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The Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development

## **The Development Model for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip: Demands and Aspirations**

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## Introduction:

Despite the Israeli wars on Gaza over the past two decades, which have caused severe impacts across humanitarian, social, cultural, environmental, economic, and urban aspects, the ongoing aggression by the Israeli occupying forces continues to systematically destroy Gaza's urban environment. This destruction is erasing the tangible and intangible identity and heritage of the Palestinian people in the region. The scale of devastation caused by Israel's destructive machinery, combined with the brutality against civilians, is evident in the numerous massacres and collective atrocities. This reflects a clear intent to target all aspects of life in Gaza, operating under a logic that subjugates life to the force of death.

The destruction carried out by the Israeli occupying forces cannot be described as random or merely a retaliatory response to the events of October 2023. Instead, it is a meticulously executed plan aimed at depopulating the Gaza Strip by inflicting mass casualties and forcing displacement through systematic policies of destruction. This deliberate campaign targets entire cities, with a particular focus on Gaza City, the political and administrative capital of the Strip. Israeli bombardments have centered on the city's core, historic neighborhoods, and markets, erasing entire districts and residential blocks from the map, as seen previously in Rafah and now in Jabalia Camp, which is undergoing complete destruction of its buildings and homes.

These systematic campaigns of destruction by the occupying forces amount to the eradication of the physical and cultural landscape. The scale of devastation, inflicted without any credible military justification, underscores this intent. Current estimates indicate that the destruction in Gaza exceeds the devastation caused during World War II, with approximately 75% of Gaza's buildings either destroyed or severely damaged.<sup>1</sup>

All international reports on the cost of rebuilding the Gaza Strip estimate it to be between \$30-40 billion,<sup>2</sup> a figure that is likely to increase if the ongoing Israeli aggression continue. It is projected that the Strip would require approximately 80 years to achieve comprehensive reconstruction. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), "Even if the war were to end tomorrow and Gaza returned to the conditions prior to October 2023, it would take 350 years for its struggling economy to recover to its already precarious state before the war."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://2u.pw/RbgUkqIt>

<sup>2</sup> <https://2u.pw/XsuVn0rc>

<sup>3</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-gaza-reconstruction-un-0ac47d4db7401e102b2bb95e85f3e105>

Preliminary data on the extent of destruction in Gaza indicates that the scale of the current war is unparalleled, exceeding any conflict since World War II, potentially surpassing it both in magnitude and severity.

This policy paper seeks to propose a vision for reconstruction that reflects Palestinian aspirations and ensures that the process contributes to sustainable development within the Palestinian context. Central to this vision is the establishment of a political framework capable of confronting Israeli policies aimed at undermining the Palestinian cause and erasing its presence. It emphasizes the need to safeguard the political essence of reconstruction, preventing it from being reduced to a process that serves the occupying forces' security agenda and political goals.

The policy paper utilizes a descriptive-analytical methodology to explore the issue, relying on a review of relevant literature on post-conflict urban reconstruction. It also incorporates findings from a focused group discussion with young participants from REFORM Association in Gaza, along with insights gathered from a workshop on youth and reconstruction conducted by the Association recently in the Gaza Strip.

### **The Concept of the Reconstruction Process:**

Post-war reconstruction is often understood as the process of rebuilding the urban infrastructure destroyed by aggression. However, this definition is incomplete, as it primarily focuses on the restoration of physical structures while overlooking other essential elements of the urban aspect. These elements, which encompass the cultural, social, and economic aspects of life, as well as history, technology, and climate, are integral to the identity and functionality of society.

The researcher (Baradan) defines post-disaster reconstruction strategies, whether resulting from natural disasters or human-made events, such as wars, as a series of processes and policies designed to prepare for and respond to disasters. These strategies aim to address immediate needs during the crisis and facilitate the rebuilding of what was damaged afterward, both in the short and long term. These policies are holistic, addressing all aspects of life and focusing on the reconstruction of physical, social, economic, and cultural elements. Unlike policies formulated for stable, ordinary circumstances, these strategies are specifically designed to meet the challenges of unstable and extraordinary conditions.

