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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

4 – 10 March 2009

New Developments since 10 March

11 March: Israeli troops shot and killed a 17-year-old boy from Deir Abu Mish'al village in the Ramallah governorate, reportedly after Molotov cocktails were thrown at Israeli troops near Halamish settlement.

West Bank**Hundreds at-risk of displacement due to new eviction and demolition orders****More eviction orders issued in East Jerusalem**

On 5 March, orders for eviction within 10 days were issued against two buildings in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and two buildings in Al Abbasiyeh neighbourhood of Ath Thuri (Abu Tor) in East Jerusalem. These orders place an estimated 320 Palestinians at-risk of displacement.

In the Sheikh Jarrah case, the families who own the buildings had previously received eviction orders. The affected buildings are in the same area as that of a family, who was forcibly evicted from their home in November 2008 after residing in it since the 1950s. That eviction occurred several months after a Jerusalem court ruled in favour of a group of Israeli settlers, who possessed an Ottoman-era bill, which they claimed proved their ownership of the land on which the house was built. The two Sheikh Jarrah buildings are affected by the same court decision, which is currently being contested.

New wave of demolition orders

The Israeli army delivered during the week demolition orders for 21 Palestinian-owned structures, including 9 residential structures, a medical clinic under construction, and seven water cisterns, due to lack of permit in Area C. The orders, which were issued for structures in the Jenin, Nablus and Hebron governorates, threaten to displace 67 Palestinians, including 41 children. The demolition of the clinic will affect some 1,200 Palestinians living in Al Beqa, located

between the settlements of Kiryat Arba and Kharsina (Hebron). Thousands of Palestinian families live under the constant threat of displacement due to thousands of pending demolition orders in Area C.

Military activities affecting civilians

Twenty Palestinians, including four children, were injured during the week due to Israeli-Palestinian violence. The majority of injuries (12, including two women) occurred during anti-Barrier demonstrations. Other contexts of injury were Israeli army search campaigns (five, including three children and two internationals); settler violence (2); and confrontations with the IDF or Border Police (3, including 1 child). Also during the week, the Israeli army erected 52 flying checkpoints, down from 70 during the previous period.

Searches: The Israeli army carried out 108 search operations during the week, down from 115 the previous week. Fifty (50) Palestinians were arrested, compared to 77 during the previous period. For the second time in as many weeks, the Israeli army conducted a search campaign in Haris village in the Salfit governorate, allegedly after stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles passing on Road 5. The Israeli army imposed a 17-hour-long curfew and closed the three entrances of the village with earth mounds. The army later removed one of the earth mounds. A similar operation was conducted in Hajja village in the Qalqiliya governorate, where the Israeli army imposed a 12-hour curfew, allegedly after stone-throwing on Road 55. The army closed the two entrances of the village with earth mounds. Palestinians later opened one

earth mound, but the other entrance remains closed.

Palestinian bulldozer driver hits police car and bus

On 5 March, a 24-year-old Palestinian male driving a bulldozer hit a police car and a civilian bus in West Jerusalem. Two Israeli police were lightly injured, and the driver was shot multiple times by an Israeli policeman and a taxi driver. He later died of his wounds.

Land levelling and requisition

Israeli contractors continued levelling land in the areas of Wadi Ar Rasha and Ras At Tira; Jayyus; and Azzun Atme in the Qalqiliya governorate, reportedly for re-routing of the Barrier. Land levelling also continued near Karmel settlement in the Hebron governorate. On 8 March, the Israeli police detained 19 Palestinians trying to reach their lands during the levelling. Two internationals were arrested and released the next day. Also during the week, Palestinians from Bil'in, Kharbatha Bani Harith and Deir Qaddis villages, northwest of Ramallah city found requisition orders for 142 dunums of land posted on the Barrier gates. The affected land lies to the west of the Barrier and has been under settlement control for the past 10 years, as settlement housing units have been constructed on the land.

Demonstrations against the Barrier and settlement expansion

Weekly anti-barrier demonstrations continued in the villages of Bil'in, Ni'lin (Ramallah), Al Ma'asara (Bethlehem) and Jayyus (Qalqiliya). In addition, on four days, Palestinian, international and Israeli peace activists held demonstrations in Wadi ar Rasha, inside the Alfe Menashe enclave in the Qalqiliya governorate protesting the re-routing of the Barrier. The re-routing will take additional land from Palestinians, and does not place the Barrier on the Green Line.

Also in the Qalqiliya governorate, activists held the first demonstration in Burin village against settlement expansion. Burin is surrounded by the Bracha and Yitzhar settlements and has been the target of numerous settler attacks.

IDF raids on villages protesting Barrier construction:

Confrontations took place between the Israeli army and the residents of Ni'lin and Bil'in villages in the Ramallah governorate following two separate overnight raids of the villages. The Israeli army fired tear gas and sound grenades towards Palestinian houses in the area. In Bil'in, soldiers at a flying checkpoint set up in the centre of the village searched civilians and vehicles. No injuries or arrests were reported. Both villages are the sites of weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations. Over 10 similar incidents were reported in February in Bil'in, Ni'lin and Al Ma'asara village, in the Bethlehem governorate, raising concerns about the apparent harassment of Palestinians protesting the Barrier. Also during the week, the Israeli army conducted a search campaign and imposed a three-hour curfew in Jayyus after stones were thrown at the Barrier gate.

Poor water quality in Massafer Yatta

The findings of an assessment of cisterns in the Massafer Yatta area of the Hebron governorate indicate that, due to the very poor levels of water quality, much of it is unfit for human consumption. Given past experience, consumption of the water would likely raise the risk of water-borne diseases. One of the main causes is that, due to the lack of water, the catchment areas around the cisterns were not properly cleaned prior to the influx of rainwater into the system. Given severe drought conditions experienced in Massafer Yatta, people were attempting to collect the largest quantities of water and used the first rains to store water, instead of draining the catchment areas.

