strip
- 40 Km (21.6 Nautical mile)** Gaza Strip coastline

The fishing sector in the Gaza Strip is considered one important economic resource, a source of income and it participates in supporting the Palestinian Gross Domestic Product¹. It provides employment opportunities for a large number of fishermen and workers in the fishing industry, such as fish sale, construction and maintenance of boats and fishing equipment. The fishing sector also contributes to the support of Palestinian food security through the provision of animal protein from fish.

It is no secret that fishing is important for the Gaza Strip through different periods of time. Fishing craft in the Gaza Strip is not easy and is involving a high-risk profession; however, fishermen in the Gaza Strip prefers the sea to any other work.

The risks of the fishing are not limited to the nature of work and safety, it also entails other risks that unforeseen to fishermen around the world. Israeli attacks on fishermen while in "allowed fishing areas" by the occupation authorities, restrict fishing areas and deprive fishermen of access to rich fishing areas. In addition to the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, which restricts the entry of fishing gears and repair materials for boats, engines, ropes and fiberglass.

According to statistics of the Department of Fisheries in the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, the number of registered fishermen in 2019 reached 3,606 fishermen and about 600 workers in the associated works to fishing craft. According to some statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of fishermen and workers in fishing crafts reached 10,000 persons in 1997. The restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation on fishermen and the fishing sector in general led to a decrease in the number during the second Intifada in 2000.

Limitations on fishing area over the years:

Before the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Palestinian fisherman practiced fishing freely in areas exceeding thousands of square miles, in conformity with the equipment and the size of boats and the laws in force at the time. However, since the 1967 war and the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the occupation authorities have begun to impose a fishing ban and prevent fishermen from entering the sea only after obtaining permits and within specific areas. The occupation authorities also impose restrictions on specific distances that may be related to fishing seasons as well as their geographical distance from the maritime boundary. For example, during the years 2015 to 2018, the occupation authorities prevented fishermen from reaching more than 6 nautical miles, but at specific periods allowed fishing boats to reach 9 nautical miles from Gaza Valley to the southern border. These restrictions prevent Palestinian fishermen in Gaza from exploiting their resources from the available fishing area under the Oslo Accords. Most of the time, the maximum permitted distance is 6 nautical miles (nmi), where the Palestinian fishermen are prevented from exploiting 70% of the area according to the Oslo Accords. In the case of

¹ The contribution of the agricultural sector to the GDP in Palestine in 2018 reached 3%, while fish and fishing represented 3% within the Agriculture. Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Annual National Accounts. http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang_ar/741/default.aspx?lang=en

reduce the fishing limit to 3 nmi, this prevents fishermen from exploiting 82% of the area allowed by the Oslo agreement. The occupation also imposes a complete closure of the sea and prevents fishing and depriving fishermen of the provision of food for them and their families. The increase in the fishermen numbers since 2008 is linked to the tightening of the siege imposed by the Israeli occupation on the Gaza Strip and the increase in the number of unemployed, some of whom have resorted to work in the fishing sector.

For the purposes of understanding the "fishing area" in detail, the boat theoretical share from the fishing area has been investigated where it was found that the number of boats reached 1705 in 2019 and by dividing the area on boats each boat is allocated about five (½) nautical square miles², while imposing fishing limit to 6 nmi, each fishing boat is allocated 0.08 square nautical miles, which is only 40% compared to the Oslo agreement.

