



THE HUMANITARIAN MONITOR

APRIL 2009

April Overview

The basic right of many Palestinians to human dignity continued to be undermined during April. In the West Bank, over 100 Palestinians, including many children, were displaced when their homes were demolished by the Israeli authorities for lack of permit, an over two-fold increase in displacement compared to March 2009. Hundreds of additional Palestinian homes were raided and searched by the Israeli army in the course of over 350 search operations throughout the West Bank. In addition, there was a 40% increase in the number of Palestinian conflict-related injuries, compared to the 2008 monthly average. Nearly half of these injuries



Selling petrol in plastic bottles. Gaza 2009.
Photo by jctordai.

occurred during incidents of Israeli settler violence, which is on the rise in the West Bank.

ISSUES COVERED THIS MONTH

West Bank, including East Jerusalem: Increase in Israeli military activities ● Israeli settler violence and related incidents on the rise ● Sharp increase in demolitions and resultant displacement ● OCHA releases Special Focus: The Planning Crisis in East Jerusalem: Understanding the Phenomenon of “Illegal” Construction ● Long delays continue at Qalandiya checkpoint ● Child Protection Concern: Number of child detainees remains high

Gaza Strip: Significant decrease in Israeli-Palestinian violence ● Internal violence raises protection concerns ● The blockade continues: Fewer goods entered Gaza ● Movement in and out of Gaza remained banned ● Land and sea access restrictions undermine livelihoods ● Referral of patients abroad disrupted during most of the month ● Wastewater situation remains fragile ● Shelter: damages assessments complete; reconstruction prevented ● Rubble removal activities ongoing ● New requests by Hamas authorities to international NGOs ● UN report on needs in Gaza in the aftermath of “Cast Lead” launched

Other oPt issues: World Bank report: ● development of the Palestinian water sector severely constrained ● Severe under-funding for West Bank projects; CAP Mid-Year Review initiated

With the blockade completing its 22nd month and the needs that emerged out of Israel's "Cast Lead" offensive still hardly addressed, the entire population of Gaza remains affected by a severe crisis of human dignity. Access for humanitarian supplies and basic goods was significantly reduced as Israel closed the crossings for the Jewish holiday of Passover. Fewer truckloads entered Gaza in April than in any month in 2009. No benzene or diesel has been allowed into Gaza for five months and cooking gas continued to be rationed. Raw sewage was back-flowing into homes in Khan Younis due to the deterioration in the sewage and wastewater treatment systems; during April, only three truckloads of plastic pipes for water and wastewater projects for the private sector were allowed into Gaza, after being barred entry since late October 2008 - an insignificant contribution in relation to the overall needs.

Other access impediments have further undermined the livelihoods of vulnerable populations throughout the oPt. In Gaza, the Israeli forces prevented farmers and fishermen from reaching cultivated areas in the proximity of the border, as well as sea areas beyond three nautical miles from the shore. This has impacted the harvest season of barley and wheat, and the peak of the sardine season, both of which take place during April. In the West Bank, access of farmers and herders to areas located in the vicinity of certain Israeli settlements or on the "Israeli" side of the Barrier, continues to be severely restricted as a result of recurrent incidents of settler intimidation and a permit and gate regime respectively.

In addition, there were hundreds of Palestinians from Gaza with acute medical problems, seeking specialized medical care outside of Gaza, who were unable to obtain the needed care due to the blockade and the political dispute between the Hamas authorities in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. At the end of the month, the dispute was resolved, allowing 90 patients to cross Erez during April, compared to 325 in March 2009. Parallel to this, access of West Bank patients to specialized treatment, while generally less constrained than for Gazans, was also affected by long delays observed at checkpoints controlling access into East Jerusalem, where most specialized hospitals are located.

A UN gender survey released this month identified an overall concern regarding psychological trauma and stress among the Gaza population. With limited access to professional psychological services, the survey found that there is a rising problem of self-medication with unsupervised pharmaceutical therapies. The survey also found that domestic violence against women is mainly concentrated in households displaced by the Israeli offensive. Some 37% of the women surveyed cited domestic violence as the primary safety problem facing women and girls, while over 50% of the surveyed men said that public and political violence is the main safety and security problem facing men and boys.

During April, the protection afforded to the population of Gaza has been affected by incidents of internal Palestinian violence, including a number of so-called "honour" killings and armed inter-factional clashes, which resulted in five fatalities and 16 injuries. In addition, while Gaza and southern Israel witnessed one of the lowest levels of violence in past years, sporadic military activities by both sides continued and resulted in the deaths of two armed militants. In the absence of an agreed ceasefire, however, the relative calm felt in April remains fragile.

Human dignity is a basic right and should not be contingent on political progress. As a first step towards reducing the assault on Palestinian human dignity, Israeli house demolitions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, should be frozen and settler violence against Palestinians and their property should be brought to an end. In the Gaza Strip, the type of goods permitted to enter should be broadened and the quantities sharply increased; humanitarian operations should be allowed without interference; unimpeded access into Gaza for essential supplies and staff should be provided regardless of religious or national holidays. Access to medical care and other necessities should not be delayed or denied due to Palestinian factional disputes. In addition, to prevent further deterioration, the international community should increase the funding for humanitarian projects in the CAP, West Bank projects in particular.

West Bank, including East Jerusalem

Increase in Israeli military activities

Israeli military activities escalated in April. This trend is reflected in the total number of Palestinian injuries, as well as in the number of Israeli search operations and related arrests. During the month, four Palestinians, including two boys, were killed by Israeli security forces and another 145 were injured by Israeli soldiers and settlers. The number of Palestinian injuries represents an approximate 40% increase compared to the monthly average in 2008. In addition, one Israeli child was killed and five Israelis were injured this month in the West Bank, compared to a monthly average of nine injuries in 2008. Search and arrest operations inside Palestinian villages totaled 460 during April, a 13% increase compared with the 2008 monthly average, while the number of arrests increased by 25% between March (295) and April (368).

