

# Let's talk about Gaza

## Life in Caravan Structures

June 2016

Almost two years after the 2014 war on the Gaza Strip that caused the destruction of more than 12,000 housing units<sup>1</sup>, 300 families still continue living in provisional structures like caravans<sup>2</sup>. Bessan Shehada, project coordinator of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine (RLS) in the Gaza Strip talked to a group of female relatives from the AlNajjar family who have been living in caravans in Khuza'a town<sup>3</sup> since they were displaced in summer 2014.

### Why you are sitting outside your caravans?

It is too hot inside the caravan. Nobody can bear this heat for more than 10 minutes. When the sun rises in the morning, we go outside the caravan to sit in the shades escaping from the sun.

### Why you are living in caravans? Where are your houses?

During the 2014 Israeli war on Gaza, we fled to UNRWA schools around. Some of us were trapped and used as human shields in their houses. The majority of the over 500 houses in our village were destroyed, when the Israeli military went in with their tanks. After the Israelis withdrew from the town, we came back to find out that we do not have houses anymore. Everything was destroyed.



### Why do you still live in caravans? What is happening with the reconstruction process?

We are waiting for our turn in the reconstruction process. The biggest problem is the siege: The Israelis don't allow cement to come in to the Gaza Strip. How could we possibly build houses without cement or other necessary construction materials?

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2016): *Internal Displacement in the Context of the 2014 Hostilities*. Retrieved June 25, 2016 from <http://gaza.ochaopt.org/2015/07/internal-displacement-in-the-context-of-the-2014-hostilities/> [last accessed: 06/27/2016].

<sup>2</sup> Shelter Cluster Palestine (2016): Palestine May 2016. Retrieved June 25, 2016 from <http://shelterpalestine.org/Upload/Doc/16e94567-472e-4675-8c50-e69b32f055da.pdf> [last accessed: 06/27/2016].

<sup>3</sup> Khuza'a is a Palestinian town in the Khan Yunis Governorate in the Southern Gaza Strip. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Khuza'a has a population of 9,700 inhabitants. The town of Khuza'a is around 500 meters from the border with Israel.



**Do you know when your turn will come?**

We do not know anything. Whenever we ask, the people who are responsible for the reconstruction process just pay lip service. They have been promising us for the past two years to reconstruct our houses but time is passing without anything happening. We do not have any control over our lives.

**How are you managing to live under these circumstances?**

We do not have any other choices. Our husbands are unemployed so we do not have enough money to rent apartments. We fully depend on humanitarian aid from international organizations to survive.

**How is life in a caravan like?**

It is miserable. There is no water, no electricity, and no infrastructure. The bathrooms smell horribly and insects and rats are living with us. It is unbearably hot in summer but freezing during winter. Caravans are simply not for humans. It is pure torture.

**How do your children spend their time?**

The young men and women who are forced to live in caravans have basically lost hope. They are unemployed living under an extremely bad situation. They can neither work, nor travel or get married. They are very helpless. All our children who still go to school used to be hardworking students with good marks. Now, they are not anymore. How would they be able to concentrate while they are living here?

**What are your dreams as women?**

We dream of a house where we have privacy, where we are able to sleep or take shower whenever we want, where we can uncover our heads inside our homes. We are forced to cover ourselves all the time, because we almost live in the street.

**Are you angry?**

We are very angry. Everything about this situation we are living in makes us angry. This anger is also eventually going against those we are living with including our own family and children. We are living in a circle of anger.