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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report - 289

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Latest Developments since Tuesday, 16 December

Gaza Strip: The blockade is having damaging effects on the ability of the UN to continue its humanitarian operations. UNRWA has nearly depleted its stocks of food. On 18 December 2008, due to the lack of wheat flour in Gaza, UNRWA was forced to suspend its food distribution for both emergency and regular programs. On average, UNRWA distributes food to approximately 20,000 refugees per day; overall, 750,000 Palestinian refugees in Gaza depend on UNRWA food assistance.

On 17 and 18 December, no imports were allowed into Gaza.

On 17 December, Palestinians fired rockets into Israel, injuring three Israelis. For the first time since the Egyptian brokered calm on 19 June, Israel conducted air strikes on buildings in Gaza (Jabalya and Khan Younis), allegedly involved in weapons manufacturing. As a result one Palestinian civilian was killed.

Military activities affecting Civilians

During the reporting period in the Gaza Strip, the IDF killed one unarmed civilian woman, one militant, and injured five others. Four air-to-ground missiles were fired by the IAF, and over 100 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza either toward Israel or IDF troops inside Gaza.

In the West Bank, on 16 December a 22-year-old Islamic Jihad member was killed in Al-Yamoun (Jenin governorate) by an undercover Israeli military unit. During the reporting period, a total of 34 Palestinians were injured by the IDF, 28 of whom (including twelve children) were injured during anti-Barrier demonstrations held in Ni'lin and Bil'in (Ramallah), Jayyus (Qalqiliya) and Ma'sara (Bethlehem). In one incident, on 12 December, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy in the H2 area of Hebron city sustained serious injury to the head when IDF soldiers manning the military tower near the Jewish Cemetery opened fire with rubber-coated metal bullets at a group of stone-throwing Palestinian youths. During the two week reporting period, Israeli military forces conducted 180 search operations and arrested 115 Palestinians.

Israeli-settler related violence in the West Bank

In the week following the forcible evacuation of Israeli settlers from Al Rajabi house in the old city of Hebron (4-9 December) by Israeli border police, Israeli settler violence spread throughout the West Bank. There were at least 68 reported incidents of Israeli settler vandalism, rioting, stone throwing, and arson, resulting in 20 Palestinian injuries. According to Israeli media sources, clashes between Israeli forces and Israeli settlers resulted in the injury of six Israeli soldiers and fourteen settlers.

Southern West Bank: On 3 - 4 December, during and immediately following the evacuation, settler violence was reported throughout Hebron City - initially in the Israeli-controlled area (H2), but later spreading into the PA controlled area (H1). Violence

escalated with twelve Palestinians reported injured during skirmishes with settlers, including two from live ammunition. Settlers also set fire to nine vehicles and at least four properties, including the contents of a mosque. Initial confrontations between Israeli settlers and Palestinian residents of the city continued until 3.30 am on 5 December, when the settlers withdrew. In the following days, from 5 -16 December, sporadic Israeli settler violence resulted in the injury of eight more Palestinians in Hebron City.

Northern West Bank: Settler vandalism was reported in a number of villages in Qalqiliya and Nablus governorates. Two Palestinians were injured due to settler violence, and property damages by Israeli settlers included vandalism of at least 40 private vehicles and an ambulance, 200 dunums of agricultural land burnt, buildings vandalized with graffiti, and the desecration of two mosques. On 4 December, the Israeli authorities closed all checkpoints around Nablus, Qalqiliya and Tulkarm, restricting Palestinian movement. The IDF ordered al-Funduq village (Qalqiliya) shops closed on both sides of Road 55, and ordered Palestinian residents to remain indoors to avoid settler attacks.

Central West Bank: During the reporting period, Israeli settlers damaged Palestinian property in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Jericho governorates. Incidents of Israeli settler violence included stone throwing at Palestinian vehicles, tire slashing, and theft of harvested olives. On 4 and 13 December, in the villages of Sinjil and Turmus'ayya, Israeli settlers desecrated two mosques with graffiti. Other incidents included an attack with live ammunition on a Palestinian house near Turmus'ayya village (Ramallah). On 4 December, Israeli settlers blocked Road 1 connecting Jerusalem and Jericho, and on 4 and 5 December, settlers blocked Road 465. On 7 and 10 December, two separate incidents of Palestinians throwing Molotov cocktails at Israeli settler buses near Turmus'ayya and 'Abud villages

(Ramallah) were reported, resulting in damage to the vehicles. On 14 December, in the of Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, an Israeli man was injured when Palestinians hurled stones at the vehicle he was driving. The man lost control of the car and collided with a bystander.

Senior UN human rights official denied entry into Israel

On the afternoon of December 14, the Israeli authorities refused to allow the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, Professor Richard Falk, to enter Israel in order to carry out his officially mandated functions in the oPt. After subjecting him to an extensive body search and examination of his luggage, and confiscating his mobile phone, authorities detained Falk overnight in a small immigration holding cell with five other persons before deporting him on a flight to the United States. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said that this action was “unprecedented and deeply regrettable.”

East Jerusalem Demolitions

On 3 December, the Jerusalem Municipality accompanied by Israeli security forces demolished one room and balcony on the third floor of a house in the Silwan area due to the lack of a building permit. As a result, an 83-year-old woman and two boys were displaced. On 16 December, the Israeli authorities demolished for the third time the Al Kurd family's protest tent in Al Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. The tent had been set up in protest of the Israeli eviction of the Al Kurd from their family home on 9 November. Palestinians re-built the tent later in the day.

