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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

9 – 15 July 2008

Military activities affecting civilians

The relative calm felt in Gaza and the Western Negev (Israel) since the ceasefire agreement went into force on 19 June continued during the reporting week. Only one serious incident was recorded, in which the IDF shot and killed a 23-year-old Palestinian unarmed civilian who approached the border fence east of Khan Younis. Moreover, four rudimentary rockets and two mortars were fired by Palestinian militants at Israel (three of which landed in Gaza), resulting in no Israeli fatalities or injuries. No incursions or air strikes were conducted by the IDF.

By contrast, this week was characterised by intense IDF military activities throughout the West Bank. One of the major IDF operations was conducted in the town of Beit Fajjar on 15 July (Bethlehem). In the course of the operation, the IDF closed all the main entry points to the town with earthmounds, imposed an eight-hour curfew, and converted the old municipality building into a military post. In Kafr Dan village (Jenin), an Israeli Border Police undercover unit, supported by the IDF, opened fire at two Palestinian militants who were travelling in a vehicle and arrested them. One of the injured men died at an Israeli hospital later in the day.

In another incident, an Israeli settler and an IDF soldier were shot and injured by a 50-year-old Palestinian militant near Deir Istiya, after which he was shot and killed by the IDF (Salfit). The IDF subsequently carried out a search and arrest operation in Qarawat Bani Hassan (Salfit), the man's home town, and imposed a curfew for three hours.

Moreover, 130 IDF search operations and 109 Palestinians arrests/detentions were reported this week. The majority of arrests took place in the Hebron (24), Nablus (21), Qalqiliya (19) and Jenin (18) governorates, while the majority of detentions took place in the Ramallah (34) and Nablus (23) governorates. These operations resulted in the injury of seven Palestinians, including five children, and some caused significant damage to or loss of property. For instance, during the search campaigns in Al Hawwoz and Abu Kteila areas of Hebron City, the IDF damaged the contents of six apartments and demolished the front walls of two houses. In the Ramallah governorate, the IDF confiscated documents from Al Bireh municipality as well as the office of the Palestinian Legislative Council Speaker, Abdel 'Aziz Duweik.

During the reporting period, the IDF also continued raiding Islamic Charities and mosques, allegedly connected to Hamas, in Nablus City. Raids were additionally conducted in the Nablus Municipality and the Nablus Mall. Most raids resulted in the closure of targeted institutions by the delivery of military orders, the confiscation of computers and files and the damage of main doors. On 9 July, Palestinians held a commercial strike in Nablus city to protest against the raids.

West Bank anti-Barrier demonstrations

During the reporting period, 16 Palestinians, one Israeli and six foreigners were injured by the IDF in the course of anti-Barrier demonstrations, mostly by rubber-coated metal bullets fired by the soldiers at the demonstrators. One Israeli Border policeman was also injured by stones thrown by the demonstrators. All the casualties this week occurred in Ni'lin village (western Ramallah) where demonstrators were protesting against Barrier construction on the village's land and the resultant isolation of approximately 2,500 dunums of private agricultural land. Moreover, three dunums of agricultural land and 50 olive trees were set on fire following the firing of gas canisters by the IDF at the demonstrators. This was the 10th consecutive week that anti-Barrier demonstrations were held in Ni'lin, resulting hitherto in the injury of 159 Palestinians, 28 of them children.

Another three demonstrations were held near the Barrier in the Tulkarm and Qalqiliya governorates to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the International Court of Justice advisory opinion, which declared the construction of the Barrier along its current route in the West Bank illegal under international law.

Incidents involving Israeli settlers

In six separate incidents this week, Palestinians threw stones (four incidents), hurled a firebomb (one incident) and opened gun fire (one incident) at Israeli settlers' vehicles in the West Bank,

resulting in the injury of one Israeli settler (reported in the first section) and damages to three vehicles.

In contrast to previous weeks, there were no Palestinian casualties this week as a result of attacks by Israeli settlers. However, on 9 July Israeli settlers from Bracha settlement fired six improvised rockets towards Burin village and one towards Madama village (Nablus), none of which resulted in injuries or damage. In addition, Israeli settlers from Beit El settlement stole 25 sheep belonging to a Palestinian herder from Beitin after reportedly threatening him (Ramallah).

In Bethlehem governorate, Israeli settlers from the settlements of Har Homa, Kiryat Arba, Gush Etzion block and Nokdim renewed their attempts to establish a presence in the evacuated military post of Ish Al Ghurab in Beit Sahur; on 14 July, they stayed overnight at the site under the protection of the IDF.

Restrictions on freedom of movement within the West Bank

The deployment of an unusually high number of flying checkpoints reported last week (149) continued this week with a total of 125 flying checkpoints. This is higher than the 2007 weekly average of 113 but lower than the 2006 weekly average of 136. The majority of flying checkpoints (76 or 61%) were deployed in the Hebron governorate, which was also subject to additional restrictions following the closure by the IDF of the main entry points into the villages of Beit Kahil, Tarqumiya, Idhna and Wadi Al Shajneh as well as three main junctions – Al Fahs (entry point into the industrial zone in H2), Halhul Bridge and Al Fawwar.

Furthermore, freedom of movement was severely hampered by delays and long queues reported at the major checkpoints controlling access to Qalqiliya City (Qalqiliya North and Qalqiliya DCO), Nablus City (Beit Iba and Huwwara), the northern West Bank (Tappuah), the Jordan Valley (Tayasir, Hamra and Yitav), East Jerusalem (Qalandiya, Ar Ram and Rafat), Jericho (Jericho DCO) and Ramallah (Jaba').

The IDF also prevented all Palestinians, except residents of Jericho travelling in vehicles registered in Jericho, from accessing the northern Jordan Valley area through Yitav checkpoint, forcing them to take a long detour route through Ma'ale Efrayim checkpoint.

House demolitions and displacement

The moratorium on house demolitions in Area C of the West Bank due to the lack of building permits, which was put into effect by the Israeli authorities in April 2008, continued during the reporting week.

On 15 July, however, the Jerusalem Municipality demolished three houses in East Jerusalem, where the moratorium does not apply, due to the lack of building permits. Two of the demolitions were carried out in Al Ashqariyeh neighbourhood in Beit Hanina and resulted in the displacement of 18 Palestinians, including 14 children, who previously had their houses demolished for the same reason in 2003. Most of the furniture was damaged as it was moved out by municipality workers. The third demolished structure was a two-storey building under construction in Al 'Isawiya, to which a family of eight Palestinians, including six children, were preparing to move. The same family had its house demolished in 1996.

Collapse of tunnels along the Gaza/Egypt border

Three Palestinians were killed this week and ten injured as a result of the collapse of tunnels along the Gaza-Egypt border. This brings up the number of Palestinian casualties due to tunnel collapses since the beginning of 2008 to 12 fatalities and 24 injuries.

Protection of Civilians Weekly Briefing Notes – New Format

Following the change in the format of this report since 9 July 2008, please be informed that detailed information on casualties, house demolitions, settler incidents, curfew, flying checkpoints, search and arrest operations, rockets, mortars and airstrikes, which appeared in the previous format, will be gradually made available in a searchable format on OCHA's website as of 15 August 2008.