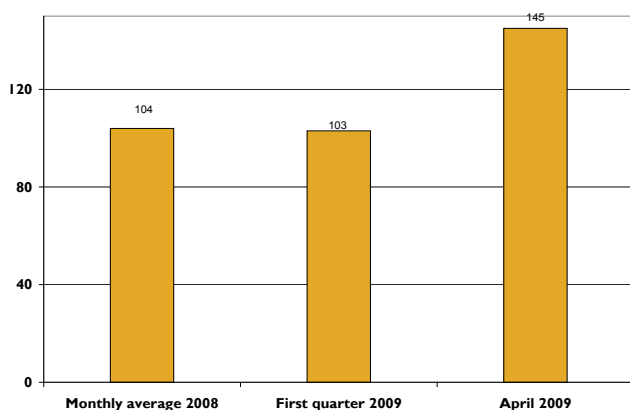


Figure 1: Palestinian injuries in the West Bank

Roughly one-third of Palestinian injuries (54) in April, and one of the fatalities, occurred during weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations. Most of the injuries happened in Bil'in and Ni'lin villages (Ramallah) as a result of live and metal-coated rubber bullets fired by Israeli security forces. On 17 April, a 26-year-old Palestinian demonstrator in Bil'in, was killed after being hit with a tear-gas canister fired by Israeli forces. Footage of the incident showed that the victim was not involved in any kind of violent behavior at the time he was shot.¹ The Israeli army launched an investigation into the killing. Weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations in Bil'in have occurred regularly since 2005. In September 2007, the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled that the Bil'in section of

the Barrier should be re-routed to restore access to part of the village's land, but the ruling has not yet been implemented.

Out of the IDF search and arrest campaigns, 347 occurred in the northern West Bank.² Palestinian villages with frequent incidents of stone-throwing at Israeli-plated vehicles driving on roads leading to settlements were the site of almost weekly operations, during which, curfews were usually imposed, impacting all aspects of life inside the villages. For example, on two consecutive days in April (15 and 16), following stone-throwing incidents, the Israeli army conducted three search and arrest operations in Haris village (Salfit); a total of 11 curfews hours were imposed on the village, resulting in the closure of the three schools in the village.

Israeli settler violence and related incidents on the rise

Nearly half of April injuries (67) stemmed from incidents involving Israeli settlers. The number of settler-related incidents recorded by OCHA this month (52) was 21% higher than the 2008 monthly average. The majority of these incidents, 47, involved Israeli settler violence against Palestinians and their property. In five of the incidents, however, Israelis in the West Bank were the target of Palestinian violence, resulting in the killing of one Israeli child and the injury of two other Israelis. Of the 67 Palestinian injuries, 23 were caused directly by Israeli settlers, while 44 were caused by Israeli soldiers during incidents involving Israeli settlers. Palestinian and Israeli injuries recorded in settler-related incidents in April are compared to a monthly average of 17 Palestinians and four Israelis injured in 2008.

While the full extent of settler violence is difficult to capture, in part, because many incidents go unreported, April's incidents come in the context of rising levels of settler violence in the West Bank recorded over the past several years: the number of incidents affecting Palestinians in April was 42% higher than the monthly average of such incidents in 2008, during which there were more settler incidents targeting Palestinians than in each of the previous two years, 401 compared to 182 in 2006 and 243 in 2007.³

SETTLER-RELATED INCIDENTS TARGETING ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN CHILDREN

The month of April was marked by an alarming series of violent attacks against children in the West Bank, the majority of which affected Palestinian children. Among the most serious incidents were the following:

1 April: A 13-year-old Palestinian boy from the Tel Rumeida neighbourhood of the Israeli-controlled part of Hebron city (H2) was injured when a group of Israeli settlers beat him while en route to his house.

2 April: A Palestinian man attacked the Israeli settlement of Bat Ayin, west of Bethlehem city, killing a 13-year-old Israeli child and wounding another seven-year-old child.

2 April: Israeli settlers stoned a Palestinian bus crossing Tappuah checkpoint, injuring a 17-year-old Palestinian girl, who was later admitted to a Nablus hospital.

3 April: A group of Israeli settlers beat three Palestinians, including two children (ages 15 and 16) in south Hebron. Before the beating, the children had been grazing sheep near the entrance of Ma'on settlement and had been ordered to stop by Israeli soldiers, who detained them and ordered them to wait at a nearby bus stop. The soldiers then departed the area without releasing the Palestinians. After the soldiers left, a bus arrived at the stop. A group of settlers got off the bus, put on masks and beat the detained Palestinians.

17 April: A 17-year-old Palestinian boy was fatally shot multiple times in the head, abdomen and limbs near Bet Haggay settlement in Hebron. Israeli authorities allege that the boy attempted to enter the settlement while armed with a knife, but the full circumstances around this killing remain unclear pending further investigation.

24 April: A 15-year-old child was among a group of 16 Palestinians injured by Israeli settlers and the Israeli army when settlers from Yitzhar settlement attacked residents of 'Urif village (Nablus), allegedly after some Palestinians tried to enter the settlement.

27 April: A 16-year-old Palestinian boy was seriously injured by live ammunition when a settler from Yitzhar settlement opened fire on a Palestinian family from Madama village (Nablus) working their land.

Sharp increase in demolitions and resultant displacement

The number of Palestinian-owned structures demolished by the Israeli authorities in April tripled, and resultant displacement more than doubled, compared to March. The sharp increase is due to the extensive demolitions carried out in one Area C locale, Lifjim, southeast of Nablus city. In total, 30 structures (including 17 tents and other residential structures) were demolished in the West Bank, displacing 118 people, compared to 10 structures demolished and 44 people displaced in

March. All April demolitions were due to lack of the requisite building permits, with the exception of one inhabited residential structure in East Jerusalem that was demolished as a means of "deterrence." So far in 2009, a total of 286 people have been displaced in the West Bank due to the demolition of their homes by the Israeli authorities, 147 in Area C and 139 in East Jerusalem.⁴

The demolitions in Lifjim affected 26 structures, including fourteen residential tents, belonging to Palestinian herders. The community's structures were previously demolished in 2005, after which the

families were informed by the Israeli DCL (District Coordination Liaison Office) that they could erect tents in the area. The 14 displaced families (101 persons) were given 48-hour eviction notices. These residents are the first in 2009 to be displaced due to house demolitions, outside the Jerusalem area.