Closures eased in the West Bank

Since 7 December the IDF has eased restrictions of movement at checkpoints around Nablus city. In addition, the IDF removed thirteen obstacles in Massafer Yatta (Hebron) and along Road 60, the main traffic artery in the area. There remain approximately 620 Israel closure obstacles throughout the West Bank.

Gaza Strip: Despite some fuel, electricity power cuts continue, 1.5 million people affected

From 4 to 16 December, the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) received 2.3 million litres of industrial fuel (36% of actual needs), enabling the resumption of operations on 11 November. However, the improvement was short-lived—by 14 December, the GPP had depleted its fuel supply and was again forced to shut down. On 15 December, after receiving 431,000 litres of fuel, operations resumed. The GPP General Director has expressed concerns that continued interruptions to the plant's operations will likely cause extensive damage to the plant's infrastructure. Power cuts of 4-8 hours/day were reported during days when the power plant was partially operational, and 8-16 hours/day when the GPP shut down.

Although all Ministry of Health hospitals are functioning at full capacity, WHO has expressed concern over the hospitals' increased dependence

on emergency back-up generators, which may fail due to unavailability of needed spare parts.

Slight increase import of goods but still severely restricted

Commodities Import: During the reporting period, a daily average of 45 truckloads were allowed into Gaza—a slight improvement compared to the average in the first three weeks since the intensification of the closure on 5 November, following the resumption of violence (six truckloads per day). The types of goods allowed in, however, remained largely restricted to food, animal fodder and medicines. Indeed, over the last two weeks, human food items and livestock fodder made up 94% of all imported truckloads (218.5 and 73 truckloads human food and livestock fodder, respectively) with the remaining 6% being medical supplies, agricultural materials and chlorine for water purification.

Fuel: In addition to the industrial fuel for the GPP, 50,000 litres of petrol and 400,000 litres of diesel were allowed into the Gaza Strip through the Nahal Oz pipelines, for UNRWA consumption only. The Gas Station Owner's Association reported that a daily average of 100,000 litres of diesel and 20,000 - 30,000 litres of petrol are entering through the Rafah border tunnels, and are available on the open market

Cooking gas shortage: 767 Metric tonnes (Mt) of cooking gas were allowed into Gaza during the reporting period. Since 5 November, less than 7.5% of Gaza's estimated needs of cooking gas has been allowed into the Gaza Strip. As a result, hospitals, and bakeries are reportedly using alternative sources of energy such as Egyptian diesel imported through the tunnels, and an increasing number of Gaza households have resorted to burning wood or plastic for meal preparation. No cooking gas is transferred through the tunnels except for a few hundred gas canisters (since 5 November).

Medical supplies: From 4 – 16 December, fourteen truckloads of medicine and pharmaceutical supplies, including one from MoH Ramallah, were allowed into Gaza. This is the first time the MoH in Ramallah has managed to deliver pharmaceutical supplies to the Central Drug Stores (CDS) in Gaza since it assumed responsibility for that on 1 September 08.

Water disinfection materials: Since 5 November, a shortage of chlorine for water treatment has been reported by Gaza's water utility, increasing the risk of outbreak of waterborne diseases. During the reporting period 48 tonnes of chlorine and 30 tonnes of other disinfectants were allowed into Gaza and distributed to water wells and desalination plants. The shipment is sufficient for approximately one month of water treatment.

Gaza Banks shut down for lack of currency notes: On 4 December, all Gaza-based banks were forced to close prior to the Muslim Eid (holiday) due to the lack of Israeli and other currencies. The Bank of Palestine stated the need for at least 150 Million NIS for payment of nearly 70,000 PA civil servant

salaries. Since October 07, Israel has only permitted approximately 170 million NIS into the Gaza Strip. On 11 December, Israel allowed the entry of 100 million NIS into the Gaza Strip enabling banks to reopen, although cash rationing continues.

Depletion of wheat in Gaza: Due to the shortage of wheat grain, all Gaza mills were forced to shut down before the Muslim Eid (holiday). From 9 – 16 December, a total of 3,560 Metric tonnes of wheat sporadically trickled into Gaza, with the Gaza Strip mills' irregular openings contingent upon wheat availability. The total amount of wheat allowed into Gaza since 5 November is approximately 4,440 Mt, about a quarter of the estimated Gaza needs.

Erez restrictions: During the reporting period, there were increased restrictions imposed on the number of journalists, diplomats, and humanitarian aid workers allowed to enter Gaza through Erez.

Gaza patient referral backlog

Following the intensification of the closure on 5 November, the Israeli District Coordination and Liaison (DCL) stipulated that only the most urgent cases referred to specialized medical treatment outside Gaza will be processed. In addition, it required that the applications by the Palestinian Referral Abroad Department (RAD) be sent by fax, instead of by courier, which, due to the power outages, was unreliable. As a result, the daily average of applications processed by the Palestinian RAD decreased from 60 to 20.

Gaza tunnels

On 05 and 15 December, in three separate incidents, two Palestinian men were killed and three others were injured when tunnels between Egypt and Rafah collapsed. Since the beginning of 2008, approximately 50 people have been killed in tunnel-related incidents. While the tunnels have provided access to otherwise unavailable commodities and allowed some economic activities, they constitute a very precarious and unsustainable mechanism, which by no measure can substitute the normal functioning of crossings.

At a glance (3-16 December):

Palestinian – Israeli conflict related casualties

- Palestinians killed: 2 in Gaza, 1 in West Bank,
- Palestinians injured: 5 in Gaza, 53 in West Bank,
 - Of whom 20 are children
- Israelis injured: 1
- Internationals injured: 2

Israeli military search operations: 180

Palestinians arrested by the IDF: 115

IDF flvina checkpoints: 120