



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

20-26 MAY 2009

LATEST DEVELOPMENT SINCE TUESDAY, MAY 26 2009

- On Thursday, 28 May, in a military operation near the village of Dura (Hebron), Israeli forces killed a Palestinian man. According to Israeli media, he was considered by Israel as the head of the Hamas military wing in the Hebron governorate. A number of Palestinians were also reportedly arrested during the operation.

WEST BANK

Military activities affecting civilians

During the reporting period, 23 Palestinians, including eight children, were injured by Israeli security forces in various incidents throughout the West Bank, roughly the same as the weekly average of injuries in the first quarter of 2009 (21) and in 2008 (24). Nine of these injuries occurred during anti-Barrier demonstrations held in Ni'lin and Bil'in villages (Ramallah governorate), including three Palestinians directly hit with tear gas canisters. Last month (April 2009), one protester was killed as a result of being hit with a tear gas canister shot by Israeli forces. In addition, three houses in the village of Ni'lin were partially burnt when hit with tear gas canisters that caught on fire. One IDF soldier was also injured during a demonstration.

In other military operations in the north, four Palestinians, including three children, were shot and injured with live ammunition while throwing stones at Israeli soldiers during military operations in Tulkarm and Tubas governorates. In a checkpoint incident, a mentally impaired Palestinian man was shot in both legs by an Israeli soldier at the Shave Shomeron checkpoint (Nablus) in unclear circumstances; one leg was subsequently amputated. Also this week, one Palestinian policeman and two Israeli soldiers were injured in an armed clash in Qalqiliya city. The clash occurred when the Palestinian policemen ordered an IDF undercover unit, which had entered the city in a Palestinian-plated ice cream truck, to stop. The incident is currently under investigation by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

In East Jerusalem and Hebron City, seven Palestinians were injured in incidents involving physical assault during the course of arrests. During the reporting period, in a letter issued to the IDF Advocate General, two Israeli human rights groups (B'Tselem and ACRI) requested the launching of military police investigations after two IDF commanders testified before a military court to routinely ordering the use of physical violence while arresting and questioning Palestinians.

Although the number of search operations during the week (107) was roughly the same as the weekly average in the first quarter of the year (109), the number of people arrested by Israeli forces decreased significantly (56 compared to 80).

Ongoing settler violence

Israeli settler violence affecting Palestinian farmers working in agricultural land in the vicinity of settlements in southern and northern areas of the West Bank continued during this week, although no casualties were reported. The reported incidents included the prevention of access to lands adjacent to the settlements of Noqdim (Bethlehem) and Ma'on (Hebron), stone-throwing at farmers from Safa village working near the Bat Ayin settlement (Bethlehem), setting fire to ten dunums of land cultivated with barley belonging to farmers from 'Urif village in the vicinity of Yitzhar settlement (Nablus), and the uprooting of at least one hundred trees belonging to farmers from Deir Istiya village (Salfit).

Vandalism and access restrictions against Palestinians during Israel's "Jerusalem Day"

On 21 May, several incidents involving Israelis, including Israeli settlers, were recorded during Israeli celebrations of the 42nd anniversary of what the Israeli authorities refer to as "Jerusalem's unification". In the Old City of East Jerusalem, Israeli security forces shut down approximately 200 Palestinian shops until the following day. During the closure, Israelis celebrating in the Old City reportedly vandalized Palestinian shops and a number of graves at Ar Rahma Muslim Cemetery. Confrontations took place between Palestinians and a group of Israelis who attempted to enter the yard of Al Aqsa Mosque. Palestinians also demonstrated at Damascus Gate, outside the Old City, against the ongoing occupation and annexation of East Jerusalem. Between 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM of the same day, Israeli forces prevented Palestinians from accessing large sections of Road 60, the main traffic artery in Bethlehem and Hebron governorates, to allow an Israeli cycling event from Hebron to Jerusalem in commemoration of the "Jerusalem Day".

Israeli Border Police shut down cultural event in East Jerusalem

Israeli security forces shut down a cultural event at the Palestinian National Theatre in East Jerusalem scheduled for 23 May, allegedly for being held under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority. The event, which is partly sponsored by UNESCO and the British Council, was to host international poets as part of the Palestine Festival of Literature. The event was to be held in honor of Jerusalem as the "Capital of Arab Culture" for 2009. No arrests were reported.

New OCHA Access and Movement report

This week, OCHA released a new report with analysis of the main developments and trends in internal movement and access restrictions in the West Bank during the period between September 2008 and the end of March 2009. According to the report, Israeli authorities have implemented a number of measures easing the flow of Palestinian traffic on some access routes to four main cities: Nablus, Hebron, Tulkarm and Ramallah. At the same time, there has been further entrenchment of various mechanisms used to control Palestinian movement and access and to facilitate the movement of Israeli settlers. While some of these measures do ease the flow of Palestinian traffic, they exact a price from Palestinian residents of the West Bank. For example, the Israeli-built "fabric of life" roads, reconnect Palestinian communities that were disconnected due to the restricted access to a main road, or due to the obstruction of a road by the Barrier, at the expense of reinforcing the exclusion of Palestinians from the primary road network and of undermining the territorial contiguity between different areas. The report concludes that Israeli settlements remain the most important factor shaping the system of movement and access restrictions. This is reflected in the significant degree of

overlap between the location of access restrictions (including the Barrier) and the location of settlements and settlers' routes.