During the month in East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities demolished a Palestinian residence in the neighbourhood of Jabal al Mukkaber due to lack of a permit, displacing a family of seven, including five children. Palestinian residents of the neighbourhood have been working on a master plan, due to be submitted to the District Planning Committee in July 2009, to rezone the area from a green area (where construction is prohibited) to a residential area. Two other Palestinian-owned structures were demolished due to lack of permits in East Jerusalem in April, including one uninhabited residential structure.

Also in April in East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities continued to order and carry out “deterrence” demolitions -- demolishing homes, where the families of Palestinians involved in attacks against Israelis live, as a means of “deterrence”. One home was demolished on 7 April, displacing ten people, including five children, all refugees, and one order was issued for the demolition of another home. If implemented, the latter will be the third “deterrent” demolition in 2009.⁵ This type of demolition resumed in 2009 after an almost four year suspension, which was based on the conclusion of an Israeli military commission that these demolitions were not an effective deterrence.

Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood continued to face the risk of displacement during the month as a result of eviction from their homes. On 14 April, the Israeli police gave notice of eviction to two Palestinian families residing in buildings located on land whose ownership is contested.⁶ The evictions could take place at any time, and will displace 51 family members including 22 children.

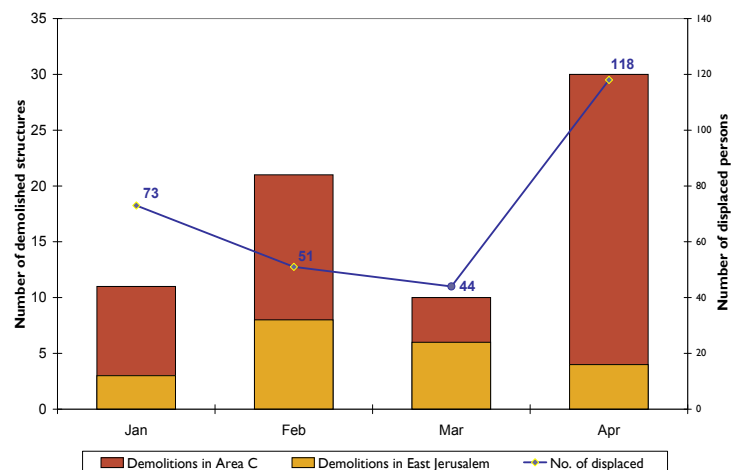


Figure 2: West Bank Demolitions, January – April 2009

OCHA releases Special Focus: The Planning Crisis in East Jerusalem: Understanding the Phenomenon of “Illegal” Construction

In the context of the Israeli authorities’ ongoing demolition of Palestinian structures, OCHA released a report in April focused on East Jerusalem that seeks to explain why Palestinians build without a permit. The report discusses the failure of the Israeli authorities to provide adequate planning for Palestinian neighbourhoods, noting that only 13 percent of occupied East Jerusalem is currently zoned for Palestinian construction and much of this land is already built-up. More than one-third of East Jerusalem land has been allocated for Israeli settlements. As a result of the restrictive planning environment, at least 28 percent of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem have been built “illegally”, i.e. without a permit. Based on population figures, this percentage is equivalent to some 60,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem who are at risk of having their homes demolished by the Israeli authorities. In addition to explaining some of the key difficulties facing Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem in their efforts to build, the Special Focus identifies a number of at-risk communities, discusses some of the hardships faced by Palestinians who are displaced, and provides an overview of various NGO and community initiatives that aim to challenge and eventually overcome obstacles in the current municipal planning process. The report calls for a freeze on house demolitions and for the Israeli authorities, to fulfill their obligations as an

occupying power and provide adequate planning and construction mechanisms for the Palestinian population.⁷

Long delays continue at Qalandiya checkpoint

Traffic jams and long delays at Qalandiya checkpoint (Ramallah) continued to occur in April, in both directions. Following the removal of Ar Ram checkpoint and the closure of the Barrier at Dahiyat al Bareed in February 2009, daily delays in the northward direction at Qalandiya checkpoint of over one hour are now common. The delays are caused by the increased volume of vehicles using the checkpoint and greater frequency of Israeli checks of vehicles. The Israeli authorities are currently expanding the checkpoint to add two additional lanes for southward traffic. According to the Israeli DCL, these lanes are to be dedicated for buses carrying Palestinians holding Jerusalem IDs, who will have their IDs checked, but will no longer be required to cross the checkpoint on foot. The Israeli DCL reports that these new lanes will decrease the pedestrian traffic through the checkpoint and potentially reduce crossing times. Until the new lanes are completed, however, the Israeli authorities continue to require all Palestinians with Jerusalem IDs, who are traveling on public transportation, to cross through the checkpoint on foot, with possible exception for the elderly or sick who may be permitted to remain on the buses.

In addition to these developments, new procedures have been posted at the checkpoint requiring all Palestinians with West Bank IDs and permits to register at the checkpoint their return through the checkpoint. At the time of publication of this report, however, the registration process had not yet begun.

Child Protection Concern: Number of child detainees remains high

There were 391 Palestinian children, including six girls, in the custody of the Israeli authorities at the end of April. This follows a sharp increase in the arrest and detention of minors observed at the beginning of 2009, which resulted in an over 20% increase in the number of child detainees between

December 2008 and February 2009.⁸ While the detention level has since decreased, it remains almost 20% higher than in April 2008.