The reconstruction phase follows a period of extensive devastation, which includes the destruction of infrastructure, public and private properties, and productive sectors. In Gaza, the systematic destruction has also targeted the elimination of advanced human capabilities, with the intent to marginalize the population and cripple its potential. This process not only impedes immediate recovery but also

obstructs future growth, keeping the community entrenched in a state of underdevelopment and dependency.

The post-war reconstruction process can be divided into three phases, spanning the period from the cessation of aggression to the restoration of normal life. These phases should be viewed as interconnected and progressive. They are as follows<sup>4</sup>:

**Phase One:** The emergency phase, also known as the immediate relief and rescue phase, lasts from one to six months, depending on the nature and severity of the aggression. This phase is characterized by the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance and a comprehensive assessment of the damage caused by the destruction of the war.

**Phase Two:** The transitional phase, which lasts from two to five years, involves the gradual restoration of normal life for the affected population. During this phase, accurate data on the damage is collected, detailed plans are developed, and decisions for implementation are made. Particular emphasis is placed on revitalizing the economy, including the reconstruction of physical infrastructure.

**Phase Three:** The development or sustainability phase, lasting from five to twenty years, is the final stage of reconstruction, during which society fully returns to normal life. This phase focuses on long-term development and the reinforcement of sustainability, ensuring that the recovery process is not only completed but also resilient, enabling the community to thrive and meet future challenges.

The reconstruction process in Gaza should not only focus on the functional aspects of rebuilding, but also on preserving the collective memory and national identity of the Palestinian community. Therefore, reconstruction efforts must take the following factors into account:

- **Future Preparedness and Planning:** The reconstruction process in Gaza must address the issue of overpopulation, ensuring the development of road networks and infrastructure that can effectively accommodate the continuous population growth in the region.
- **Preserving the City's Identity:** The reconstruction of Gaza's cities must prioritize reinforcing the residents' identity, history, heritage, and their deep-rooted connection to the land. This process should strengthen the community's sense of belonging and individuality, while also preserving their collective memory.

However, the requirements for the reconstruction process should be based on the following<sup>5</sup>:

- **Needs Assessment:** This phase involves evaluating the fundamental needs of the affected population to identify the level and type of assistance required. It includes addressing essential needs such as housing, food and water, and access to basic services like electricity and education. The information gathered from this assessment enables the delivery of timely, relevant, and prioritized aid to those in need.
- **Damage and Destruction Assessment:** This assessment involves collecting detailed information to accurately understand the extent of the damage, allowing for adjustments to the reconstruction plans. Experts from various fields carry out evaluations and surveys, using the gathered data to guide the rebuilding process. This includes information on:
  - Damage to homes and buildings
  - Damage to essential livelihoods, including factories, shops, small businesses, and industrial units.
  - Damage to the agricultural sector, encompassing both crop and livestock production.
  - Damage to public services, including education, healthcare, utilities, and recreational facilities.
  - Damage to government buildings and facilities.
  - Damage to critical infrastructure, such as roads, water networks, electricity, sewage systems, telecommunications, and bridges.

#### **Existing Contexts for Reconstruction in the Gaza Strip:**

Conflict and post-conflict contexts are marked by significant environmental, economic, and social damage that can set affected communities back by decades. This is clearly evident in the current genocide perpetrated by the occupying forces against the Palestinian population, particularly in Gaza. For nearly a year, the occupying forces have been carrying out a coordinated campaign to dismantle the fundamental structures of Palestinian life, with the ultimate goal of eradicating the Palestinian

people. This aligns with Raphael Lemkin's definition of social genocide,<sup>6</sup> as outlined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.<sup>7</sup>

The systematic patterns of Israeli genocide in Gaza have manifested in numerous recurring forms across different times and locations throughout the region. These include territorial control, enforced internal displacement, the destruction of agricultural land and water resources, the devastation of vital infrastructure, and the targeting of humanitarian aid.<sup>8</sup>