In the comprehensive closure survey completed at the end of March 2009, OCHA field teams documented and mapped 634 obstacles blocking internal Palestinian movement and access, which represents an insignificant increase of four obstacles, compared to the parallel figure at the end of the previous reporting period. (Report available at www.ochaopt.org.)

Gaza Strip

Military activities affecting civilians

During the reporting period, two alleged armed militants were killed in an armed clash with Israeli forces near Kerem Shalom Crossing in the southern Gaza Strip, bringing the death toll of Palestinians in Gaza since the implementation of unilateral ceasefires on 18 January 2009 to 22. During the week, Palestinian armed factions fired several rounds of homemade rockets and mortar shells towards southern Israel, including a military base; in addition, Palestinian factions set off explosives on two separate occasions near Israeli troops patrolling areas located in the vicinity of the Gaza-Israel border. None of these incidents resulted in casualties.

Also this week, an eight-year-old Palestinian child was injured while handling an explosive device near his home in Maghazi Camp, east of Khan Younis. Unexploded ordnance (UXO) continues to pose high risk for the Gaza population. Since the declaration of the ceasefires, six children have been killed in Gaza while handling UXO.

Israeli military restrictions on Palestinian access to land and sea

Israeli restrictions on Palestinian access to land and sea in the Gaza Strip continue. On 24 May, the Israeli Air Force dropped thousands of leaflets in Arabic in different areas of North Gaza and Gaza governorates, warning that people who enter areas closer than 300 metres from the Gaza-Israel borders will be risking their lives. This is the first time that residents of Gaza are officially informed that the "buffer zone", implemented in border areas following the Israeli "disengagement" from Gaza in 2005, has been expanded by 150 metres. Since "disengagement", Israeli forces have enforced restrictions on access to land by opening warning fire towards farmers, preventing them from reaching their land located near the Gaza-Israel border.

Israeli forces also continue to restrict access of Palestinian fishermen to fishing areas beyond three nautical miles from the coast. This week, Israeli patrol boats opened fire towards Palestinian fishing boats on five separate occasions, forcing them to return to shore, and arrested two Palestinian fishermen. Restricted access to the sea continues to undermine the current sardine catch, the bulk of which is located in deeper waters.

Palestinian deaths in tunnel-related incidents significantly increased

During the reporting period, seven Palestinians were killed and four others were injured in incidents related to tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border. Six of the fatalities resulted from a tunnel collapse and another one died after being electrocuted. The tunnels remain an important economic lifeline, supplying the market with goods restricted from entering Gaza through the Israeli-controlled crossings. In 2008, there were at least 46 Palestinians killed, and 69 others injured in tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border.

Gaza imports remain restricted to basic food items (17- 23 May 2009)

Imports into the Gaza Strip remain restricted by Israel to certain basic food items. This week, a total of 688 truckloads of goods (a daily average of 115 truckloads) entered Gaza, representing less than 27% of the weekly average of truckloads that entered Gaza during the first six months of 2007, before the Hamas take-over. Of the total number of truckloads allowed entry during the week, 565 carried food items (83%), 79 carried hygiene supplies (12%), and the remaining (44) were mainly comprised of medical supplies, non-edible consumables and electric appliances for the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO), the first shipment to GEDCO since March 2009. In addition, a convoy of 40 truckloads of medical supplies led by European parliamentarians and other activists was allowed into Gaza via the Rafah Crossing.

The entry of other major essential goods including construction materials for reconstruction, spare parts for water and sanitation projects, and industrial and agricultural materials, remain either barred from entry or restricted to limited quantities. In addition, exports from Gaza continue to be generally banned, with only limited quantities of cut flowers allowed out of Gaza in 2009. The last shipment of cut-flowers was allowed out on 27 April 2009.

Nahal Oz Crossing may shut down; limitations on fuel imports continue

According to the Palestinian Gas Stations Owners' Association (GSOA), Israeli authorities have informed them that the Nahal Oz pipeline, Gaza's main fuel delivery route, will be relocated to the Kerem Shalom Crossing within the coming few weeks. According to the Israeli Civil Liaison Administration, fuel pipelines now exist at Kerem Shalom Crossing. However, the capacity for fuel delivery at Kerem Shalom and the future status of Nahal Oz fuel pipeline are not yet clear.

Gaza fuel imports continue to fall below needs as a result of Israeli restrictions. While cooking gas and industrial fuel have continued to enter through Nahal Oz Crossing, diesel and benzene for commercial uses have been barred from entry since 2 November 2008, with the exception of small quantities delivered to UNRWA and some hospitals.