



## OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

P.O. Box 38712, East Jerusalem, Phone: (+972) 2-582 9962 / 582 5853, Fax: (+972) 2-582 5841 ochaopt@un.org, www.ochaopt.org

## Protection of Civilians Weekly Report No. 287

19 – 25 November 2008

### Latest developments

*The Humanitarian Coordinator for the oPt, Maxwell Gaylard, yesterday described the Gaza blockade as “an assault on human dignity with serious humanitarian implications,” at the launch of the 2009 Consolidated Appeal. The blockade, which began in June 07 and has been compounded by the recent full closure, has caused the degradation of daily life for most Gazan civilians – half of them children. People’s lives are being increasingly reduced to a daily struggle of obtaining clean running water, fuel for cooking, and fresh foods to maintain their families. Lacking electricity and back-up fuel, most basic services and utilities are on the brink - having received only limited maintenance and spare parts, and no development investment in more than a year. With a poverty rate already standing at 76%, an unemployment rate of 45%, the 76% of the population already receiving assistance are looking more and more to the international community for help.*

*On 26 November, the Gaza crossings were opened allowing limited humanitarian assistance and some fuel supplies in. While this is a positive development, the amounts of supplies imported remain wholly insufficient to meet the basic needs of the population and restore any semblance of normal life. The level of imports since the closure of the crossings on 5 November, stands at an average of less than five truckloads a day, compared to 123 in October 08 and 475 in May 07, before the Hamas takeover. The unpredictability of these humanitarian deliveries is also making it difficult for organizations to run assistance programs.*

*On 26 November, following the temporary replacement of damaged batteries, with locally adapted car batteries, the Gaza Power Plant resumed operation. However, the electricity situation is still precarious as the replacement batteries could fail at any time and fuel supplies are sufficient for two days only. Power cuts, particularly in Gaza City, are expected to be reduced at least for the coming two days.*

*On 27 November, Israel allowed the entry of 18 tons of chlorine, used to disinfect drinking water. This quantity is sufficient for about eight days.*

### Military activities affecting civilians

In the West Bank, 17 Palestinians, including five children, were injured this week by the IDF, compared to 15 last week. Nine of the injuries occurred during anti-Barrier demonstrations. Eighty search operations were conducted by the IDF during the week in the West Bank. One of the largest occurred in Tuqu’ village (Bethlehem governorate), during which, IDF soldiers assaulted two boys and a woman and arrested 20 men. In addition, a twenty-hour curfew was imposed on the village, which, inter alia, prevented the functioning of schools. This is the eighth IDF operation in the village since the beginning of August.

In the Gaza Strip, clashes between Palestinian militants and the IDF continued, resulting in the injury of one unarmed Palestinian civilian. By contrast, no Palestinian militant was killed or injured this week, compared to eight killed and six injured last week. In the course of the week, Palestinian militants fired approximately 20 homemade rockets and mortar shells towards Israel, most of them towards Sderot City. Five of these exploded at the launch site in Gaza. No casualties were reported from rocket and mortar firing.

### Gaza: population severely affected due to the ongoing closure

The closure of Gaza’s crossings for humanitarian assistance basic supplies and fuel, imposed by Israel on 5 November in response to the firing of rockets by Palestinian militants, continued during the reporting period, substantially affecting almost all spheres of life. On 21 November, while condemning the Palestinian firing of rockets in Israeli civilian areas, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator stated that, “measures which increase the hardship and suffering of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip as a whole are unacceptable and must cease immediately... We must make sure that the humanitarian needs of the population are met, even in the most difficult political and security environment.”

**Electricity supply disrupted:** With the exception of Rafah, Gaza’s population continued to experience long electricity cuts, after Gaza’s only power plant shut down again on 13 November, after Israel stopped fuel supplies and spare parts from entering Gaza. On 24 November, Israel allowed 440,000 litres of industrial fuel to enter but the plant was unable to resume operations due to the breakdown of the turbine batteries caused by the prolonged lack of use. The electricity distribution company (GEDCO) stated that the load-sharing schedule resulting

in shortages of electric power throughout Gaza implemented in the previous week, would continue. Gaza City, with over 600,000 residents, and the middle area, continued to experience up to 16 hours of electricity cuts per day. Hospitals in Gaza remained operational in spite of power cuts, as they have relied on backup generators, which are not designed to sustain daily basic medical services.

**Most households without daily running water; water system at risk of contamination:** Electricity cuts compounded by the lack of backup fuel also affected the ability of the Coastal Municipality Water Utility (CMWU) to supply water and to operate its sewage pumping stations. About 80% of Gaza's water wells (115 out of 145 wells) are functioning only partially and the rest are not operational. As a result, half of the population of Gaza City has water supply only once a week for a few hours. The lack of synchronization between water and electricity supply, resulted in zero water supply to many people living in multi-storey buildings, who depend on the functioning of pumps to receive water. On 23 November, the CMWU raised concern about an additional pending crisis in the water supply – chlorine supplies used to disinfect drinking water, would be depleted within two weeks if no new shipments were allowed in. Already some wells have run out of stock and the CMWU is asking people in several areas to boil water before drinking. The potential contamination of the system with un-chlorinated water is a serious concern.