Various organizations monitoring the situation of child prisoners in Israeli prisons have expressed concern over the lack of respect for many of the rights provided for in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice ("The Beijing Rules"). These concerns are related, inter alia, to consistent allegations of physical and psychological abuse during interrogations; denial of prompt access to lawyers and family visits; substandard conditions of detention, including lack of access to proper health or educational services. In addition, all but one of the five prisons that hold children are located inside Israel in contravention of international humanitarian law, further constraining access to family visits.⁹

Among those children currently imprisoned there are two boys held in administrative detention. In addition, there are five other males who were arrested and placed in administrative detention as children, but who recently turned 18. Administrative detainees are held without charge or trial, on the basis of secret evidence, which neither the accused nor their lawyer have access. According to Defence for Children International / Palestine Section, Israeli Military Order 1591 empowers military commanders to detain Palestinians, including children as young as 12, for up to six months if they have 'reasonable grounds to presume that the security of the area or public security require the detention'. The initial six month period can be extended by additional six-month periods indefinitely. This procedure denies the detainee the right to a fair trial and the ability to adequately challenge the basis of his or her detention. The UN Committee Against Torture has expressed concern that Israel's use of administrative detention does not conform with Article 16 of the Convention Against Torture.¹⁰ All of the seven males mentioned above have received more than one detention order, including one who has been in detention since December 2007.

Child Protection figures at a glance

Conflict-related casualties:

Palestinian children killed: 2

Israeli children killed: 1

Palestinian children injured: 31

Israeli children injured: 1

Displaced as a result of House Demolitions: 59

Palestinian children in Israeli detention: 391, including two administrative detainees

Gaza Strip

Significant decrease in Israeli-Palestinian violence

In spite of the absence of a bilateral ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, Gaza and southern Israel witnessed in April one of the lowest levels of violence in recent years. While sporadic military activities by both sides continued, only two armed Palestinians were killed and no Palestinian or Israeli was injured. This constitutes a significant decrease in Palestinian casualties compared to March (7 fatalities and 19 injuries) and February (9 fatalities and 24 injuries), and the lowest figure since August 2008 (0 casualties), when the “calm” agreement brokered by Egypt was holding.

Violent incidents during the month include: two Israeli air force strikes; an across-border exchange of fire between an Israeli unit and Hamas militants; the detonation of an explosive device next to an Israeli foot patrol; and the targeting of a Palestinian boat, allegedly carrying explosives. In addition, Israeli forces continued firing warning shots at farmers cultivating land near the Israeli border and at fishermen sailing beyond three nautical miles from the shore, where most of the fishing catch is to be found. Palestinian militants also fired a number of rockets and mortars.

Internal violence raises protection concerns

Five Palestinians were killed and at least 16 others injured in April as a result of internal Palestinian violence. Developments in April, including a number of so-called “honour” killings, armed inter-factional clashes, and the targeting of a beauty

shop and a children’s centre, have raised concerns over the level of protection afforded to the broader population.

Armed family disputes resulted in the deaths of five Palestinians and the injury of at least 11 others in April. Four people died in two crimes committed in the name of “honour”: the first took place on 9 April, when three family members, a husband, wife, and their five year-old son, were shot and killed by their elder son while sleeping; the second incident occurred on 13 April, when a woman, was killed by her brother, allegedly due to “immoral behaviour.” The brother later turned himself over to the police. In addition, at least five Palestinians were injured during the month as a result of armed factional disputes: an armed man was injured during a dispute between two Hamas militants; and four people were injured, including one bystander, when unknown gunmen opened-fire on a group of three alleged Fatah members. Two other similar incidents were reported, but resulted in no injuries.

Also during the month, an explosive device was detonated at the door of a beauty parlor west of Gaza City with no injuries reported, and a child and family-care centre operated by local NGOs was set on fire, east of Khan Younis, destroying the centre’s equipment. No group claimed responsibility for these attacks. The child centre is one of five centers established by local NGOs to provide recreational activities and psycho-social support, particularly to children, following Israel’s “Cast Lead” military operation.

Calling for an investigation into an incident involving the illegal use of firearms that resulted in the injury of three Palestinians, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights emphasized that tolerance of such incidents will lead to deterioration in the rule of law, increased security chaos and the loss of innocent life.¹¹ It should be noted, however, that the ability of the Hamas authorities to adequately enforce the law in Gaza has been significantly undermined by the partial paralysis of the judicial system (taking place in the background of the rift with the PA in Ramallah) as well as by the extensive destruction of police infrastructure during the last Israeli offensive.

In addition, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) reported that a military court in Gaza sentenced four Palestinians to death on 7 April. The four Palestinians were convicted of murdering a lecturer at the Islamic University in July 2006 during armed inter-factional clashes. Three other Palestinians were sentenced in the same case to life imprisonment with hard labor. According to PCHR, these sentences were based on the Revolutionary Penal Code of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) of 1979, which has never been approved by the Palestinian legislature. The organization has repeatedly called for its abolition as it “violates international standards of fair trial and does not include fair and independent mechanisms for appealing against court sentences.”¹² Only one of the seven convicted is currently detained by the Hamas Authorities. The others escaped prison on 28 December 2008, when Israel targeted Gaza’s Central Prison during Operation “Cast Lead.” These sentences bring the total number of death sentences issued by the military court in Gaza in 2009 to seven.

The blockade continues: Fewer goods entered Gaza

Due to the closure of the Israeli-controlled crossings during the Jewish holiday of Passover, April saw the lowest number of truckloads entering per month into Gaza (2,656) since the beginning of 2009. This number represents an 18% decrease compared to the monthly average during the first quarter of the year (3,228) and only one-quarter the amount of truckloads that entered Gaza in May 2007 (10,921), one month before the Hamas take-over and the beginning of the blockade. Truckloads imported by humanitarian agencies constituted one-quarter of overall truckloads that entered during April, including 39 truckloads that entered through Rafah Crossing, with the rest imported by the commercial sector.