A careful observer of Israeli actions in Gaza can recognize the intent to obliterate every facet of life in the region, effectively pushing it back to a pre-modern state, or as many Israeli leaders have openly declared, to the "stone age." This assessment is echoed by Philippe Lazzarini, the Commissioner of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), who stated that a single year of war has set Gaza back to the early 1950s. He further referenced a recent United Nations study, which concluded that the aggression has decimated the Palestinian economy, leaving nearly the entire population of Gaza in poverty, while health and education indicators have regressed by 70 years.<sup>9</sup>

According to international reports, the cost of reconstruction in Gaza is estimated to range between \$30-40 billion,<sup>10</sup> a figure that could rise further if the aggression continues. The region will require approximately 80 years to complete a comprehensive rebuilding process. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has highlighted that "if the war were to end tomorrow and Gaza returned to its pre-October 7, 2023 situation, Israel would need 350 years for its struggling economy to return to its unstable pre-war level."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the available estimates of the destruction in Gaza suggest that the scale of the current

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<sup>6</sup> Raphael Lemkin: A Polish Jewish lawyer (1900-1959) who described the Nazi policies of systematic murder, including the extermination of the European Jewish people. He coined the term "genocide" by combining the Greek word (-geno) meaning race, ethnicity, or tribe, with the Latin word (-cide) meaning killing. For more see: Holocaust Encyclopedia:

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/ar/article/what-is-genocide>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations: Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, United Nations website: <https://www.ohchr.org/ar/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-prevention-and-punishment-crime-genocide>

<sup>8</sup> Hayyan Jaber: "Patterns of Genocide in Palestine... Individual Cases in a Systematic Context of Mass Killing," Palestine Forum, <https://2u.pw/bjdrqmOf>

<sup>9</sup> Al-Quds Al-Arabi: <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D9%85%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B6-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A3%D8%B9%D8%A7/>.

<sup>10</sup> UN: Gaza reconstruction could take 80 years at \$40 billion cost <https://2u.pw/XsuVnOrc>

<sup>11</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-gaza-reconstruction-un-47ddba7401e102b2bb95e85f3e105>



aggression is unprecedented since World War II, and may even surpass it in both magnitude and intensity.

The issue of reconstruction in the Palestinian context is marked by deep contradictions and disparities between various stakeholders, making it an inherently complex and challenging process. This complexity is intensified by the ongoing dual conditions of occupation and blockade, which cast doubt on the possibility of meaningful reconstruction once the war ends. Israel's approach to reconstruction, in particular, is rooted in the denial of the Palestinian people's political rights, as evidenced by Israeli perspectives on the post-war scenario. These perspectives emphasize the continued control and domination over Palestinian life, which would effectively hollow out any reconstruction efforts of their true purpose. This pattern is evident in past experiences, most notably in the aftermath of the 2014 aggression, when Israel attempted to control the reconstruction process and used it as a means to justify its blockade of Gaza.

Naturally, the Israeli approach to any reconstruction effort will be driven by its security and economic priorities, aiming to shape a "new Palestinian" who conforms to the demands of occupation. This vision, articulated by the Israeli Prime Minister in several statements, revolves around a model of "cultural reform" that seeks to transform Palestinian identity and society in ways that serve Israeli objectives. Such an approach risks undermining Palestinian autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination, while reinforcing the ongoing dominance and control of the occupation.

The Israeli approach to any reconstruction process can be summarized as one that primarily serves its own security and economic interests. The central aim of the reconstruction efforts, as envisioned, is to alter the collective Palestinian mindset towards Israel and its policies. This approach, articulated by the Israeli Prime Minister, reflects the concept of "cultural reform,"<sup>12</sup> modeled on Douglas MacArthur's post-World War II strategy in Germany and Japan.<sup>13</sup>

### **What Kind of Reconstruction Process Do We Envision?**

Literature on post-conflict reconstruction worldwide highlights that reconstruction is not an automatic process. Its scale, scope, and pace depend on various geo-economic factors impacting all parties emerging from the conflict. Geopolitical considerations play a key role in how economic resources are allocated, with aid, loans, and

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U1jczbOiSw&rco=1>.