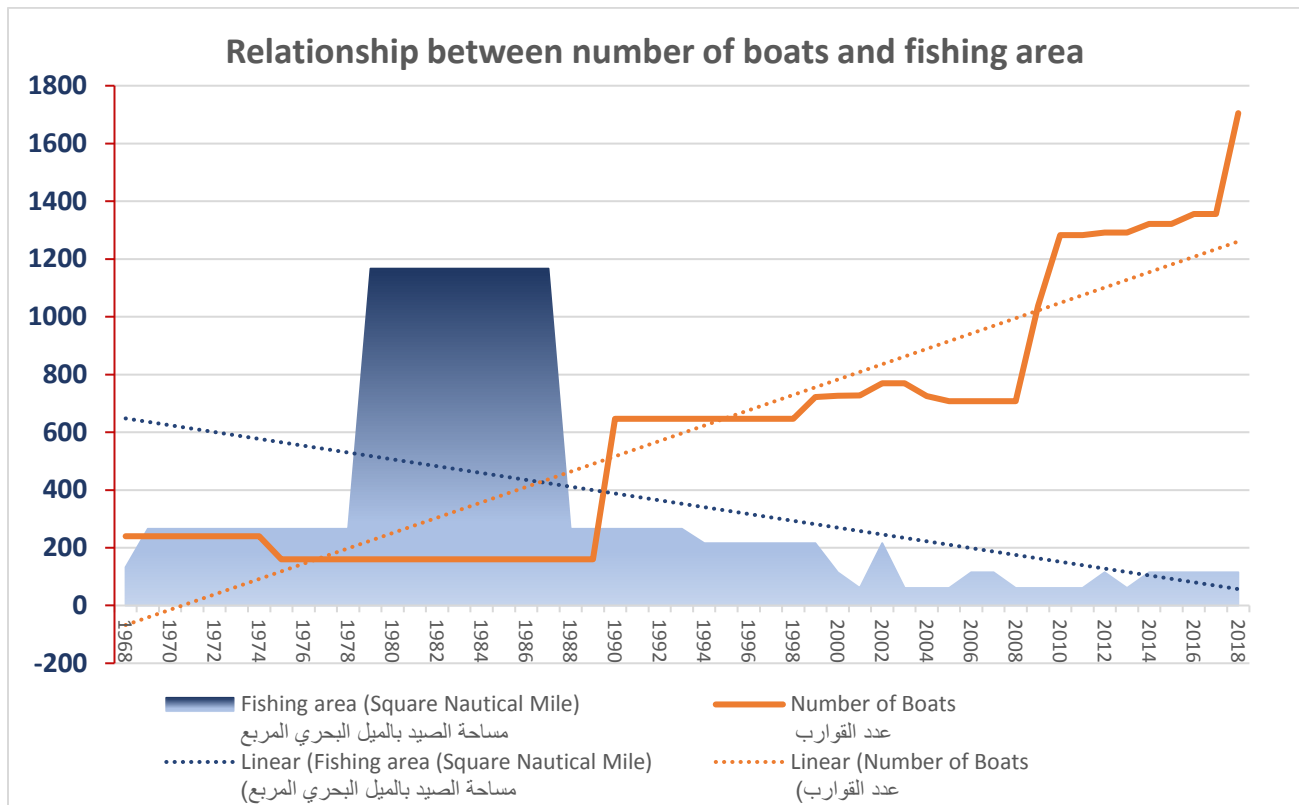


Figure 1 Fishing zone and number of boats

Figure 2 shows how the occupation reduced fishing areas from 1988 to 2018.³

² Measurement by nautical miles: every 1 mile = 1.6 km, each 1 nautical mile = 1.85 km, each 1 nautical mile square = 3.43 km²

³ Data Sources: General Directorate of Fisheries. UAWC Study: The Status of Hunting and Fishermen in the Gaza Strip, Abdel Nasser Madi, Union of Agricultural Work Committees 2011)

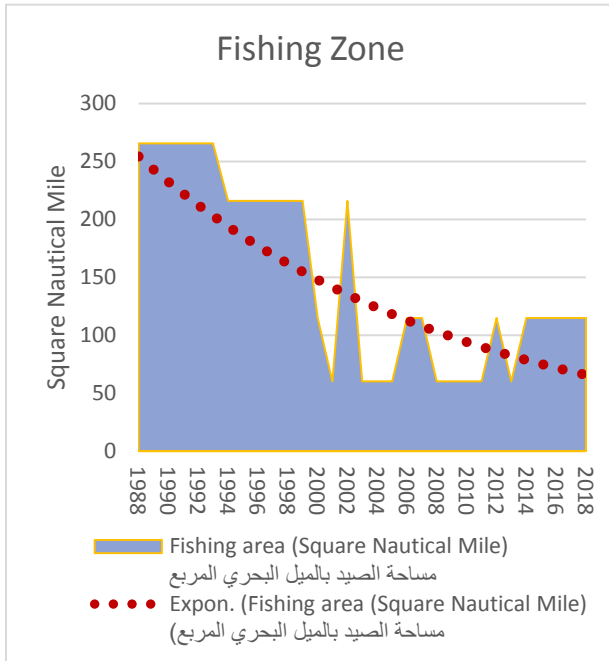


Figure 2 Allowed fishing zone from 1988 until 2018

The graph is showing a marked reduction in the fishing zone, two years after the signing of the Oslo Agreement, which - despite its unfairness for the Palestinian fisherman- allowed the fishermen 20 nautical miles, or 337 square nautical miles, where the boat's share of the area was about one third of a square nautical miles (about 2 km²) when the agreement was signed. Today, with 1,705 boats of varying sizes and capacities, the average area available per boat is only 0.08 square nautical miles at best over the last ten years. This in itself is violating the basic human rights enshrined in international treaties and conventions. The comparison itself does not take into account a number of other important factors related to the marine environment, the breeding and reproduction of fish in the three coastal miles and other prohibited dead fishing areas such as those for the discharge of sewage. It is worth mentioning that a small engineless boat needs an area of 3000 m² for setting up drift nets, according to information received from the committees of fishermen in the Union of Agricultural Work Committees. It should be noted here that environmental hazards constitute serious risks to the marine environment