Import procedures remained subject to unclear and often inconsistent criteria at the crossings, with the types and quantities of commodities continuing to be determined by the Israeli authorities, instead of by local market needs. While food commodities constituted the bulk of imports (70%), several items,

including fruit juice, sweets and chocolates, baby formula, beverages and tea, continued to be barred for entry. The decision taken by the Government of Israel on 22 March 2009 to enable the unrestricted entry of all foodstuffs, provided that the source is approved by the Israeli authorities, is yet to be implemented.

The ban on construction materials (including cement and glass), spare parts for water and electricity infrastructure, and agricultural inputs, continue to prevent reconstruction and recovery activities in the Gaza Strip, including some planned as part of the Gaza Flash Appeal. Among other commodities denied entry, there are approximately 200 metric tonnes of humanitarian relief items stored in West Bank warehouses, which contain, inter alia, household and recreation kits, wheelchairs, blankets, toothbrushes, toys and veterinary drugs.

The Chamber of Commerce in Gaza reports that since the beginning of the blockade on Gaza in June 2007, the Israeli authorities have held a total of 1,757 containers with imported goods. The direct losses incurred by Gaza importers are estimated at around \$10 million, including freight container charges and storage fees paid at Ashdod port and warehouses in Israel and the West Bank.

Notwithstanding the ongoing ban on exports since June 2007, five truckloads of cut-flowers (nearly 200,000 flowers) were allowed out via the Kerem Shalom Crossing during April. Since the beginning of the year, 15 truckloads of cut-flowers were exported from Gaza, the first on 12 February 2009. According to the November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Israel should allow the export of 400 truckloads per day from Gaza.

Due to continued restrictions on exports, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in Gaza instructed farmers on 29 April not to plant export crops, in particular those in need of huge financial investments, such as cut-flowers and strawberries. According to the MoA, this step is taken to protect farmers from losing huge investments and to preserve water reserves. Instructions to farmers have also included directing export crops to cover local market needs only.

Due to limited local market capacity, some Palestinian farmers are feeding animals on crops that they used to export and are not able to since June 2007.

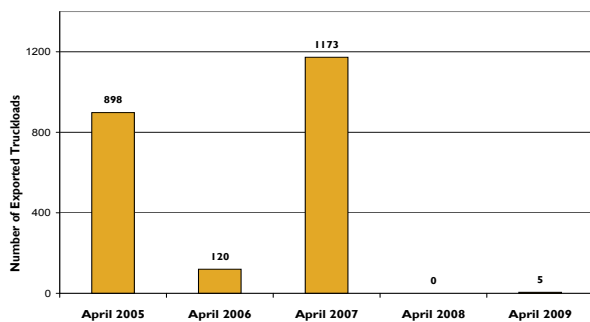


Figure 3: April exports

Nahal Oz fuel pipeline was opened on 16 days in April, compared to 23 days in March, reducing the amounts of imported cooking gas and industrial fuel by around 10% and 8% respectively. Therefore, the imported amounts constituted only around 50% and 70%, respectively of the monthly needs, as estimated by the Palestinian Gas Stations Owners' Association (GSOA) and the Power Plant Authority. Due to the ongoing shortage of cooking gas, GSOA has continued to implement a rationing system at the 21 cooking gas stations throughout the Gaza Strip, limiting their operation to four days per week. As a result of shortages of industrial fuel combined with the lack of spare parts needed for the power plant, scheduled power cuts of up to five hours a day throughout the Gaza Strip have remained in place.

Other types of fuel, including commercial benzene and diesel have remained banned from entering Gaza since 2 November 2008, except for small quantities delivered to UNRWA. According to the GSOA, due to the increasing and regular entry of diesel and benzene through the tunnels located under the Rafah-Gaza border since mid-March, with a daily entry of nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 70,000 litres of petrol, both goods are sold at low prices on the open market. The Rafah tunnels remain an important economic lifeline for Gaza's population, supplying the market with goods restricted from entering Gaza through the Israeli-controlled crossings.

Movement in and out of Gaza remained banned

The movement of Palestinians in and out of the Gaza Strip through the Erez and Rafah crossings remained in the control of the Israeli and Egyptian authorities, respectively. The borders continued to be officially closed in April, however exceptions continued, mainly limited to medical and other humanitarian cases. During April, the number of those exceptional cases decreased, as a result of constraints related to the Gaza-Ramallah rift: the freeze in the referral of patients to specialized treatment outside Gaza and the non-issuance of new passports.

The number of Palestinians who succeeded in crossing Erez in April (515) was below half the number in March (1,183). One of the reasons for the decline was the freeze in the referral of patients during most of April and the related decline in permits issued by the Israeli authorities; only 173 patients and their companions crossed Erez, compared to 635 in March (see below). The majority of those who crossed Erez were Palestinians holding permits to visit families outside of Gaza.

Rafah Crossing, located on the border with Egypt, was opened on an exceptional basis throughout April, allowing 2,427 Palestinians to enter Egypt and 1,095 to return back to Gaza. The daily average of people who crossed into Egypt (81) and those who entered Gaza (37) during April represents only 27% and 26% respectively of the parallel figures for May 2007, one month before the Hamas take-over.

Some of the people who would be eligible for crossing as exceptional cases were prevented from traveling because new passports are unavailable in Gaza; they can only be issued by the PA in Ramallah. This problem emerged immediately after the Hamas takeover in June 2007 when the PA stopped sending blank passports to Gaza. Since the beginning of 2008, Gaza has received 15,600 new blank passports, a number insufficient to meet demand. The Hamas authorities have reported that there are more than 2,000 pending applications for new passports, including nearly 600 for medical cases needing to travel abroad. At present there is no workable mechanism for the Gaza population to obtain new passports.

Land and sea access restrictions undermine livelihoods

Restrictions imposed by the Israeli forces on access of Palestinians to agricultural land in the proximity of the border with Israel and to fishing areas beyond three nautical miles (nm) from the shore continue to damage Palestinian livelihoods.

