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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report No.279**24-30 September 2008****Military activities affecting civilians**

During the reporting week, the IDF carried out 85 search operations throughout the West Bank and arrested 96 Palestinians. One of these operations, conducted on 29 September in Ni'lin village (Ramallah), resulted in clashes between the soldiers and Palestinian residents, during which four Palestinian males were injured (two by rubber coated metal bullets, one by live ammunition and another one by a tear gas canister). Three other people were injured this week in Ni'lin by the IDF, and several others suffered from tear gas inhalation, during anti-Barrier demonstrations. In another IDF operation carried out on 24 September in Ad Duhiesha RC (Bethlehem), a 17-year old boy was injured with live ammunition, while his house was being searched, and was later arrested. Finally, in a search campaign conducted in Qalqiliya City on 26 September, a curfew was imposed in parts of the city for eight hours and doors and fences of ten houses were damaged.

On three occasions during the week, IDF troops performed military operations near the border between Gaza and Israel, a few hundred meters within Gaza. One of the incursions led to an exchange of fire with Hamas militants, but resulted in no casualties or damage. In two cases, IDF patrol boats opened fire at Palestinian fishing boats west of Rafah, forcing them to return to shore. According to Israeli media reports, a homemade rocket that was fired towards Israel landed on the Palestinian side of the border, but resulted in no casualties or damage.

Imports into Gaza: significant increase in fuels

Between 21 and 27 September, there was a significant increase in the amount of petrol, diesel and industrial gas allowed into Gaza, compared to the weekly average since the beginning of the truce on 19 June (138%, 125% and 35% respectively). The amount of industrial gas allowed in exceeded the amount needed to operate Gaza's power plant, for the first time since the cut in supply by the Israeli authorities in October 07. According to Palestinian sources, the increase was intended to compensate for the reduction in supply expected due to

the crossings closure during the upcoming Jewish holidays. Following this increase, Hamas authorities decided to temporarily suspend the rationing system for diesel, which can now be purchased without restrictions.

By contrast, this week there was a 42% reduction in the amount of cooking gas allowed by the Israeli authorities into Gaza, compared to the weekly average since the truce, resulting in longer-than-usual queues at gas stations.

In addition, despite the expected closure of crossings, the total number of truckloads that entered Gaza this week was only slightly higher (5%) than the weekly average since the beginning of the truce (913 vs. 871). Sufa crossing, which was closed by the Israeli authorities following the opening of Kerem Shalom crossing earlier this month, remained closed during the entire reporting period. In addition, almost no cement entered Gaza this week due to the closure of the conveyor belt at Karni crossing. Moreover, while two new construction items were allowed in this week in very limited amounts, overall, the shortage of construction materials continues being a key factor preventing economic reactivation.

Political tension in Gaza: reduced impact of strikes alongside aggravation of the water sector crisis

Due to the ongoing conflict between Ramallah and Gaza authorities, the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) in Gaza continued being denied the fuel supply required to operate water wells and waste-water pumping stations. As a result, the water supply to more than 250,000 people, mostly in the Rafah and Joher El Deak areas, is intermittent and unpredictable. This crisis resulted in the total depletion of the fuel reserves at half of the drinking water wells, a situation which may result in an interruption in water supply to hundreds of thousands of people if there is an electricity outage.

During the week, teachers and health workers in Gaza continued their strike for the fifth consecutive week. Following last week's call by the respective unions in Ramallah, the strike has been extended until 07 October 2008. However, despite the strike, all Gaza hospitals and primary health care clinics continued to provide most services, with a reduction in the scope of activities due to the Ramadan holidays. Similarly, attendance to PA school by students and teachers, including newly appointed teachers, was above 95%.

West Bank access incidents

On 29 and 30 September, the Israeli authorities imposed a "general closure" on the West Bank due to the Jewish New Year, meaning that even Palestinians holding valid entry permits are prohibited from entering East Jerusalem and Israel, with the exception of medical cases and employees of international organizations. For the same reason, the IDF closed to Palestinian traffic two of the checkpoints into Nablus ('Awarta and At Tur) during the same period. .

As in the previous three weeks, access of Palestinians to East Jerusalem for the fourth Friday of Ramadan (26 September) was restricted to men over 50 and women over 45 without permits and for men aged 45-50 years and women aged 30-45 years with permits. Around 320,000 worshippers were able to reach Al Aqsa mosque, including Palestinians with Israeli residency or citizenship. The IDF continued to extend the opening hours of the main checkpoints around Nablus, however, delays and long queues were still observed at two of them (Huwwara and Beit Iba). Palestinians with Israeli citizenship were allowed to enter Nablus (with cars) and Jenin and Qalqiliya (on foot only) for family visits and shopping.

This week, the IDF and the Israeli Civil Administration issued a military order announcing that 6.5 dunums of private Palestinian land, which had been confiscated in 1994 for "public purposes", will be used to "expand Enav checkpoint", which controls Palestinian movement to and from Tulkarm. While according to the Israeli authorities this expansion will improve the traffic flow through the checkpoint, there is concern that expansion will also result in the further entrenchment of a major movement obstacle.

In the Hebron governorate, the IDF re-installed two earthmounds, previously removed in July, blocking access to Road 60 from two villages (Wadi Al Shajneh and Abda). This measure, which coincided with the Eid Al Fitr holiday, caused difficulties for people visiting relatives and friends. Another three earthmounds were newly installed by the IDF north of Qalqiliya city, in an agricultural area isolated by the Barrier, further complicating farmers' access to their lands.

In the southern area of the Hebron governorate, IDF soldiers reportedly denied Palestinians from the Susiya hamlet access to water cisterns belonging to them that are located next to the settlement of Suseya, despite prior coordination.

Settler-related incidents

An Israeli settler was injured near the 'Ale Zahav settlement on 27 September, after Palestinian militants opened fire at his vehicle. Immediately after, the IDF imposed curfew for eight hours on two Palestinian villages adjacent to the place of the incident (Kafr ad Dik and Burqin) and conducted a search and arrest operation. During the operation, confrontations between villagers and the IDF erupted, resulting in the injury of six Palestinians, including a 13 year-old boy. Following the lifting of the curfew, a group of Israeli settlers entered Kafr ad Dik village and damaged the windows of six houses and three vehicles. This development triggered the return of the IDF, who evacuated the settlers and re-imposed curfew for another three hours.

Palestinian killed allegedly by unexploded ordnance

On 27 September, the body of an 18 year-old shepherd from 'Aqraba village (Jordan Valley) was found dead in an area adjacent to the Israeli settlement of Gittit. According to the Israeli Police, an autopsy performed in an Israeli forensic institute, as well as evidence collected on the ground, indicate that the man was killed by the shrapnel of an IDF unexploded ordnance. The family of the victim, however, dismissed this explanation and claims to have evidence indicating that he was murdered by Israeli settlers.