not only to the Gaza Strip, but also to the Mediterranean basin in general. According to the Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, the negative impact of fishing restrictions on the first three nautical miles didn't appear in 2006 and 2007 but in 2009 as fish breeding areas were largely depleted.⁴

The restrictions were not only limited to the resizing of allowed fishing area, but the Israeli occupation imposed an entire closure of the sea and prevented the fishermen from fishing at different periods of the year. In meetings with some fishermen, most of them mentioned that the periods of closure are often occur in the high fishing seasons such as sardine and other seasons, which the fisherman wait for months to be able to cover the costs of his trips or to compensate his losses and expenses from previous months.

At the beginning of this year, the occupation authorities announced the expansion of the fishing limits to 15 nautical miles and within specific conditions and areas, then reduced the distance to 12 and then to 10 nautical miles and at different periods it banned the fishermen from entering the sea and access to their means of livelihood. The occupation used this method as a form of collective punishment for fishermen and residents in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli measures are “an extension of the collective punishment against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, which are aimed, among other things, at restricting fishermen and preventing them from carrying out their work and freely accessing areas where fish exists”. “The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) affirms that the Israeli decision to reduce fishing distance violates the economic and social rights of Palestinian fishermen, violates the right to work in accordance with Article VI of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights”⁵.

The following figure and the table below show the periods of closure and fishing distance⁶ set by the Israeli occupation from beginning of 2018 to the end of June 2019:

⁴ <https://www.ochaopt.org/ar/content/gaza-fisheries-fishing-catch-increases-amid-ongoing-protection-concerns-1>

⁵ <https://pchrgaza.org/ar/?p=15698>

⁶ UAWC. Israeli violations against fishermen in Gaza Strip 2018. P18.