On at least eight occasions in April, Israeli forces fired warning shots towards Palestinian farmers, forcing them to leave their land. Most of these incidents occurred in areas east of Khan Younis and Deir al Balah. While no casualties were reported, two of the incidents resulted in damage to houses. These incidents have discouraged farmers from accessing some areas along the border, thus impeding the harvest of wheat and barley crops. While these crops are rain fed and do not require intensive care during the year, access is essential during the harvest season in April.

In addition, Israeli patrol boats opened fire towards Palestinian fishermen on at least 20 occasions during the month and Israeli forces arrested 12 fishermen in two separate incidents. These events undermined the peak of the sardine season, which takes place in April, with a resultant decrease in the catch, compared to previous years. Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights reported that in one of these incidents (6 April), fishermen were forced to swim towards an Israeli military vessel before they were arrested and interrogated, and their fishing boats were requisitioned. By the end of the month, the boats had still not been returned.

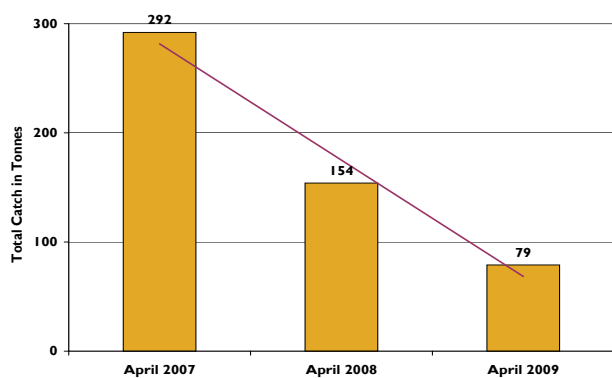


Figure 4: Fishing catch in April

Referral of patients abroad disrupted during most of the month

The issuance of referral documents for specialized medical treatment outside Gaza during most of the month was severely affected by the dispute between the authorities in Gaza and the PA in Ramallah, which erupted following the takeover of the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) by the Gaza authorities on 22 March 2009. This situation ended on 26 April and the previous director of the RAD and his team resumed their work after an agreement was reached between the two authorities, with the support of WHO, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, and notable civil society figures.

Between 22 March and 26 April, Hamas-appointed employees ran the RAD and processed some 650 referral documents, around 70% of which were to Egyptian hospitals. Between 27-30 April, the RAD approved 262 referral documents, over half of them to Egyptian hospitals and the remaining to hospitals in Jordan, Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian District Coordination Office (DCO), responsible for arranging the crossing of referred patients to hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israel and Jordan, via the Erez Crossing, stopped operating following the takeover of the RAD, but resumed its duties on 27 April. Between 27-30 April, the office had processed 73 permit applications. According to it, a total of 90 patients crossed Erez during April, compared to 325 in March and 258 in February.

A total of 495 patients crossed Rafah Crossing during the month for medical treatment in Egypt. According to the Palestinian Passport Officer at the Rafah Border, almost 80% of patients who crossed the Rafah border were carrying referral documents issued by the Hamas-appointed medical committee, and, thus, lacked financial coverage from the PA, while the remainder had referral documents approved by the PA before 22 March. Egyptian hospitals only accept documents issued by the PA, and thus initially denied treatment to patients

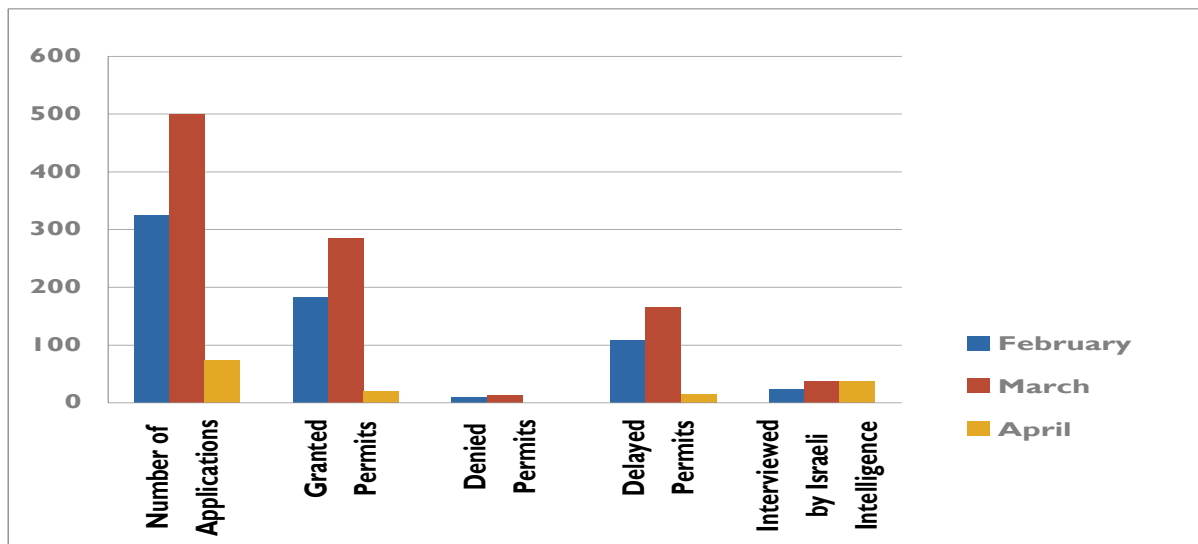


Figure 5: Number of applications to cross Erez and their status

holding Gaza authority documents; however the patients were treated following the intervention of Egyptian civil society, which covered medical costs. During April, WHO confirmed the death of four patients, following the lack of timely access to healthcare services.

Also of note during April, the Central Drug and Disposables Stores (CDS) in Gaza reported an increase in the number of drugs and disposables out of stock compared to March, due to financial constraints. A total of 65 drugs and 90 disposables were out of stock at the end of April, compared to 52 drugs and 68 disposables at the end of March.