<sup>13</sup> Moamen Al-Ghazali: "The Contemporary Japanese Political System: A Comparison between the Meiji Era and the American Political System," Arab Democratic Center: <https://democraticac.de/?p=47088>

investments being directed based on the political objectives of influential regional and international powers.<sup>14</sup>

Reconstruction often becomes a new arena for competition among local, regional, and international actors. As a result, the post-conflict landscape is shaped by the alliances and rivalries that define the underlying regional conflicts.

There are four essential conditions that must be met for any reconstruction effort to be successful, which are:<sup>15</sup>

- 1. Availability of Economic Resources for Reconstruction:** This involves securing the financial resources essential for the reconstruction process. While the presence of ample resources, both locally and internationally, is crucial, it is not always sufficient to establish the political and economic foundations needed for long-term reconstruction. Some countries may lack the institutional stability and effectiveness necessary to properly utilize these resources.

Political factors, including the rise of new elites and the dynamics of the post-conflict political system, critically influence the prospects for securing reconstruction resources. These factors shape the local social and political beneficiaries of funding and determine the involvement of regional and international partners in the rebuilding process. For example, governments of countries emerging from conflict may face sanctions that restrict their access to investments and loans, hindering their reconstruction efforts.

- 2. The manner in which the war concludes:** The way in which the war ends plays a pivotal role in determining the course of post-conflict developments. There is concern that it could lead to political and social fragmentation within the Palestinian context, which would, in turn, have a profound impact on the reconstruction process in the following ways:

- Undermining security stability, a key prerequisite for attracting both local and international investments, which in turn hampers the flow of critical humanitarian aid required for the resettlement of internally displaced people.
- Threatening the cohesion of national markets, directly tied to regional stability in the post-war period, preventing the enforcement of essential

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sultan Barakat: "The Slowness of the Reconstruction Process in Gaza: Donor Hesitation between Subjective and Objective," Arab Policies Magazine, Volume 8, Issue 45, 2020



regulations governing economic activities, such as taxation, pricing of subsidized goods and services, and the provision of public services.

- The ongoing fragmentation often leads to the restructuring of state and business networks, benefiting warlords who have entered the business sphere. These so-called "criminal entrepreneurs" typically operate by offering protection or engaging in various forms of violence, such as looting, extortion, and asset stripping. As a result, productive activities are undermined through mediation, including smuggling, trafficking, and other illicit market practices. Additionally, their involvement in overt looting disrupts the interests of other actors in society or the market. These dynamics make it difficult to transition away from a war economy, even after major hostilities have subsided. This pattern has been observed in countries with weak state institutions. In Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and El Salvador, for instance, warlords and business leaders dominated the economy post-conflict. They succeeded in consolidating their power and manipulating economic incentives to serve their own interests, turning violence, protection rackets, looting of natural resources, and recruitment of fighters into widespread economic activities involving large segments of the population.

