

RETURNING TO JABALIA – A TESTIMONY FROM HUSSEIN, UNRWA TEAM MEMBER

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Returning to Jabalia – a testimony from Hussein, UNRWA team member

After the ceasefire had started, I walked all the way from Beach camp in western Gaza City to Jabalia in the northern part of the Strip. The journey was exhausting, both physically and emotionally. I was anxious about what I would see in the place where I was born and raised, where my family and friends lived. We had expected destruction based on the relentless sounds of explosions that echoed from Jabalia for over 100 days, but nothing could have prepared me for the reality I encountered.

As soon as I arrived at Jabalia camp, I tried to check on my family's temporary house, where they had been living instead of their main house, which had been destroyed in the Israeli military operation in May 2024. The surprise was that I couldn't find anything that indicated the house or the streets. All the houses were mixed together, and all the memories of the family home and the neighborhood were gone.



After the ceasefire started, people who had been displaced are returning to Jabalia, northern Gaza - January 2025 © 2025 UNRWA photo

I began documenting with my camera. The scenes were harrowing—complete devastation. Nothing looked the same. I saw people who had been displaced gradually returning to the camp, but the shock on their faces was unmistakable. They couldn't recognize the streets or their homes; everything had been destroyed, leveled to the ground. The situation was beyond dire: no water, no food, no sanitation, no walls—no life. Even sitting among the ruins was impossible because there was nothing left to hold onto.

As the day progressed, some families decided to return to shelters in Gaza City, saying that Jabalia was no longer habitable. Others, with no alternatives, stayed in Jabalia, living amidst unimaginable conditions: no shelter, no food, no water, surrounded by rubble and makeshift tents.



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Despite the challenges, I witnessed UNRWA respond swiftly by distributing emergency food parcels to the families who had no other refuge. However, the mission was far from easy. There were no proper means of transportation, forcing us to walk for hours to reach the affected areas. Occasionally, we relied on damaged UNRWA vehicles that barely functioned after 15 months of war. The roads were destroyed, making movement nearly impossible. People would often flock toward the aid distribution, driven by a severe shortage of basic resources.

As a photographer, I felt deeply powerless. The camera, my trusted tool for capturing reality, failed to convey the magnitude of destruction and suffering. The tragedy and devastation I witnessed were beyond the limits of any lens. The pain, the shock, and the untold stories etched on people's faces were impossible to fully capture. Every photo I took felt inadequate, unable to reflect the enormity of the crisis.



After the ceasefire started, people who had been displaced are returning to Jabalia, northern Gaza - January 2025 © 2025 UNRWA photo



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Despite this sense of helplessness, I knew my role was crucial. This experience underscored the immense human suffering and the urgent need for sustained international support. The residents of Jabalia desperately need shelter, water, food, and healthcare. But above all, they need hope—for a dignified life and a better future.

After three weeks, UNRWA teams, working day and night, were able to repair a generator to operate the main water pump in Jabalia. The primary demand of the people was water. I remember how happy they were when the pump was first turned on. The UNRWA team was very proud of this achievement and of providing urgent assistance to the displaced people, whose homes had been destroyed and who were left homeless. I feel a strong and deep connection between the Palestine Refugees and UNRWA, as neither can exist without the other.



UNRWA team members distribute humanitarian aid to displaced people returning to northern Gaza - January 2025 © 2025 UNRWA photo



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