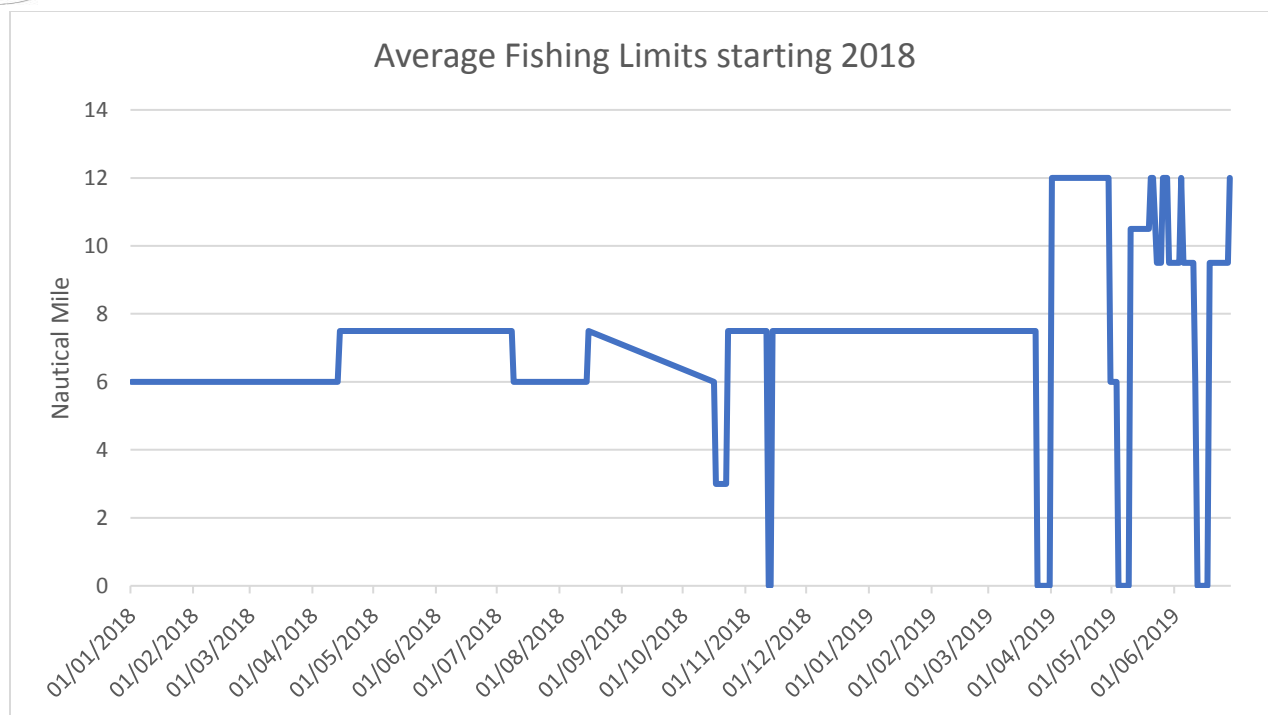


Figure 3 Average fishing distances from the beginning of 2018

Date	Action	Area (N.M)	Percentage of denied areas
10/04/2018	Expansion of fishing area from Wadi Gaza to Rafah from 6 miles to 9 miles	145	57%
09/07/2018	Reduction fishing area to 6 nautical miles	115	66%
15/08/2018	Expansion of fishing area from Wadi Gaza to Rafah from 6 miles to 9 miles	145	82%
16/08/2018	Reduction of fishing area to 6 nautical miles	115	57%
17/08/2018	Reduction of fishing area to 3 nautical miles	60	100%
23/10/2018	Expansion of fishing area from Wadi Gaza to Rafah from 6 to 9 nautical miles	145	66%
12/11/2018	Full closure of the sea	0	100%
14/11/2018	Allow fishermen to fish within 6 miles and 9 nautical miles	145	39%
25/03/2019	Complete closure	0	66%
01/04/2019	Extending the fishing area to 15 miles. From the northern Gaza Strip to the Gaza wharf 6 nautical miles, and from the Gaza port to Gaza Valley 12 nautical miles, from Gaza Valley to Khan Younis 15 nautical miles from Khan Younis to Rafah 12 nautical miles.	206	100%
30/04/2019	Reduction of fishing area to 6 nautical miles	115	46%
04/05/2019	Complete closure	0	39%
10/05/2019	Allow fishing for 12 miles	182	52%
21/05/2019	Extending the fishing area to 15 nautical miles.	206	39%
23/05/2019	Reduction of fishing area to 10 nautical miles	162	52%
26/05/2019	Expansion of the fishing area to 15 nautical miles from the west of the city of Zahra in the center of the Strip to the city of Rafah.	206	39%
29/05/2019	Reduction of fishing area to 10 nautical miles	162	52%
04/06/2019	Extending the fishing area to 15 nautical miles	206	66%

Date	Action	Area (N.M)	Percentage of denied areas
05/06/2019	Reduction of fishing area to 10 nautical miles	162	100%
11/06/2019	Reducing fishing area to 6 nautical miles	115	52%
12/06/2019	Complete closure	0	39%
18/06/2019	Allow fishing for 10 nautical miles	162	57%
28/06/2019	Extending the fishing area to 15 nautical miles	206	66%

Restrictions on the entry of fishing gears

Since 2006, the Israeli occupation authorities have imposed a ban on the entry of fishing equipment, engines and tools and spare parts for the maintenance and repair of boats, which led to the suspension of a number of boats. The ban also affected another group of professionals in the fisheries sector, such as workshops for the manufacture and maintenance of fishing boats.

These restrictions have adversely affected the profession of the boats industry in the sector because of the lack of materials and high costs due to the blockade, which has led to an increase of boats constructing costs many times. These materials include wood, fiberglass⁷, outboard engines for small boats, marine engines for large boats such as trawlers and purse seiners, steel cables and spare parts considering that they were "dual-use" materials. This resulted in the deactivation of about 200 small boats (Hasaka) and twenty-five large boats.

Israeli occupation violations against fishermen:

The Israeli occupation commits various violations against the Palestinian fisherman in the Gaza Strip on a daily basis. In terms of the right to life, the Israeli occupation authorities have deprived the lives of ten fishermen since 2006, injured 167 fishermen and arrested 633 others. The Israeli occupation authorities also damaged 159 fishing boats during the sporadic attacks and confiscated 159 boats, 3 of the boats were returned in 2008 and 54 boats were returned between 2015 and 2018. These boats were returned without major equipment and gears (engines, navigation equipment and fishing nets), unfit for service and require complete maintenance. In May 2019, following a petition by human rights organizations to the Supreme Court, Israel supposed to return 65 fishing boats owned to fishermen from Gaza⁸.