Access and Closures

The Israeli army imposed a three-day general closure on the West Bank, due to the Jewish holiday of Purim. Also, during the week, the Israeli army removed Ar Ras / Kafriat checkpoint, which controlled all traffic to and from seven villages in the southern Tulkarem district (approximately 12,000 people) to Tulkarm city. Removal of this checkpoint also facilitates movement between Tulkarm city and the southern West Bank districts, by providing a means of bypassing Enav checkpoint, where long delays are reported as a result of continued land leveling and related works for

expansion of the checkpoint. The Israeli army also allowed this week sheep and goat herders to cross agricultural gates in northern Tulkarm and southwest Jenin governorates and access grazing areas between the Barrier and the Green Line, following a four week restriction due to the risk of foot and mouth disease spreading in the area.

Settler Violence

Several incidents of settler violence were reported during the week. Groups of Israeli settlers attacked and robbed a 42-year-old Palestinian shepherd and attacked another four Palestinian shepherds in separate incidents in the Jenin governorate. In the Jericho governorate, a settler stole sheep belonging to a Palestinian family. The sheep were later returned to the family after the Palestinian and Israeli DCLs intervened. Also during the week, groups of Israeli settlers threw stones at Palestinian vehicles driving on Road 55 in the Qalqiliya governorate, and in three places on Road 60. One Palestinian was injured. Also during the week, a group of settlers, guarded by the army, entered Nablus city during the night to visit Josef tomb. In a separate incident, the Palestinian Waqf security at Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem reportedly identified a group of tens of settlers attempting to infiltrate the compound to hold Purim prayers. The settlers were apprehended and handed over to the Israeli police.

Gaza Strip Update

Ceasefire remains fragile

During the week, one Palestinian militant was killed and another injured by an Israeli air strike that hit their vehicle. Also, three Palestinian policemen were injured when Israeli troops opened-fire towards their vehicle. Of three Palestinian civilian injuries during the week, two, including one of a child, occurred when Israeli patrol boats opened-fire towards the Swedish Village, west of Rafah. In addition, the Israeli airforce (IAF) targeted and hit tunnels under the Rafah-Egypt border and one metal workshop in Gaza City. The workshop sustained damages. Of note, not reported last week, students and teachers of an UNRWA school in Rafah were forced to

evacuate the school on 3 March when an IAF air strike hit a nearby area.

Palestinian factions reportedly fired 29 homemade rockets and five mortar shells from Gaza towards southern Israel, including towards Kissufim military base. Two RPGs, fired by Palestinian factions, hit an Israeli military base east of Al Maghazi Camp, prompting return gunfire and tank shelling from Israeli soldiers. No injuries on either side were reported.

Gaza Military Court issues death sentences

According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, on 10 March, the Gaza Military Court sentenced three Palestinians to death, following their conviction in the murder of a 40-year-old Palestinian man.

Three killed in tunnels collapse

Three Palestinians were killed and three others injured when tunnels collapsed (5 and 6 March). A total of 14 Palestinians have been killed and 10 injured in tunnels-related incidents since the ceasefires on 18 January 2009.

Access to fisheries further restricted

The Israeli authorities further restricted the access of Gaza's fishermen to three nautical miles from the shore. This is a reduction from the six nautical miles imposed between the time the blockade was imposed on Gaza in June 2007 and the start of "Cast Lead" on 27 December. It is a significant reduction from the 12 nautical miles Israel committed to under the Bertini Commitments in 2002. This reduction raises concerns over the upcoming fishing season, which reaches its annual peak in mid-April. In three separate incidents (4, 6 and 10 March), Israeli patrol boats fired towards Palestinian fishing boats, forcing the boats to return to shore.

The blockade on Gaza continues

Gaza crossings: A total of 889 truckloads entered during the period, compared to 466 last week. Though in limited quantities, the entry of wheat has enabled the five Gaza mills to continue functioning. One mill, bombarded and destroyed during military operations, remains non operational. One

truckload of cut-flowers was allowed out of Gaza on 5 March.

In addition, limited quantities of cooking gas (21% of estimated weekly needs) and industrial fuel (69% of estimated weekly needs) entered.

Rafah Crossing remains closed; it was last opened for regular public use on 9 June 2007. However, the crossing was exceptionally and partially opened for urgent cases and humanitarian delegations during the week. Also, 105 truckloads of medical and relief supplies were allowed in on 7, 8 and 9 March.

Items restricted for entry: Many critically needed items (spare parts, construction materials, etc.) remain restricted for entry, preventing reconstruction and recovery efforts. Moreover, the continued restriction on the entry of cash is affecting the ability of 65,700 PA staff to withdraw their salaries from the banks. According to the

International Monetary Fund, this affects the livelihoods of approximately half a million Gazans. UNRWA is also unable to distribute cash assistance until cash is allowed entry.

Access to water and electricity in Gaza remains difficult

50,000 people continue to have no running water, and an additional 100,000 receive water only every 5-6 days, primarily in the North Gaza district, eastern areas of Khan Younis and Az Zeitoun area of Gaza City. Access to water for the affected population will remain difficult until spare parts and repair materials are allowed entry into Gaza. According to the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO), 90% of the Gaza population experiences intermittent power cuts, resulting from scheduled power cuts. The remaining 10% of the Gaza population has remained without electricity, due to damages sustained by the electricity network, since the 27 December 2008 onset of the Israeli military operation "Cast Lead".