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Palestinians collect aid supplies from trucks that entered the Gaza Strip, amid a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza City, Oct. 12, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Ramadan Abed)



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Two waves of trucks supplied by Catholic Relief Services with tents and other shelter equipment rolled into Gaza last week.

For most of the year, the trucks — carrying hygiene kits, food and shelters — have sat idle in Jordan and Egypt after the collapse of a short-lived ceasefire agreement in March made bringing supplies across the border extremely [difficult](#). Nearly a dozen warehouses in the two countries also remained filled with supplies destined for the Gaza Strip.

With a [new halt in fighting reached Oct. 10](#), some of the trucks in Jordan have made their way into Gaza. For CRS, the international aid and development arm of the U.S. Catholic bishops, the days since have focused on reestablishing its networks, reconnecting with its distribution centers and reassessing need as it begins again the long mission to assist millions of Palestinians recover and rebuild after two years of war and near-daily bombardments.

The mood in Gaza is of "cautious optimism," said Jason Knapp, CRS country representative for Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank.



A Palestinian girl looks out from a window of a car carrying belongings, as she and other Palestinians who were displaced to the southern part of the Gaza Strip at Israel's order during the war make their way along a road, as they return to the north, amid a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza City, Oct. 12, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Mahmoud Issa)

"These moments of hope have broken down before, but definitely [it is] a huge relief that the hostilities ended. And a thoughtfulness as people look toward the future and try to understand what is ahead for them," he said in a phone interview Oct. 16.

The first test of the latest ceasefire agreement came days later, when Israeli forces on Oct. 19 suspended aid entering Gaza and fired several missiles in response to militants firing on Israeli troops. Israeli and Hamas leadership both said they remained committed to the ceasefire, the Associated Press [reported](#), and Israeli officials said that aid was to resume Monday, Oct. 20.

"We've been praying for and hoping for [a ceasefire for] a long time, but it's tenuous, and so the big worry is just that it will fall apart," Bill O'Keefe, CRS

executive vice president for Mission, Mobilization and Advocacy, said in a phone interview days before the new strikes. "And there's lots of ways that could happen, and it's going to take hard work and willingness of parties to ensure that the peace holds."

## **Surveying immediate needs**

Knapp, who is based in Jerusalem, began his position with CRS in mid-2023, just months before war broke out after the Palestinian militant group Hamas killed 1,200 people in southern Israel and took more than 250 people as hostages. Israel's military response has [decimated](#) much of Gaza and killed an estimated 67,000 people — nearly half of them women and children — and injured 170,000 more.

"It's been so heartbreaking to see the impact of war on all the cultures here in the Holy Land," Knapp said, "and to see the ways that it impacts people, the way that impacts families and communities and whole national structures."

**[Related: Cardinal says joy over Israel-Hamas ceasefire overshadowed by 'pain' of loss in war](#)**

A third ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was reached Oct. 9. The peace plan [took effect Oct. 13](#) and required Hamas to release the remaining 48 hostages, including 20 believed to be living, and for Israel to withdraw from Gaza in three phases and also release 250 Palestinian prisoners and 1,700 detainees. In addition, Israel agreed to reopen humanitarian aid corridors.

CRS has restarted its office in Gaza City. Most of the distribution centers it uses in Gaza are still operating, though some were destroyed. Some hygiene kits have already been distributed.

It will take time for relief efforts to fully ramp up, Knapp said. The roads are a primary factor.

On Oct. 9, travel was slow and winding through Gaza when Knapp joined a CRS convoy visiting Rafah, Khan Yunis and Deir al-Balah.



Palestinians, who were displaced to the southern part of Gaza at Israel's order during the war, make their way along a road in the central Gaza Strip as they return to the north Oct. 10, 2025, after a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza went into effect. (OSV News/Reuters/Mahmoud Issa)

Roads of debris and rubble badly damaged by bombings and military strikes stretched a typically 30-minute journey to three hours. Stalled vehicles and tents pitched alongside roads provided additional impediments and at times the trucks drove on makeshift paths in sand.

"There's a lot of work that needs to be done in the immediate term to clear roads and to restore basic services, especially water systems and sanitation systems," Knapp said.

CRS has focused on scaling up its operations as hundreds of thousands of people move from southern Gaza back north to Gaza City. A challenge will be analyzing what the need is — whether shelters, clean water, food or basic essentials. Even more difficult, Knapp said, is ensuring that aid reaches the most vulnerable, amid a

population where nearly everyone was impacted by the war in some way.

"The amount of supplies that we've been able to get to Gaza City has still been fairly limited so far," Knapp said.

Along with the immediate focus on providing food to people facing starvation and famine, rebuilding homes and infrastructure will also be a major focus for CRS. Doing so will take a lot of time and money, O'Keefe said. The agency's experience in the aftermath of tsunamis and other extreme storms, he said, has developed an expertise in constructing temporary housing that is both dignified and safe.



A Catholic Relief Services worker chats with people at a tent camp for displaced Palestinians in the Gaza Strip May 5, 2025. (OSV News/CRS Staff)

"We are already designing with people on the ground how we can assist people to move from tents to a more stable and but still temporary housing until the infrastructure is repaired or rebuilt," he said.

## Rebuilding lives in Gaza

The hope is that CRS's network of warehouses and decades of experience working in Gaza will help its operations scale up rapidly and shift just as quickly to address needs as they arise and change. Along with broken roads and brittle truces, another looming obstacle is the coming winter months, when rain and colder temperatures will worsen roads and living conditions.

"That is something that is weighing over us, the amount of supplies that need to get in before, before winter," Knapp said.

He offered "immense appreciation" for the support of CRS's work from Catholics in the United States. A donation page remains open on the CRS website.

CRS has a staff of 65 people in Gaza now, and they are working to expand that number, O'Keefe said. Many already working in Gaza did not escape the impacts of war.

"[Some] are returning to what was their home and finding that life as they know it is never going to come back the way it was," O'Keefe said.

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Like many displaced Palestinians, the return home for CRS staff is beyond meaningful.

About a month ago, a Palestinian CRS member and his family were displaced to Deir al-Balah from their home in Gaza City. His wife was pregnant with their second child, and it remained their dream for the baby's birth certificate to say "Gaza City."

"He was telling me about [what] all of that would mean for him," Knapp said. "To be able for them to move, for them to work through the rubble, try to find a place to live, try to find clean water, try to find health care that was accessible and where his wife could safely deliver their baby, all for that sense of home."

When they last spoke, the family had made their way back to Gaza City. The wife was still pregnant.

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