The occupation and the policy of collective punishment have caused great losses to fishermen, their properties and means of livelihood. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War states that "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited. Pillage is prohibited. Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited."

Israeli attacks since 2006 until the end of June 2019

-  10 fishermen were killed
-  167 fishermen injured
-  633 fishermen arrested
-  159 boats destroyed
-  159 boats confiscated

Table shows the Israeli violations against fishermen

Year	Kill	Injury	Arrest	Boat Damaging	Boat confiscation
2006	1	1			
2007			64	7	
2008			15	3	3
2009	1	9	14		3

⁷ The current price of a fiberglass gallon is NIS 1400 compared to NIS 200 before 2012.

⁸ Statement by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, May 2019. <http://www.mezan.org/post/28641>

2010	1	11	21	1	7
2011		3	32	3	9
2012	1	2	72	5	14
2013		4	17	1	3
2014	1	10	53	17	14
2015	1	25	73	7	17
2016		30	135	15	45
2017	2	21	39	21	13
2018	2	30	70	30	20
2019 ⁹		21	28	49	11
المجموع	10	167	633	159	159

The restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation on the fishing sector affected the fishermen economic situation. Fishing intended to provide the fisherman good living and a decent life for himself and his family. Figure (4) shows the annual catch compared to the number of boats. Both trendlines show that despite the increase number of boats, this has not affected the amount of catch, but the reduction in catch quantities is attributed to the increased restrictions on fishers and reduction of

fishing areas. This has forced most fishermen to work within the coastal three miles, destroying the ecological structure and fish breeding centers along the beach.

