



## PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

6-12 MAY 2009

### LATEST DEVELOPMENT SINCE TUESDAY MAY 12

**May 13:** Pope Benedict XVI visited Bethlehem and Aida refugee camp where he saw the Barrier wall around parts of the camp; The Pope was quoted as saying: "Overshadowing much of Bethlehem, is the wall that intrudes into your territories, separating neighbors and dividing families...In a world where more and more borders are being opened up – to trade, to travel, to movement of peoples, to cultural exchanges – it is tragic to see walls still being erected... Although walls can be easily built, we all know that they do not last forever, they can be taken down. First, though, it is necessary to remove the walls that we build around our hearts,"

## West Bank

### Military operations affecting civilians

This week, one Palestinian was killed and eighteen others injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank, nearly the same as the weekly average of Palestinian injuries in the West Bank in the first quarter of 2009. On 6 May, a Palestinian was killed by Israeli forces in the H2 area of Hebron city near the Ibrahimi Mosque in unclear circumstances. Most of the Palestinian injuries occurred during anti-Barrier demonstrations (13) held in the villages of Ma'sara (Bethlehem) and Ni'lin and Bil'in (Ramallah). In the northern West Bank and in East Jerusalem, four Palestinians were injured at different checkpoints by Israeli security forces, two shot with live ammunition and two physically assaulted. An Israeli soldier was killed on 7 May by "friendly-fire" during an Israeli military operation near Ramallah City.

During the week, the number of Israeli military search operations was slightly below the average number of searches per week in the first quarter of 2009 (98 compared to 109). By far, the highest number of search operations occurred in the northern West Bank governorates (66), with the most occurring in Qalqiliya (31). The number of Palestinians arrested by Israeli forces during the week was also slightly less than the weekly average in the first quarter of 2009 (80 compared to 86), with most occurring within the Ramallah governorate (18) followed by the governorates of Qalqiliya (15) and Hebron (12).

In addition, there were 13 search operations conducted by Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces in the West Bank, resulting in the arrest of 36 Palestinians. All of the PA search-and-arrest operations occurred in central and northern West Bank districts. In a press statement issued during the reporting period, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) expressed concerns about the political motivation of the arrests, as well as about allegations of torture in the course of the interrogation of the detainees.

## Decrease in Israeli settler violence during the week

During the reporting period, Israeli-settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank significantly diminished in comparison with recent weeks. Most of incidents that occurred during the reporting period were in the south and resulted in only one Palestinian injury, compared with a weekly average of 17 Palestinian injuries in the previous four weeks. This week's injury occurred when on 9 May a group of settlers assaulted a man in the H2 area of Hebron city.

In the governorates of Bethlehem and Hebron, Israeli-settlers continued to prevent Palestinian herders from grazing their sheep in areas close to settlements, and in the northern governorates of Qalqiliya and Nablus, there were two reported incidents of Israeli settlers attacking farmers or preventing them from tending their land.

On 12 May, some 1,500 Israeli settlers held an IDF-approved rally in the evacuated northern West Bank settlement of Homesh calling on the Israeli government to rebuild it. The settlement of Homesh was dismantled by Israeli authorities in August 2005 as part of the "disengagement" plan.

## Shrinking space and fragmentation of the Bethlehem Governorate

On 7 May, OCHA released a report that examines how Israeli measures, including the Barrier, settlements and closures have impacted Palestinian livelihoods, development and residential expansion in the Bethlehem governorate. Only 13% of Bethlehem land is available for Palestinian use out of 660 sq. kilometers and much of it is fragmented. However, freezing construction of the Barrier inside the West Bank, and opening closed military areas and nature reserves for Palestinian development, could restore parts of the lost space to the governorate.

## Gaza Strip

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### Military activities affecting civilians

Throughout the reporting period, Israeli airstrikes, which resumed in the previous week, continued to target tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border, and sporadic armed clashes took place between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed militants in several areas, namely Al Bureij Camp and Abassan. The hostilities this week resulted in the death of one armed militant in this area, while the previous reporting period saw two Palestinians killed and four others injured.