Also contributing to shortages of medical items is the inconsistent delays in entry of most shipments coordinated by WHO, in particular electronic equipment, before receiving approval from the Israeli authorities.

Wastewater situation remains fragile

The wastewater situation in the Gaza Strip continues to be extremely fragile as a result of the preceding 22-month blockade, which has restricted the entry of vital spare parts and construction resources to Gaza. Lack of physical resources combined with restriction on movement near the border areas, has prevented essential repair and maintenance work from being conducted at the wastewater treatment plants by concerned agencies. During April, only

three truckloads of plastic pipes for water and wastewater projects for the private sector were allowed into Gaza, after being barred entry since late October 2008 - an insignificant contribution in relation to the overall needs.

The situation of the wastewater lake adjacent to the Khan Younis treatment plant remains precarious. The increase in the pressure on the lake has resulted in the back flow of raw sewage to people's residences and into the sewage network, posing a risk to public health. While Gaza's water and wastewater utility (CMWU) is implementing steps to reduce this pressure, the current situation could have been avoided, had Israel allowed the entry of steel pipes. Another exceptional project undertaken and completed by CMWU during April is the repair of the temporary disposal ponds at the Beit Lahiya treatment plant, which collapsed on 27 March 2009.

Shelter: damages assessments complete; reconstruction prevented

By the end of April, UNRWA and UNDP completed their assessments of damage caused during the "Cast Lead" offensive. Current figures indicate that a total of approximately 3,500 houses were totally destroyed or beyond repair (2,300 refugee and 1,200 non-refugee houses), 2,100 houses sustained major damage (1,000 refugee and 1,100 non-refugee houses) and 40,000 houses incurred minor damage

(30,000 refugee and 10,000 non-refugee houses). From this caseload, approximately 7,000 refugee families and 8,250 non-refugee families have now received cash assistance from UNRWA and UNDP respectively. However, the ongoing ban on the import of construction materials through the official crossings continues to prevent large-scale works, while materials currently available in Gaza have reached prohibitively high prices. Despite the large-scale displacement following house destruction during “Cast Lead,” there are currently only six small tented areas in the north of Gaza, housing a few displaced families until alternatives are found. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Works and Housing received from the Turkish Red Crescent 190 caravans (prefab shelters) for families affected by the latest military offensive.

Rubble removal activities ongoing

There is an estimated total of 600,000 tonnes of concrete rubble resulting from the Israel's bombardment of houses, public buildings and commercial and industrial facilities during the last Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip. Some locations were also identified to be heavily contaminated with hazardous material such as asbestos and UXO (unexploded ordnance), posing a serious risk to public health. So far, a total of 273 sites have been assessed for the risk of UXO.

A Joint Operational Plan, developed by UNDP, envisions the sorting, removal and crushing of concrete rubble at an estimated cost of \$15 million, of which \$7 million has been funded, thus far. Implementing agencies include UNDP, UNMAS (United Nations Mine Action Service), UNICEF and some NGOs. The work plan includes undertaking risk assessment of sites (May–June 2009), carrying out safety training measures and MRE (Mine Risk Education) activities (June– July 2009), rubble removal activities (August – February 2010), and crushing and storage (October– June 2010).

Once rubble removal begins, the International Mine Action team will provide UXO safety training and training of trainers to workers involved in these activities. During April, the team provided 17 UXO safety presentations, including two during Training

of Trainers (ToT) workshops to different civil society groups.

New requests by Hamas authorities to international NGOs

Developments during the month seem to indicate increased oversight by the Hamas authorities of the activities of international NGOs providing humanitarian assistance in Gaza. On 8 April, the Ministry of Interior announced that all NGOs working in Gaza must register with it and submit their annual reports in order to continue working in Gaza. According to the announcement, registration must be performed within one month. NGOs have requested that their registration in Ramallah be recognized as valid for the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including in the Gaza Strip. The lack of accepted registration documents, led to a few INGOs having difficulty obtaining VAT exemptions, leading to an obvious impact on the cost of their projects. The issue is still being clarified. Some NGOs were also approached by the Ministry of Labor, which requested detailed information on their employees and, for those implementing cash-for-work programmes, also on their beneficiaries. In conjunction with other restrictions applicable to international NGOs working in Gaza, stemming from their countries of origin, these developments may constrain their ability to continue delivering assistance to those in need in the Gaza Strip.

UN report on needs in Gaza in the aftermath of “Cast Lead” launched

The UN Inter-Agency Gender Task Force launched on 21 April a household survey called “Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza: Beyond the aftermath of the 23 day Israeli military operations”. The survey was conducted in the first week of March 2009, focusing on how women and men have been affected and have responded to the crisis and what are the urgent humanitarian needs they perceive in the present.

The majority of the respondents rated psychological trauma and stress as a main concern, believing that the need for psychosocial services is as critical as the basic need for food and water. Moreover,

due to increased trauma and stress and limited access to professional psychological services, there is a rising problem of self-medication with unsupervised pharmaceutical therapies among the Gaza population. The report cited distance as the main obstacle to women and girls' access to general health services.

The survey found that domestic violence against women is mainly concentrated in households displaced by the war. Of the women surveyed, 37% cited domestic violence as the primary safety problem facing women and girls. Over 50% of the surveyed men said that public and political violence are the main safety and security problems facing men and boys. Also of concern, half the respondents who were displaced during the Israeli offensive said that their children had not returned to school after the war due to "lack of security".

Other oPt issues

World Bank report: development of the Palestinian water sector severely constrained

The World Bank published this month a report entitled "Assessment of Restrictions on Palestinian Water Sector Development". One of the report's main findings is that the joint Israeli-Palestinian governance over the water sector, as well as the water allocations, established under the 1995 Oslo interim agreement and still in effect today, falls short of the needs of the Palestinian people. Because of the imbalance of power, capacity and information between parties, interim governance rules and practices have resulted in systematic and severe constraints on Palestinian development of water resources, water uses, and wastewater management. Furthermore, since 2000, the Israeli-imposed movement and access restrictions have further impaired Palestinian access to water resources, infrastructure development and utility operations. These constraints, however, affect access to water in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip differently.

