



## OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

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## Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

18 – 24 March 2009

### New Developments since 24 March

In his briefing to the UN Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, the Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, Lynn Pascoe, called on Israel "to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and open the crossings for emergency supplies and reconstruction materials, without which there will be no way to rebuild Gaza."

The Israeli human rights groups Gisha and Physician for Human Rights called on the parties involved in the control of Rafah crossing - Israel, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas - to take the necessary steps to open it immediately.

On 25 March, Israeli authorities issued administrative detention orders (detention without charge or trial) against two political figures, allegedly affiliated with Hamas. The two are among a group of 10 arrested by Israeli forces during the week (see *below*).

### West Bank

#### Military activities affecting civilians

During the reporting period, Israeli security forces injured 20 Palestinians, including two children. While this figure represents a slight increase compared to the weekly average of injuries during the previous four weeks (17), it is below the weekly average for 2008 (27). Twelve (12) of the injuries occurred during anti-Barrier demonstrations in four villages in the Qalqiliya, Ramallah and Bethlehem governorates. Most of the injured were shot by Israeli security forces with rubber-coated metal bullets, including one who sustained a critical injury to his head. The rest of the injuries (8) resulted from physical assault by Israeli soldiers.

Also during the week, the Israeli army carried out 101 search operations throughout the West Bank, nearly the same as the weekly average during 2008 (103). The majority of these operations (79) were conducted in the northern West Bank, with 34 of them in the Qalqiliya governorate.

#### Demolitions in East Jerusalem area continue; Israeli High Court approves another "deterrent" demolition

This week, the Israeli Civil Administration demolished four Palestinian-owned structures, including three residential structures, in Al 'Eizariya, just outside East Jerusalem, due to the lack of building

permits. Twenty-five (25) people, including 15 children, were displaced. The demolitions occurred in Area C, in the vicinity of an area planned for the expansion of the Ma'ale Adumim settlement (E1). Since the beginning of 2009, OCHA has recorded the demolition of 17 structures in the same area, 11 of which were residential, leading to the displacement of 56 people.

Also this week, the Israeli High Court of Justice approved the demolition of a house in East Jerusalem on the grounds that it would serve as a "deterrent" measure, the second such decision taken by the Court in 2009. The house belongs to the family of a Palestinian who killed three Israelis while driving a bulldozer in West Jerusalem in July 2008. In February 2005, the Israeli Minister of Defense suspended this type of demolition after a military commission found that such demolitions did not constitute an effective deterrence. According to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, between the beginning of the second Intifada and the 2005 suspension, Israel demolished over 600 housing units in the oPt on these grounds.

#### Land leveling in the vicinity of Israeli settlements continues

During this week, land leveling activities were observed in areas reportedly owned by Palestinians in the vicinity of Israeli

settlements, including the settlements of Tappuah, Bracha and Karmel, located in the Salfit, Nablus and Hebron governorates respectively. In addition, the Israeli authorities opened a military road leading to Al Rajabi house, located in the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron City (H2) and from which settlers were evacuated in December 2008. In Qalqiliya governorate, Israeli contractors continued leveling land and uprooting olive trees belonging to Palestinians for the re-routing of two sections of the Barrier (see previous week's report).

#### **Arrests of political leaders, including former PA Deputy Prime Minister**

On 19 March, Israeli forces arrested ten political leaders, including a former PA Deputy Prime Minister and four Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) members. According to the Israeli army, they were arrested due to their attempt to restore Hamas's administrative branch in the West Bank. However, according to the Ramallah-based Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights group, the timing of the arrests suggests that they were triggered by the collapse of the Egyptian-mediated prisoner exchange negotiations between Israel and Hamas, raising due process and collective punishment concerns. Following the capture of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit on 25 June 2006, Israeli forces arrested dozens of political figures allegedly affiliated with Hamas in the West Bank, 25 of whom are still being held.

#### **Israeli forces prevent events for "East Jerusalem as the Capital of Arab Culture"**

On 20 March, Israeli police prevented celebrations marking the declaration by the Arab League of East Jerusalem as the 'Capital of Arab Culture for 2009', on the grounds that they were being held under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority. Large numbers of Israeli police dispersed crowds, confiscated flags and arrested at least ten Palestinians. They also entered a school and stopped the students from flying balloons.