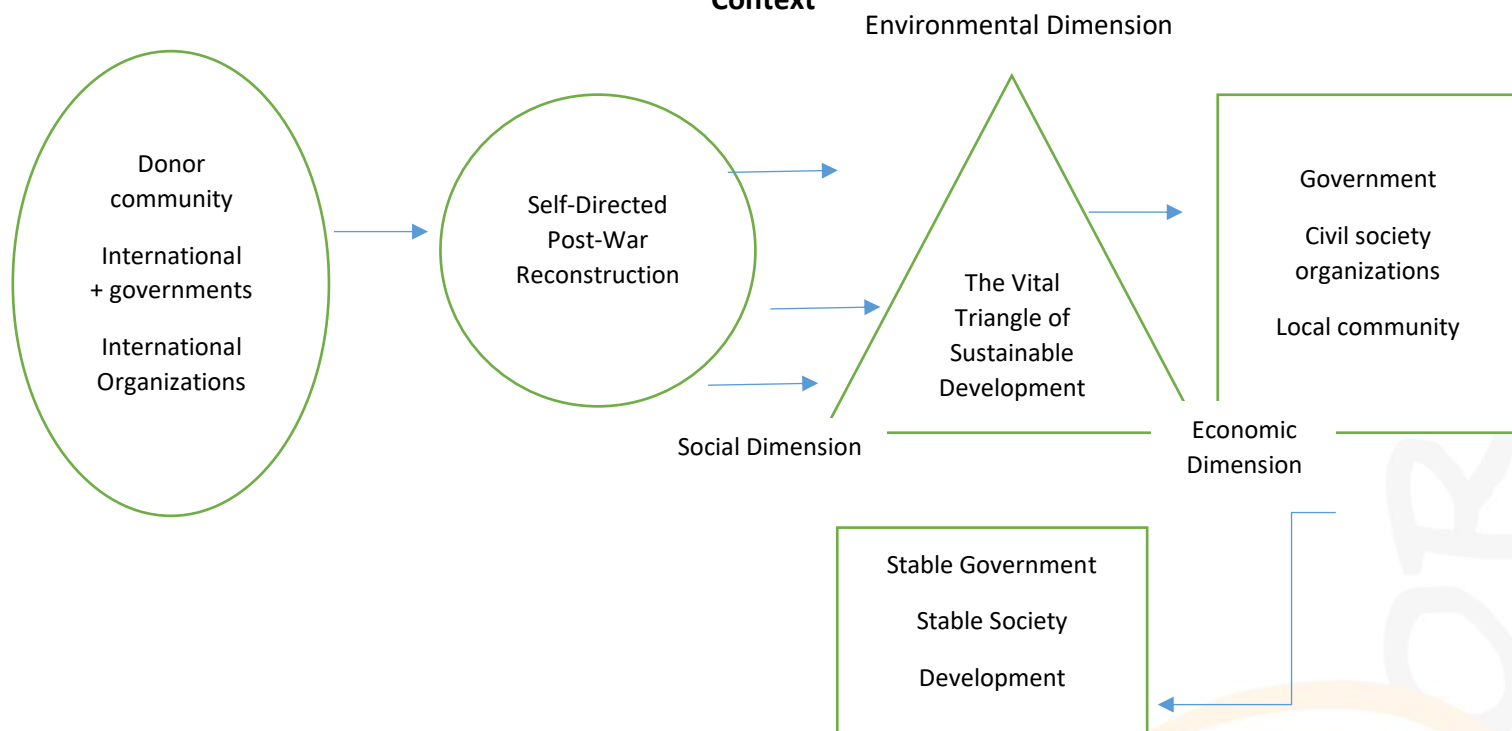
- 3. The Presence or Absence of a Political Process at the National or Regional Level:** The existence of a political process in the post-war phase largely depends on the manner in which the conflict ended, and this process plays a crucial role in determining the feasibility and nature of reconstruction. It is deeply intertwined with the political dimensions of rebuilding, whether directly through power-sharing arrangements or mechanisms of control, or indirectly through the establishment of rules governing the redistribution of resources. This has significant consequences for forming alliances and legitimizing political authorities in the aftermath of conflict.
- 4. The Pre-War Economic Structures, Institutional Legacy, and State Relations:** The economic legacy of a country prior to war plays a significant role in determining whether reconstruction will lead to long-term economic recovery or merely to the physical rehabilitation of war-affected states. This legacy can either present an opportunity or a barrier that shapes the impact of reconstruction efforts. It can either enhance or hinder the path toward comprehensive development, where citizens actively participate in the production and distribution of value, thus influencing prospects for national reintegration and state-building.

