



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

22-28 APRIL 2009

West Bank

Military activities affecting civilians

Violence in the West Bank increased sharply during the reporting period, with 51 Palestinians, including nine children, injured in Israeli military activities, more than twice the average number of Palestinian weekly injuries in 2008. Of the Palestinians injured in the West Bank, four were shot by Israeli forces with live ammunition. In Ramallah governorate, a Palestinian farmer from Rantis village was shot and injured with live ammunition by Israeli forces while tending his land near the Barrier. The farmer remains in serious condition. In an incident near Tarqumiya checkpoint in the Hebron governorate, Israeli forces shot and injured a mentally impaired Palestinian man from the town of Halhul, who had been ordered to stop. The remaining two injuries by Israeli live fire occurred in an Israeli settler incident. (*See Israeli-settler incidents section below*).

Three separate incidents of IDF assaults on Palestinians at checkpoints occurred this week. At a checkpoint in Jericho, three Palestinian civilian males from Tulkarm were physically assaulted by the Israeli soldiers staffing the checkpoint. In another incident, on 23 April, two Palestinian men were stopped in Tura al Gharbiya village (Jenin) by Israeli troops and physically assaulted. Three days later, a Palestinian man was physically assaulted in Huwwara (Nablus) by Israeli Border Police. The reasons for the assaults are unclear.

The number of Israeli military search operations rose for the second consecutive week, (115 vs. 104 in the previous week), and is higher than the 2008 weekly average (103). The number of Israeli arrests of Palestinians also rose (from 60 arrests the previous week to 77 arrests during the current reporting period), but remains below the 2008 average of 84 arrests per week.

Anti-Barrier and other demonstrations

During the reporting period, weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations were held in Nil'in and Bil'in villages (Ramallah). Palestinians injured in weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations rose sharply to 33, including six children. Most injuries occurred in Bil'in village (25 injuries, including three children) in the aftermath of the 17 April demonstration where a Palestinian was killed by an Israeli-fired tear-gas canister. Weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations have recurred in Bil'in village since 2005. In September 2007, the Israeli High Court ruled for the rerouting of the Barrier built on Bil'in land. However, there have been no implemented changes in the Barrier's route.

Israeli settlers' violence continues against Palestinians and their property

The trend of recent weeks of escalated settler attacks on Palestinians and their property continued during the week. There were 17 Palestinians injured in settler-related incidents, much higher than the weekly

average of 2008 (five settler-related Palestinian injuries per week). In addition to physical injury and property damage, such attacks affect the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers and herders in northern and southern West Bank villages located in the vicinity of some Israeli settlements.

In the northern West Bank, sixteen Palestinians from 'Urif village (Nablus) were injured when Israeli settlers attacked the village after some Palestinians allegedly attempted to enter the nearby settlement of Yitzhar on 24 April. Israeli forces arrived to stop the ensuing clashes; ten Palestinian injuries were caused by Israeli security forces, and six by Israeli settlers. Three days later, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy was seriously injured by live ammunition when a settler from the same settlement (Yitzhar) opened-fire towards a family from the nearby community of Madama, while working on their land. Moreover, on 28 April, settlers from Yitzhar damaged a house under construction in 'Urif village.

From 22 - 28 April, Israeli settlers from the Barkan industrial area began leveling land belonging to Sarta village (Salfit) for settlement expansion. So far, 200 dunums of land have been leveled, including 50 dunums of olive trees.

In the southern West Bank, settlers from Taqoa and Bat Ayin settlements in Bethlehem governorate and Asfar and Ma'on settlements in Hebron governorate assaulted farmers and herders, preventing them from accessing grazing areas located in the vicinity of the settlements. During the same period, settlers from Ma'on and Nof Neshet grazed their sheep on land belonging to Palestinians in the Yatta area (Hebron). At least 40 dunums of villages' spring crops of wheat and barley were destroyed.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures in Area C and East Jerusalem continue

Israeli authorities demolished twenty-six structures, including fourteen residential tents, belonging to Palestinian herders in Lifjim (Area C), east of Aqraba village (Nablus), due to their lack of building permits. The community's structures were previously demolished in 2005, after which the families had been informed that they could erect tents in this area. The 14 displaced families, including 101 persons (49 children), were given 48-hour eviction notices.

Due to a lack of building permit, the Jerusalem Municipality demolished a Palestinian residence in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Jabal al Mukkaber, displacing a family of seven, including five children. Residents of the neighborhood, who began receiving demolition orders in 2005, have been working on a master plan to rezone the area from a green area to a residential area. The owner of the demolished home is currently paying a fine of 25,000 NIS (approx. 6000 USD) for building without a permit. The master plan was to be submitted to the District Planning Committee in July 2009.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities served demolition orders to the family of a Palestinian man who in September 2008 drove his vehicle into a group of pedestrians near Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, injuring nineteen Israelis, including eight Israeli soldiers. The driver, a Palestinian man from East Jerusalem, was killed during the incident by an Israeli military officer. If executed, it will be the third demolition order in 2009 under similar circumstances; two "deterrent" demolitions have occurred after the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected appeals opposing the demolitions.

West Bank access restrictions

Israeli authorities imposed a general closure on the West Bank, due to the Israeli Independence Day holiday, to last from 26 April through 29 April. All Palestinians with permits, with a few exceptions, were barred from entering East Jerusalem and Israel. Also due to the Israeli holiday, Palestinian travel at the Allenby Bridge border crossing with Jordan was restricted on 28 April between 08:00 – 14:00.

