

The role of the EU in funding Gaza's power supply
The European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza
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<http://www.savegaza.eu>

"The people of Gaza do not deserve to live – metaphorically or in reality – in darkness." Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy
March 2009

The Situation:

The situation of the people of Gaza is desperate. Not only are they prevented from leaving one of the most crowded places on earth, and from rebuilding their destroyed homes and businesses, they are now plunged into darkness for eight hours a day, every day. Those who are not wealthy enough to afford back-up generators must do without light and heat in the midst of winter. In addition, the UN office for the coordination of humanitarian affairs (OCHA) estimates that there are 40,000 people who are living without *any* electricity due to damage to electricity networks during last year's Israeli invasion.

The Cause:

Gaza's only power plant has long been dependent in part on shipments of diesel fuel purchased through the EU's PEGASE program. That is, until last November, when the EU announced – at the request of the Palestinian Authority -- that its €97 million worth of funding would no longer be earmarked specifically for Gazan fuel. Instead, the funds now go into the PA's general coffers, and due to what appears to be the continuing political feud between Fatah (in the West Bank) and Hamas (in Gaza), the people of Gaza are now largely without power. The EU Commission, has explained this decision by saying that the policy is to "allow the PA, to the greatest extent possible, to set its own priorities." However, the political differences between the PA and Hamas are well known and for now, intractable. To leave it up to the PA to assure that the people of Gaza do not suffer is to condemn them to a cold, dark winter – and often, much worse. Although the administration of Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas is working hard to improve life in the West Bank, it has proven unable – or, at worst, malicious – in its care for the people of Gaza. Political leverage seems to be the priority of the day.

Action Needed:

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, said in March 2009 that "the people of Gaza do not deserve to live – metaphorically or in reality – in darkness." The government of the European Union must recognize the pragmatic reality of the situation, as well as exhibit the compassion demonstrated by Ms. Ferrero-Waldner.

Please contact your MEP and ask that the specific funding for power for Gaza should be reinstated until a reconciliation deal has been signed between the two parties. If we do not act now, the suffering of the nearly 1.5 million people of Gaza will not only occur on our watch, it will be our responsibility, indirect or not.

Background:

The Gaza Power Plant has been repeatedly and deliberately bombed by Israel, most notably during Operation Cast Lead. In addition, although Gaza gets nearly two-thirds of its power from Israel, high demand for electricity this winter led to the breakdown of some of the main power lines. Yet, at the same time, the Israeli blockade prohibits the import of materials needed to repair the plant, returning it to full operational capacity.

The EU and other European countries began providing funding for the power in Gaza through PEGASE in February 2008, as a response to the Paris Donor Conference and the Palestinian Authority's (PA) Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP). It is designed to provide a conduit through which the European Commission and participating donors to support the PRDP through direct assistance. In addition to delivery of fuel to the Gaza Power Plant, PEGASE provides allowances to the PA's civil servants and pensioners and to Palestinian families considered the most vulnerable. PEGASE has channeled support to the Palestinian people from the European Union, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Every month, PEGASE ensured that about 30% of the total demand for electricity in the Gaza Strip was met, through the delivery of industrial diesel to the Gaza Power Plant. It delivered an average of 8 million litres of fuel per month, benefitting the population of Gaza at a cost of almost €97 million.

When she first visited the occupied Palestinian territories, in November 2007, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner said, "The European Commission will never let the people of Gaza down." We must not prove her wrong.