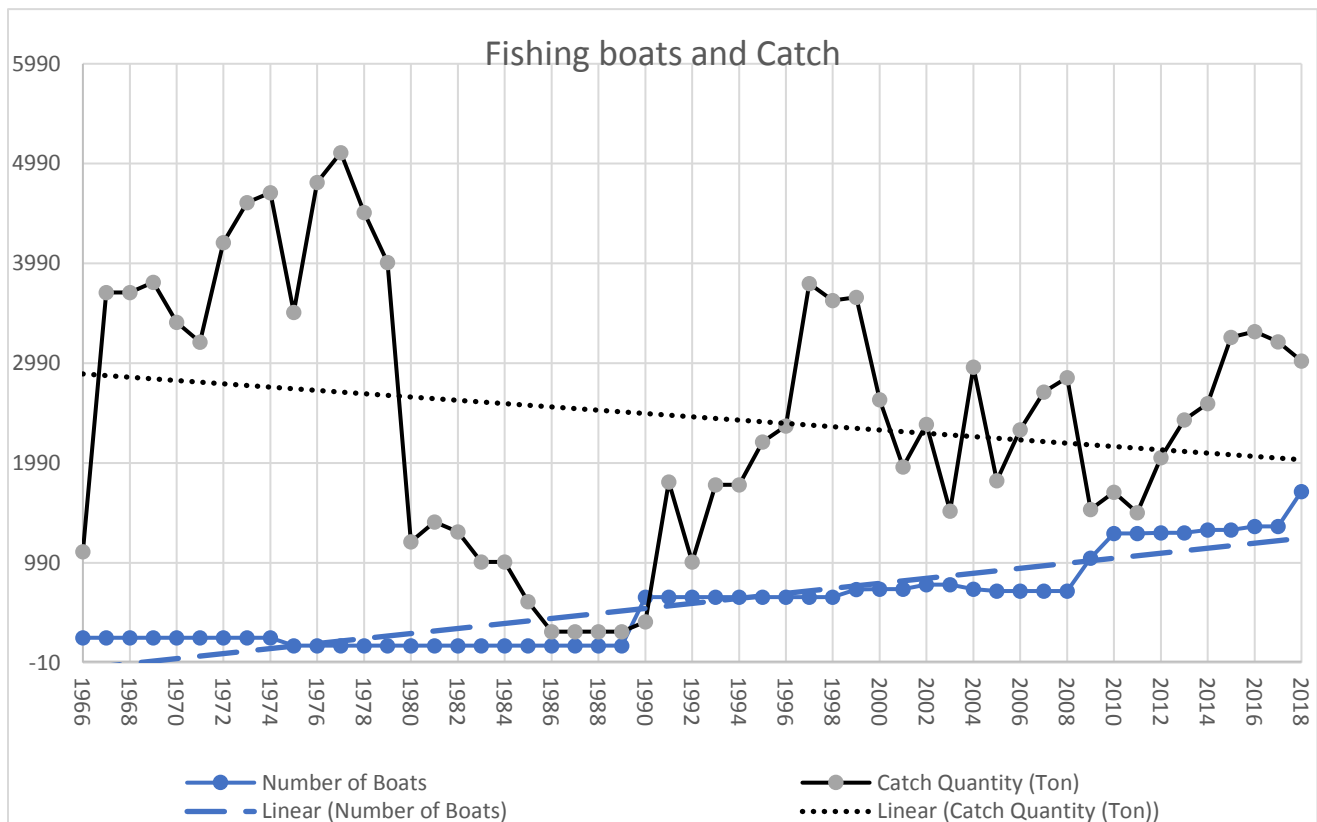


Figure 4 Number of boats and Cash quantities over years

The figure above shows a logical and natural consistency in the increase in the number of fishing boats during the post-Oslo period and after the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip in 2007. In contrast, the amount of fish caught does not logically match the number of boats (in 2016 small sardines (fry) were added to the catch despite their low value). This in turn reinforces that the restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation are the most powerful factor in the impact on the amount of fishing and therefore the low return on the fisherman and the Palestinian citizen. These policies have also increased the negative effects on the marine environment such as overfishing.

⁹ Data up to end of June 2019

Fisheries, food security and natural resources sector

Fish production is an important part of production inputs in coastal States or those containing lakes and rivers. Fish are also one of the most important sources of protein and healthy food for the population. In the Gaza Strip, fishermen are working hard to meet the needs of the local market for fresh fish. With reference to the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs report of March 2018, the fisheries sector remains an important source of employment. Fish, particularly sardines, is a major source of protein, micronutrients and omega-3 fatty acids for Palestinians in Gaza, and contributes to food diversity.¹⁰ In May 2019, the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) issued a statement¹¹ on food insecurity of the population of the Gaza Strip, where the percentage of acute or moderate food insecure population reached 68% (about one million and three hundred thousand citizens in the Gaza Strip) compared to 40% in 2017.

The Israeli occupation continue to be the biggest obstacle to any development on the water resources sector, including fishing in Palestine. The 1982 Convention gives the State of Palestine the right to exploit the exclusive economic zone. "This Convention gives States the exclusive right to prospect for oil, gas up to 350 nautical miles (648 km) from shore, fishing within 200 nautical miles (370 km) of its coasts and within the 200 nautical miles, called the exclusive economic zone, all States have the rights of the high seas for navigation and aviation, but coastal States control all economic sources in this region".¹²

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2015, the per capita consumption rates in most countries ranged from 7.7 to 25 kg per year¹³. The average consumption per capita of the Palestinian population does not exceed 2.5 kg / year of fish¹⁴, but the average consumption of Palestinian citizens in the Gaza Strip did not exceed 2 kg / year of fresh fish since 2005 until the preparation of this paper.

The Israeli occupation at the beginning of 2019 declared the expansion of the fishing zone and allow a distance of 15 nautical miles; such announcement did not improve the economic and living conditions of fishermen. The improvement of life for the civilian population should not be linked with collective punishment and the expansion of the fishing area should be aligned with allowing the manufacture and maintenance of boats and fishing equipment to enter freely and without delay into the Gaza Strip.

¹⁰ <https://www.ochaopt.org/ar/content/gaza-fisheries-fishing-catch-increases-amid-ongoing-protection-concerns-1>

¹¹ <http://pngoportal.org/news/15438.html>

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Law-of-the-Sea#ref913546>

¹³ FAO The state of fishing and aquaculture 2018 - Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. www.fao.org/3/i9540ar/i9540AR.pdf