During the reporting period, sporadic Palestinian rocket and mortar shells continued to be fired from Gaza towards IDF troops operating in Gaza and the border line, but resulted in no Israeli casualties.

### Restrictions on access to border areas and sea continue

Israeli restrictions on Palestinian access to land and sea inside the Gaza Strip continues to undermine livelihoods. These restrictions include access of farmers to their land located in the north and east along the border with Israel, and access of fishermen to fishing areas beyond three nautical miles from the shore.

On six occasions during the week, IDF troops stationed on the border line opened fire with live ammunition and tank shells towards Palestinian farmers working in agricultural lands in border areas. In one incident, Israeli munitions set fire to 15 dunums of wheat-fields in an area east of Al Qarara. On 12 May, Israeli tanks and bulldozers entered Gaza east of the Islamic cemetery, east of Jabalia, and conducted land leveling and excavation operations.

Israeli restrictions on Palestinian maritime access also continued to be enforced, with Israeli patrol boats opening warning fire on Palestinian fishing boats west of Beach Camp, Deir El Balah and Rafah, forcing the fishing boats to return to shore. On one occasion, Israeli patrol boats boarded and conducted a search of a Palestinian fishing vessel, arresting four fishermen. Restrictions on access to the sea, have contributed to a decline in sardine catch, resulting in a price increase from 10 to 35 NIS per kilo.

### **Israel's blockade of Gaza (3-9 May)**

Israel's 23-month blockade continues to affect all aspects of life. During the last four weeks, an average of 619 truckloads per week entered Gaza, less than 20% of the average weekly number of truckloads imported in the first six months of 2007 (before Hamas' takeover of Gaza). This week, a total of 736 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, 16% of which were designated for humanitarian aid agencies (204). Of these imports, food supplies made up the majority (73%) followed by hygiene/cleaning supplies (16%). A total of 44 truckloads of industrial supplies were allowed into Gaza (see below). The remaining 32 truckloads of goods were divided among all other commodities—medical supplies (09), non-edible consumables (07), and other miscellaneous items (16).

#### **The largest single-week shipment of industrial water-related supplies since June 2007**

During the reporting period, a limited yet significant amount of water and sanitation supplies was allowed into the Gaza Strip. A total of 44 truckloads of supplies including plastic pipes, hoses, plumbing spare parts, and eleven power generators were imported between 3-9 May.

Although this will contribute to improving the system's structure, water and wastewater conditions in the Gaza Strip remain fragile due to absence of many other essential materials needed for water and wastewater projects, including cement, steel pipes, and other materials. Cement, for example, needed for the construction of water reservoirs, remains in short supply with only two truckloads allowed into Gaza during the reporting period.

Areas in the districts of Jabalia, Beit Lahia, and Gaza City sustained substantial infrastructure damage during the Israel's "Cast Lead" operation, with 32,000 people left without access to piped water. International NGOs have provided water tanks to these communities for domestic use. As long as construction materials and other supplies remain restricted, the initiation of new water/wastewater projects or the completion of stalled projects in these areas will continue to be hampered.

Gaza fuel imports (3-9 May 2009) Industrial fuel imported this week for the operation of Gaza's Power Plant held steady for the third consecutive week at just under 2.2 million litres imported—approximately 68% of weekly Power Plant requirements. Cooking gas imported into Gaza through Nahal Oz constituted only 60% of Gaza's weekly needs as estimated by the Gas Station Owners' Association (GSOA); cooking gas consumption remains rationed in the Gaza Strip.

GSOA estimates that fuel continues to be transferred through the Rafah- Egypt border tunnels into Gaza at a rate of nearly 100,000 lit of diesel and 70,000 lit of petrol per day. Egyptian diesel and petrol are available in the open market with diesel costs 02 NIS/lit and petrol 03NIS/Lit. No petrol or diesel fuel has been imported into Gaza through the Nahal Oz fuel pipeline since 2 November 2008, except for limited quantities for UNRWA.