**Insufficient humanitarian aid allowed in:** On 24 November, 48 truckloads of humanitarian aid and essential items to the private sector were allowed into Gaza. Of these, 28 contained food supplies (mainly milk and dairy products, rice, cooking oil and flour) and 20 wheat grain and animal feed. During the week, concerns increased over the possibility that wheat flour stocks would be exhausted. As of 25 November, the stock of wheat grain available in Gaza's mills and warehouses was less than 3,000 Mt (metric tonnes), of which three quarters were of the lowest quality. World Food Programme (WFP) estimates the daily flour needs of Gaza's population at approximately 450 Mt. Most mills have been saving their wheat flour production for the bakeries. As a result, wheat flour is not available for distribution by humanitarian agencies. According to WFP, the availability of dairy products, meat, fruits and rice in the market, as well as animal feed and several hygiene items, is far below demand.

**Shortage of cooking gas adversely affects services and livelihoods:** Since 05 November, no cooking gas has been allowed into Gaza and almost all outlets remain closed. While some cooking gas was reportedly imported from Egypt via the tunnels, the amounts are very limited and four times the price of the Israeli gas, making it unaffordable for most Gazans. Almost all hospitals, bakeries and households were affected by this shortage. People have resorted to using all types of flammable objects to cook.. More than 30 out of 47 bread bakeries in Gaza City are no longer operational since they have no cooking gas, up from 20 reported last week. As a result, for the second consecutive week, long queues in front of the operating bakeries were

reported, while a bread rationing scheme – one bag per person –remains in effect. The closure of bakeries has affected, inter alia, UNRWA's school feeding programme, targeting some 200,000 school children, as many school canteens are being forced to serve less nutritious meals. Chicken farms were particularly affected by the shortage of cooking gas, which, combined with the lack of animal feed, has led hatchery owners to destroy their animals en masse. According to FAO, one of the 11 hatcheries in Gaza exterminated 300,000 chicks in one day.

**Cash assistance suspended:** UNRWA's cash distribution to the poorest refugees is still suspended since 19 November due to an absence of NIS in Gaza. The small cash grant allows the poorest refugees, who have no other source of income, to supplement their basic food ration with fresh vegetables and other vital household supplies.

### **West Bank: More house demolitions in East Jerusalem and in Area C**

During the week, the Israeli authorities demolished four Palestinian-owned residential structures, due to the lack of building permits. As a result 20 people, including 12 children, were displaced. Three of the demolitions were carried out by the Municipality of Jerusalem on 25 November in East Jerusalem villages: 'Anata, As Sawahra Al Gharbiya and Jabel Al Mukabar. Two of these structures had been reconstructed, following their previous demolition in previous years. The fourth structure, demolished by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), was located in Area C, in the outskirts of Al 'Eizariya town (Jerusalem governorate). While the ICA claimed that a demolition order was issued in advance, the two elderly people, who were about to move to the house, reported that no order or prior warning was given to them. The demolition took place while both were receiving medical treatment at a hospital; as a result, no furniture or belongings could be removed from the house. In addition, the ICA issued four demolition orders in al 'Aqaba village (Tubas governorate) targeting three houses under construction and one agricultural road. The entire community, which is located in an area declared by the IDF as a closed military zone, is under threat of displacement, given that the majority of its buildings have pending demolition orders.

These demolitions come in the context of renewed Area C demolitions and an intensified wave of East Jerusalem demolitions; since August 2008, 132 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and 16 structures in East Jerusalem were demolished.

### **Settler-related incidents: High level of tension in Hebron City**

A high level of tension could be observed during the reporting period in the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron City (H2) following the Israeli High Court of Justice's decision to vacate the Al Rajabi building settlement the previous week. On 21 and 22 November, around 20,000 settler-supporters arrived in the city. During this time, the IDF took control of observation positions in five Palestinian homes to secure the movement of the settlers and their supporters. The IDF also closed the Ibrahim Mosque to

Muslims. During this week, Israeli settlers threw stones at a Palestinian building in the H2 area of Hebron, desecrated tombstones at a nearby Islamic cemetery and scribbled offensive words on the walls and door of Al Ras Mosque.

### **West Bank demonstrations**

Several anti-Barrier demonstrations took place during the week in Ni'lin (Ramallah governorate), Jayyus (Qalqiliya governorate), and Al Ma'sara (Bethlehem governorate) villages, resulting in the injury of nine Palestinians and one international activist. During the demonstration in Jayyus protesting IDF measures restricting Palestinian farmers' access to land behind the Barrier, demonstrators destroyed part of a Barrier gate. The number of casualties during anti-Barrier demonstrations continues to fall well below the weekly average during the peak between May and August (20), primarily due to the decline in the frequency of demonstrations. In addition, the IDF injured one child and two men with rubber-coated metal bullets in another demonstration, held by Palestinians next to the evacuated settlement of Homesh, in protest of continuous attempts by Israeli settlers to resettle the area.

#### ***This week at a glance:***

##### **Palestinian – Israeli conflict related casualties**

- Palestinians killed: 0
- Palestinians injured: 1 in Gaza - 17 in West Bank.  
Of whom 5 are children
- Israelis injured: 0

**IDF search operations: 80 (previous week 81)**

**Palestinians arrested by the IDF: 65 (previous week 75)**

**IDF flying checkpoints: 60 (previous week 58)**

WB Checkpoints with long delays and queues:

Nablus: Huwwara, Beit Iba, Tappuah  
Jerusalem: Qalandiya, and Ar Ram  
Jericho: Jericho DCO.

The Dead Sea checkpoint continues to bar all access to Palestinian-plated vehicles from Thursday afternoon through Saturday evening.