#### **Israeli soldiers refuse to escort children of At Tuwani**

On 23 March, Israeli soldiers refused to escort Palestinian children from villages in the Massafer Yatta area of South Hebron to and from their school in At Tuwani village. The children were forced to take a detour to avoid Israeli settlers in the area. Israeli soldiers began escorting the children in 2004, following repeated attacks by Israeli settlers. This academic year, settlers have attacked the children twice. There were 14 such attacks in the 2007-2008 school year.

#### **Opening of Ramallah – Jericho road**

On 18 March, the Al Mu'arrajat road connecting Ramallah and Jericho governorates was re-opened. The road has been closed for the past nine months while being renovated by UNDP. The opening of the Al Mu'arrajat road means that Palestinian traffic is no longer forced to use the DCO checkpoint at the entrance of Jericho City, at which there have been long queues and delays over the past nine months.

#### **Gaza Strip Update**

##### **Military activities affecting civilians**

One Palestinian fisherman was injured at sea, when an Israeli patrol boat opened fire towards his boat. In another incident, five fishermen were arrested by Israeli forces while at sea. Since the implementation of the ceasefires on 18 January 2009, a weekly average of one Palestinian has been killed and four Palestinians have been injured.

Also this week, two children (aged 14 and 15) were killed while handling unexploded ordnance (UXO) west of Gaza City. There have been five child fatalities from UXO, since 18 January 2009. In addition, two alleged Palestinian militants were killed while attempting to plant a roadside bomb, east of Deir El Balah. Palestinian factions continued to fire rockets towards southern Israel, resulting in no casualties or damage.

Incidents involving fishermen are part of Israel's ban on access of Palestinians to sea areas beyond three nautical miles from the shore, down from six nautical miles prior to Israel's "Cast Lead" offensive. This ban impacts the catching of sardines, the bulk of which are located beyond 12 nautical miles. The livelihood of 3,000 fishermen and their

families is severely undermined, along with a reduction in the availability of affordable animal protein.

#### **Increasing concern over detainees under Hamas authorities' custody**

The Gaza-based human rights group Addameer reported that seven Palestinians have died in Hamas custody since February 2009. According to Addameer, at least four of the deaths allegedly resulted from severe ill-treatment. Addameer also reported that Hamas has so far failed to investigate these cases and to hold those responsible accountable.

#### **Hamas authorities take control over the Referral Abroad Department in Gaza**

On 22 March, Hamas de facto authorities in Gaza took control over the PA Referral Abroad Department (RAD), which assesses applications by patients for specialised medical treatment at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Egypt and Jordan. This step has brought the referral process to a halt. The PA Ministry of Health in Ramallah will not finance treatments authorized by Hamas, nor will such patients be allowed by Israel to exit Gaza via the Erez crossing. The Egyptian authorities are also conditioning access of patients to Egyptian hospitals on financial authorization and approval from Ramallah. This development puts the lives of hundreds of chronically-ill patients treated abroad at risk.

#### **The blockade continues in spite of minor relaxation measures**

The import of goods from Israel, particularly by humanitarian agencies, remains subject to unclear and often inconsistent criteria at the Israeli-controlled crossings. This week, a number of food items, including canned tuna, biscuits and tomato paste, were

blocked by the Israeli authorities after being declared as "non-humanitarian".

Along with the ongoing restrictions and lack of transparency, some relaxation measures were either announced or implemented during the week. On 22 March, the Government of Israel announced that it will lift all restrictions on the entry of food stuffs, provided that the source of the shipments is approved by the Israeli authority. Earlier in the week, nine truckloads carrying supplies needed for water projects were allowed into Gaza, including one truckload of cement, the first such delivery since November 2008. However, according to the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility in Gaza, the benefit of these supplies will remain limited unless additional materials, including water pipes, are allowed entry. Israel allowed a truckload carrying flowers out of Gaza, bringing the total number of such truckloads to seven since January 2008, all of which have been exported in February and March 2009. Exports from Gaza have been banned by Israel since the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007. According to Paltrade, the Israeli authorities will allow the export of only limited numbers of flowers through the Kerem Shalom crossing. In addition, seven commercial truckloads of soap and shampoo were allowed into Gaza on 24 March, the first time since October 2008.

As a result of the ongoing restrictions on imports, the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border continue to be an important lifeline for the population, supplementing shortages of basic commodities. Reportedly, this week two Palestinians were killed and two others were injured following the collapse of three such tunnels. A total of 16 Palestinians have been killed and 12 injured in tunnels-related incidents since the 18 January 2009 ceasefires.