Regarding the West Bank the report found that Palestinians extract about 20% of the "estimated

potential" of the aquifers that lie under both the West Bank and Israel, while Israel extracts the rest. In addition, Israel overdraws on the "estimated potential" by more than 50% of its share under the Oslo Agreement, without the approval of the Joint Water Committee. Actual household use in the West Bank is estimated to average 50 litres per day per capita, while a third of communities, comprising about 10% of the population across the West Bank, still lack network services.

In Gaza, no new sources have been officially developed since 1995 and heavy over-drafting of groundwater has led to groundwater quality decline and seawater intrusion. Only 5-10% of the Gaza aquifer is now yielding drinking quality water. The population has responded to water shortages with private well drilling and desalination for domestic use. Water supply coverage and water availability are, in principle, better than in the West Bank and availability rose by 50% between 2000 and 2005. However, since 2005, water supply has become very intermittent and has fallen to crisis levels, largely due to the deteriorating political and security situation which curtails access to power, fuel and spare parts.

The main conclusion of the report is that integrated resource management is impossible under current conditions, and the development effort by the PA and donors has dwindled to a series of coping strategies that preclude rational development of the water sector. The report also highlights the need to resolve current unsustainable water practices, particularly aquifer over pumping and lack of pollution control that – together with a predicted decrease in rainfall in coming decades - could compromise the welfare of future generations.

The report indicates that the resolution of all these problems will require movement on the political front. Yet, reforming the way in which the Joint Water Committee and the Israeli Civil Administration address Palestinian development needs is a priority until such time that the political issues are resolved in final status. The PA does, however, have a narrow margin for improvement, and there is a strong need to prioritize, especially given limited institutional capacity.

Severe under-funding for West Bank projects; CAP Mid-Year Review initiated

As of the end of April, funds worth \$254 million have been pledged for Gaza projects, covering 40% of needs specified in the 2009 CAP, including the Flash Appeal. By contrast, levels of funding for West Bank projects continue to be extremely low; only 26-30% of needs covered, or \$51 million pledged, out of \$198 million requested.

At the time of reporting, WFP (World Food Programme) was considering ways to adjust food distribution activities in the West Bank without reducing the number of beneficiaries receiving assistance. WFP has a shortfall of 83%, or around \$43 million in its budget for its West Bank projects, which include providing meals in schools and food assistance to the most vulnerable.

By the end of April, UNRWA was also reporting poor funding of its projects in the West Bank relating to emergency job creation (75% shortfall), cash and food assistance (82% shortfall), emergency health assistance (56% shortfall), mental health (just over half of funding needs pledged) and environmental health programmes (98% shortfall). It is anticipated that some UNRWA projects will have to cease altogether at the end of June if more funds are not found; the environmental health programme is the most critically under-supported, with water and sanitation services provided to 19 refugee camps unable to be guaranteed beyond the summer, affecting 192,000 refugees. More than 300,000 Palestinians living in 150 remote communities risk losing access to basic health care services through UNRWA's mobile clinics if funding for the emergency health programme is not obtained.

The Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) funded two projects in Gaza during April; one of which provided \$114,000 to a local NGO to provide repairs to fishing boats that were damaged during the Israeli offensive in December/January. The second project, worth \$143,500, will enable a Gaza-based NGO, "the

Society of Physically Handicapped People (SPHP)" to provide essential food items, NFIs (Non-food items) and basic hygiene and medical items for 1000 people, most of them children with disabilities who are suffering from malnutrition, medical problems and who are not receiving help from other organisations. Since the beginning of the year, the HRF has supported 20 projects in the Gaza Strip, worth more than \$3 million.

Finally, the 2009 CAP Mid-Year Review (MYR) process for oPt was initiated during April. This year, the schedule of this process has been advanced in view of the urgency to draw the attention of donors to the serious underfunding of humanitarian projects in the West Bank and some Gaza programmes. This MYR aims also at updating the portfolio of the projects presented in the 2009 CAP and reprioritizing humanitarian response activities.

End Notes

1. available at: <http://www.bilin-village.org/english/search.php?q=Israeli+high+court+of+Justice&s=ok>.
2. In March, there were 325 IDF search and arrest operations
3. For more details on the settler violence phenomenon, see the OCHA Special Focus Unprotected: Israeli settler violence against Palestinian civilians and their property, December 2008, available at <http://www.ochaopt.org>.
4. This includes 20 people displaced after their structure was rendered uninhabitable by sealing with concrete as a “deterrent” related to an attack on Israeli citizens in 2008.
5. For more details on the cases involved, see OCHA Protection of Civilians weekly reports for the periods 1 – 7 April 2009 and 22 – 28 April 2009.
6. For background on the case, see the March 2009 Humanitarian Monitor.
7. http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_planning_crisis_east_jerusalem_april_2009_english.pdf
8. Source: Defence for Children International / Palestine Section.
9. Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) provides that an occupying power must detain residents of occupied territory in prisons inside the occupied territory.
10. See for example the Committee’s Conclusions and Recommendations of the Committee against Torture, Israel, 23/11/2001.
11. Al Mezan press release, “Four People Injured by Unknown Gunmen”, 20 April 2009.
12. PCHR press release, “Military Court in Gaza Sentences 4 Palestinians to death; PCHR Calls upon Palestinian President not to ratify the Four Sentences,” 8 April

CONTRIBUTING AGENCIES

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Relief and

Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), Al Haq, Badil, Save the Children (UK), Defence for Children International – Palestine Section (DCI-PS), Oxfam GB, Palestine Hydrology Group (PHG), ACF-E, AAA, ACP, ACAD, and members of the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM).

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