### Which Reconstruction Model Do We Want:

The Palestinian context, with all its implications, necessitates the development of a unique model that links development and reconstruction. It is essential to approach the issue of reconstruction within the Palestinian context from a developmental perspective, rather than from a narrow economic or utilitarian one. This developmental approach is the most fitting for the current Palestinian situation, as it focuses on addressing both immediate and long-term challenges. This model not only aims to address post-war conditions but also ensures the provision of opportunities for future generations, creating pathways for a dignified life for all.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars in the Palestinian context argue that the developmental model is the most effective approach<sup>17</sup> for achieving meaningful reconstruction in Palestine, contingent upon favorable political conditions. This model is built on an interconnected framework called the Vital Triangle of Sustainable Development, which equally emphasizes three core dimensions: economic, social, and environmental development.

### **The Sustainable Development Reconstruction Model Needed in the Palestinian Context**



<sup>16</sup> Yasser Darwish: Outputs of a workshop on youth and reconstruction, held in REFORM's office in the Gaza Strip.

<sup>17</sup> Amjad Al-Shawa: Outputs of a dialogue session on the role of youth in the issue of reconstruction, Ramallah, Palestine, prepared at REFORM's office in the Gaza Strip.

### **Requirements for Achieving the Reconstruction Model in the Palestinian Context:**

Many observers consider the developmental model for reconstruction to be the most effective and suitable for the Palestinian context, as it contributes to the following:

- Ensuring comprehensive international support for the reconstruction process without preconditions or harsh political compromises, while fostering an understanding within the international community (donor community) of the Palestinian needs.
- Localizing the reconstruction issue within the Palestinian context by establishing a self-sustaining Palestinian national and local leadership to guide the reconstruction efforts. This leadership is uniquely positioned to understand and address the economic, social, and environmental needs of the Palestinian society. It can implement realistic, integrated solutions to the profound challenges imposed by the war, such as the destruction of infrastructure—including vital resources like food, water, air, and soil—the collapse of the economic system, including job opportunities, employment, and the private sphere. Most crucially, it can tackle the social challenges caused by death, displacement, refugee crises, the destruction of education, the breakdown of civil order, rising poverty, insecurity, and the fragmentation of the social fabric.<sup>18</sup>
- Focusing on building an economy that addresses the needs of society, rather than emphasizing the distribution of shares between local and international companies.
- Prioritizing the removal of war remnants from the environment as an essential step for ensuring safe living conditions, while addressing the social and psychological trauma resulting from the war.
- This model fosters societal stability, helps overcome polarization and divisions, and contributes to the stabilization of the political system.

### **Requirements for the Success of the Developmental Model in the Palestinian Context:**

For the developmental model to succeed, it is crucial to adopt it as part of a clear vision for reconstruction within the Palestinian context. Thus, achieving the following is essential:

- Establishing a specialized technical and professional committee within the framework of a unified Palestinian political system, ensuring it remains integrated rather than separate from this framework. This is crucial in the Palestinian context to ensure that the reconstruction process does not align with Israeli objectives

aimed at fragmenting Palestinian areas and undermining the unity and institutional coherence of the Palestinian entity.

- Establishing a framework that brings together all political forces, civil society, and prominent figures to organize the situation on the ground in Gaza, while revitalizing the popular aspect through the reactivation of volunteer committees. These committees could help alleviate social tensions and prevent conflicts.
- Integrating emergency relief efforts as the initial phase of the reconstruction process within a national and liberationist framework. This requires rethinking the operational mechanisms to establish a comprehensive national reconstruction strategy, while rejecting the oversight systems that existed prior to the aggression, particularly the Robert Serry framework, which legitimized the Israeli blockade and control over reconstruction materials.
- Expanding the range of financing options by seeking engagement with China, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and the Group of 77, to diversify and broaden the financial opportunities available to Palestine.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **1- At the Level of National Institutions:**