¹⁴ http://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=8966

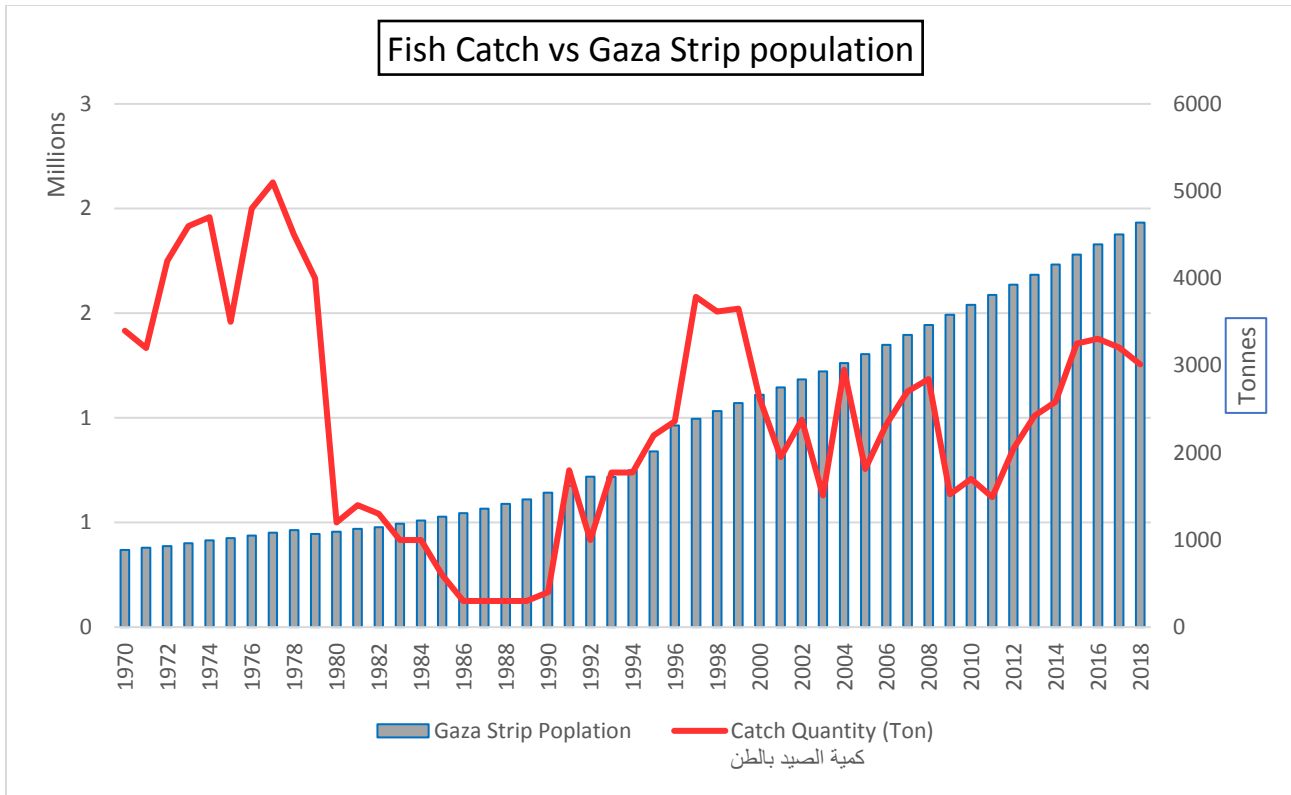


Figure 5 Fish Catch vs Population in the Gaza Strip

Recommendations for donors, international organizations and the international community:

- To make pressure for the expansion of fishing areas and to lift the maritime siege imposed on fishermen in order to develop their own fishing skills and access to the high seas.
- To hold the Israeli occupation accountable, file cases demanding compensation for losses on human and material
- Work to lift the ban imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities on all fishing gears and boats maintenance materials and the cancellation of the dual-use items list and to allow the entry of all types of fishing gears.
- Support the development of the fishing sector by providing support for studies and research to protect the fishing sector and preserve the marine wealth.
- Provide protection for fishermen to work safely under natural conditions free of risks
- Provide financial support with production inputs to fishermen and their families to maintain their livelihoods
- To ensure the sovereignty, exploitation and access of Palestinians to their natural resources, sources of livelihood in a secure and a globally protected legal framework.