Due to the Israeli holiday, on 28 April, the IDF closed Wadi Ash Shajina village opening on Road 60 in Hebron affecting approximately 5,000 Palestinian farmers. This is the second such closure in 2009 that the closure. Wadi Ash Shajina was closed six times in 2008.

Gaza Strip

Military activities affecting civilians

Recent weeks have seen the lowest levels of violence in the Gaza Strip since July 2008. For the third consecutive week, no Palestinian or Israeli casualties were reported as a result of Israeli-Palestinian violence in the Gaza Strip. Despite this, military activities in Gaza have not entirely ceased. Israeli troops fired randomly into border areas near Sufa and Karni crossings, and on one occasion, armed clashes occurred between Israeli forces and armed Palestinians approximately 50 meters north of Nahal Oz fuel crossing. During the reporting period, sporadic Palestinian rocket and mortar fire from Gaza towards southern Israel was reported.

Israeli patrol boats continued to enforce restrictions on Palestinian access to the sea during the week: in five separate incidents, Israeli patrol boats opened fire targeting Palestinian fishing boats west of Rafah, Khan Younis, and Deir El Balah, forcing the fishing boats to return to shore.

Work resumed at Gaza Patients' Referral Abroad Department

On 27 April, the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in Gaza resumed work following an arrangement reached between the authorities in Gaza and the PA in Ramallah. This arrangement ended 36 days of disruption that began on 22 March 2009 when the Hamas authorities in Gaza seized control of the RAD, over staff corruption allegations. The resumption of operations followed mediation efforts by members of civil society and UN agencies.

As of 29 April, some 40 referral cases had been processed after being financially approved by Ramallah. Approximately 150 of the delayed referral cases will be examined by the newly established referral medical committee in their first meeting on 30 April 2009.

According to WHO, three patients died while waiting for referral documents during the 36 days of disruption. In addition, WHO is investigating five deaths which occurred during this period.

22-month Israeli blockade on Gaza continues

Israel's 22-month blockade continues to affect all aspects of life. This week, 776 truckloads of goods, including 203 for humanitarian aid agencies (26%), were allowed entry to Gaza; construction materials, spare parts for public infrastructure and industrial, agricultural inputs including livestock, IT/computer-related items and others remain barred from entering Gaza. Almost no new items were allowed entry into Gaza during the week. The ban on concrete and other construction materials

continues to hinder Gaza reconstruction efforts to rebuild homes and necessary infrastructure destroyed during “Cast Lead”.

The smuggling tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border continue to supplement shortages of necessary items that are restricted from entry through Israeli-controlled crossings. This week, a Palestinian man was killed and another injured when a tunnel under Gaza-Egypt border collapsed on 25 April.

Gaza fuel imports (19-25 April 2009)

The amount of industrial fuel which entered for Gaza’s power plant operations increased (by 26%) compared to the previous week (2.2 vs. 1.6 million litres). The amount received represents 70% of the weekly requirements of 3.15 million liters to operate the Gaza power plant at current full capacity. Also, cooking gas imported into Gaza through Nahal Oz almost doubled to 1,192 tonnes (compared to 633 tonnes previously)—approximately 68% of the estimated 1,750 tonnes of estimated weekly needs.

No petrol or diesel has been imported into Gaza through the Nahal Oz fuel pipeline since 2 November 2008, with the exception of limited amounts for UNRWA. However, the Gas Station Owners’ Association estimates that fuel continues to enter through the Rafah- Egypt border tunnels at a rate of nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 70,000 litres of petrol per day.

Exports

One truckload of carnations (nearly 42,000 cut flowers) was exported on 20 April through the Kerem Shalom crossing. Since 12 February 2009 (just before Valentine’s day), 14 truckloads of flowers have been exported from Gaza.

5,000 Gaza beneficiaries not receiving their national security allowance from Israel

According to Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, the Israeli National Insurance Institute halted payments to more than 5000 Palestinian beneficiaries in the Gaza Strip. The majority of these beneficiaries are entitled to an allowance, given for work-related accidents while employed in Israel (before March 2006). According to the Center, the halt in the payments occurred, allegedly, because in January 2009 the Bank of Israel suspended its transactions with Gaza banks, including the Bank of Palestine.

Inter-factional conflict

According to Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, since 20 April, throughout the Gaza Strip, large numbers of Fatah movement and Fatah Youth Organization activists and leaders were briefly detained and interrogated by Hamas affiliated security agencies. All of the detainees were released within a few hours. According to the Centre, three of those summoned and interrogated were beaten and bound in uncomfortable positions. On 23 April, a number of students affiliated to Fatah were arrested and later released at Al Azhar University in Gaza. The arrest took place following a dispute between Fatah and Hamas-affiliated student groups within the university campus.

Armed family disputes

Ten people were injured in an internal family dispute when a Palestinian male fired three RPGs targeting his own family home and a Police vehicle. The person later fled towards the border with Israel where he surrendered himself to Israeli soldiers stationed on the border line east of Deir Al Balah.

No new passports for Gaza's population

In the second half of March 2009, the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah began issuing a new edition of the Palestinian passport. These passports are currently only being issued/renewed in the West Bank, and Gaza authorities are no longer able to print new passports in Gaza. Only those able to send their application for a passport to the West Bank will be issued a new passport.

The Hamas authorities reported that there are more than 2,000 pending applications for new passports, including nearly 600 for medical cases for people needing to travel abroad. The authorities in Gaza appealed to international agencies and human rights organizations to intervene and encourage the PA in Ramallah to create a workable mechanism to resolve the issue.