- Developing a strategic vision to establish governance structures in the Gaza Strip during the transitional phase, within the framework of a unified political system.
- Adopting a unified Palestinian vision that unites all Palestinian factions, political forces, and civil society organizations, ensuring inclusive representation. This will help build a comprehensive national vision that defines plans, strategies, interventions, and policies for a comprehensive reconstruction.
- Establishing a unified Palestinian delegation to negotiate with international stakeholders and the donor community on the mechanisms and strategies required for the Palestinian reconstruction process.
- The reconstruction process must be seen as an opportunity to reform the Palestinian political system, restore national unity, and end the division. It should also provide a chance to renew the system's structures and restore the legitimacy of all its components through an inclusive democratic process. This will allow the political system to achieve reconciliation and unify its institutions, facilitating a smooth and efficient reconstruction process, free from regional tensions and the politics of alignment that could delay or obstruct reconstruction efforts.
- It is crucial for the Palestinian Authority to adopt a disaster management and reconstruction strategy, informed by lessons from previous international

experiences. This strategy should be implemented at the national level, covering all aspects related to every phase of disaster management and reconstruction.

- Establishing an effective national center or authority for disaster management, focused on coordination, research, and preparedness. Its primary mission would be to strengthen communities' resilience to disasters, develop the necessary policies and legislation, and create a flexible framework for swift and sustainable reconstruction. This would involve crafting the required legal frameworks specific to the Palestinian context, conducting studies to reduce potential obstacles in the reconstruction process, and ensuring that civil society organizations play a pivotal and active role within this center or authority.
- Guiding reconstruction efforts toward urban sustainability, ensuring they meet the needs of the Palestinian community in Gaza while being adaptable to the changing social dynamics.

## **2- At the Level of Local Authorities:**

- Amending the technical regulations within local authorities regarding building and construction permits to ensure the provision of integrated infrastructure across all cities and villages in the Gaza Strip. These amendments should be incorporated into future development plans for the region, aligning with sustainable urban development initiatives. Furthermore, local communities should be actively engaged in the future planning of Palestinian cities.
- Prioritizing green spaces in the reconstruction process and formulating clear policies to address the anticipated expansion into agricultural areas.
- Municipalities and local committees must actively involve citizens, especially youth and women, in the planning of reconstruction efforts.

## **3- At the Level of Civil Society Organizations:**

- Civil society organizations must play an active, constructive, and influential role in the reconstruction process, contributing to the development of Palestinian legislation and policies that effectively respond to the needs of the Palestinian community.
- Emphasizing the monitoring role of civil society organizations in identifying any potential corruption within the reconstruction process, while also conducting studies and research to enhance and refine reconstruction efforts.
- It is crucial to ensure coordination, integration, and full partnership with official institutions to facilitate a rapid and flexible reconstruction process in Gaza. Civil

society organizations must also assume their vital supporting role alongside the government in raising community awareness about the reconstruction efforts.

#### 4- At the Level of the International Community and Donor Countries:

- Donor countries must uphold their commitments to the reconstruction process, ensuring that their contributions are not linked in any way to political positions regarding the Palestinian political system.
- It is essential to support Palestinian efforts to create a national and civic framework to lead the reconstruction process, in line with the Palestinian vision for rebuilding.
- Political conditions should not be imposed on the reconstruction process. Donor countries must ensure that their support for reconstruction respects the rights of the Palestinian people, in line with international legal resolutions.
- Donor countries should play a key role in strengthening the infrastructure of Palestinian society and its institutions, thereby contributing to the development of the Palestinian political system.
- Donor countries must ensure that the reconstruction process truly reflects the establishment of Palestinian state institutions, free from political bias or the manipulation of reconstruction efforts for political leverage over Palestinian positions.
- The international community and donor countries must take active steps to prevent Israel from delaying or hindering the reconstruction process. Reconstruction should be a central chance for ending the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip.
- It is essential to hold Israel accountable for respecting the resources of the Palestinian people and refraining from interfering with them. In this context, donor countries should seek guarantees that Israeli actions will not target reconstruction projects in the Gaza Strip.
- The international approach to reconstruction must prioritize its developmental role by integrating reconstruction efforts with the enhancement of Gaza's infrastructure and economy. This will foster genuine and sustainable development within the region.



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