Special recommendations to local authorities

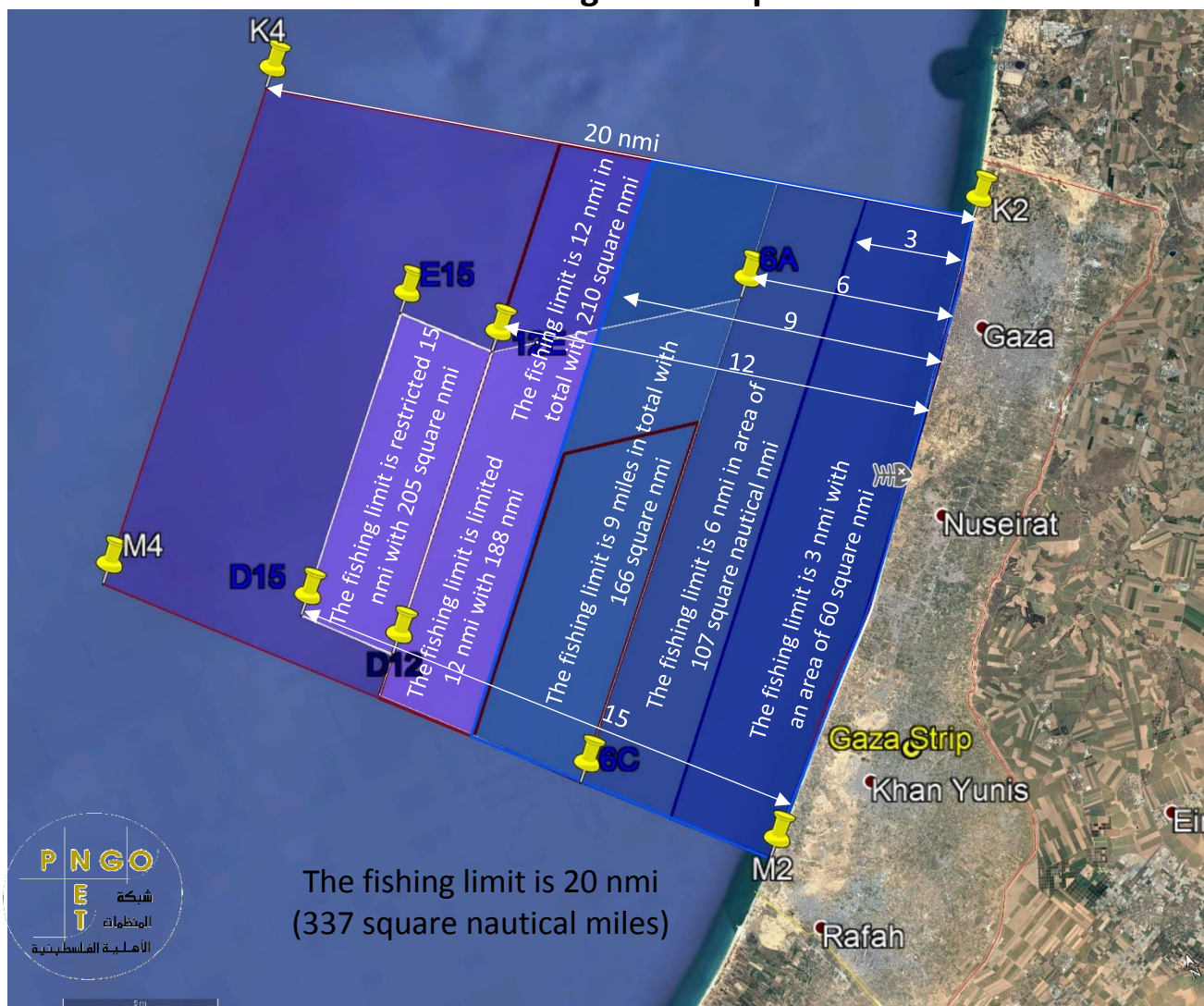
- Uniting efforts to preserve fishermen rights
- Develop a national strategic plan aimed at promoting and developing the fishing sector, preserving the marine environment and enacting a law to preserve marine life and determine the laws and procedures for setting up fishing time, fishing location and techniques.
- Work to expose the crimes of the occupation against fishermen at the international level in order to pressure the occupation to stop its attacks

- Exempt fishermen from all types of taxes and dues, including fuel taxes (Blue)
- Activating of the “Palestinian Disaster Risk Reduction and Insurance Fund” and include fishermen in the categories participating and benefiting from it.
- Develop suitable wharfs for fishermen to protect their properties and capabilities
- Establishment of workshops for the manufacture and maintenance of boats and marine engines
- Support aquaculture
- Provision of training for fishermen on safety at work and use of modern fishing techniques to improve returns at the personal and national levels.
- Provide financial support for conducting accurate statistical surveys on the number of fishermen, fishing fleet, catch quantities and registration mechanisms.
- Provide practical alternatives to fishers during fish breeding

Sources of information:

- General Directorate of Fisheries - Ministry of Agriculture
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
- Palestinian Center for Human Rights
- Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Fishing Zone Map



Fishing distance	Area (nmi)	Percentage of usage
Full 20 nautical miles	337	100%
Full 15 nautical miles	254	75%
Full 12 nautical miles	210	62%
Full 9 nautical miles	166	49%
Full 6 nautical miles and partially 9 nautical miles	137	41%
Full 6 nautical miles	107	32%
Full 3 nautical miles	60	18%

Map of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on closures and restrictions on movement

