



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

16 – 29 SEPTEMBER 2009

Latest Developments since Tuesday, 29 September

- 30 September: According to Al Mezan Center for Human rights and other sources, including the Ministry of Health, two Palestinians (aged 45 and 28) were killed and another nine injured when Israeli air strikes targeted and fired three missiles at the tunnels area in Rafah. According to Israeli media, the air strikes were in response to rockets fired towards southern Israel.
- 30 September: A Palestinian youth died after he was hit by an Israeli patrol jeep in the village of Ya'bad, near Jenin. The incident, which the IDF said was an accident, occurred during a confrontation involving stone throwing at a vehicle of the Israeli water company, Mekorot, which was escorted by Israeli soldiers.

West Bank

West Bank casualties; tensions heighten in the Old City of Jerusalem

Compared to relatively low numbers of Palestinian injuries in recent weeks, there was an exceptionally high number of injuries during the two week period covered by this report. Israeli forces shot and killed one Palestinian and injured 50 Palestinians in various incidents throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, compared to one death and ten injuries during the previous two weeks. On 22 September, Israeli forces opened fire on a Palestinian man from Sur Bahir village (Jerusalem) at a gas station near the Israeli settlement of Bitar Illit (Bethlehem); the man was hit with at least 20 bullets. Circumstances surrounding the incident are unclear and Israeli authorities are investigating.

The majority of the 50 injuries during the period occurred on the same day; on 27 September, 16 Palestinians were wounded in clashes that erupted in Al Aqsa mosque compound in the Old City of Jerusalem, when Palestinians attempted to prevent a group of Israelis, protected by Israeli security forces, from entering. Four of the injuries resulted from rubber-coated metal bullets, six from physical assault, and the remaining six by gas inhalation requiring medical treatment. According to the Israeli media, 18 Israeli policemen were injured. An additional 22 Palestinians were injured in related clashes that broke out the same evening between Israeli forces and Palestinian protestors in Al 'Isawiya neighbourhood of East Jerusalem.

The remaining 12 injuries included four Palestinians wounded during the weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations that took place in the Ni'lin and Bil'in villages (Ramallah), four at checkpoints, and another four during search and arrest operations. Three Israeli border police were also injured during the anti-Barrier demonstration in Ni'lin.

During the period, Israeli forces conducted a total of 161 search and arrest operations throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In one search and arrest operation that took place in the Old City of Jerusalem on 29 September, following the clashes at the Al Aqsa mosque compound, 50 Palestinians were arrested.

Movement and access update

During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities announced the removal of 100 closure obstacles in the West Bank, almost all of them earthmounds. Upon request, the IDF provided OCHA with the GPS figures of these removals. In the southern West Bank, where the majority of the removals were reported to have occurred, OCHA's preliminary field work confirmed that approximately 1/3 of the 75 reported removals have been implemented: four of these have importance on a local level. Most of the remaining obstacles out of the 1/3 confirmed are located on agricultural roads off of Road 35 and Road 60, which will allow access for approximately 60 families to harvest their grape orchards. OCHA field staff also reported that all the closure obstacles around the major settlements in the south were reinforced during this period and that there was an increase in flying checkpoints, possibly due to the Jewish holidays.

In the central West Bank, OCHA's preliminary field work confirmed 10 out of 15 announced removals. In addition, another two removals were observed. All of these open up local routes, leading to Road 60 (2) and Road 457 and 458 (10), and four are important on a local level. In the northern West Bank, the Israeli authorities provided GPS figures for four removals, two of which had identical coordinates, resulting in a total of three announced removals. Based on preliminary field work, OCHA is unable to confirm any of these. OCHA has observed one separate removal in the northern West Bank.

OCHA field teams are continuing to investigate the remaining announced removals, a significant number of which are not included in OCHA's regular closure count.

On 2 September, Israeli authorities removed part of the infrastructure at the Ma'ale Efrayim checkpoint, one of four staffed checkpoints controlling access to the Jordan Valley, and reported that the checkpoint would no longer be regularly staffed. This would enable Palestinian-plated vehicles to enter the Jordan Valley through this checkpoint without a permit. According to the Israeli DCL, this easing has been reversed; all cars are checked and pre-existing permit requirements for vehicles have been re-instated.

Also during the period, the Israeli authorities imposed two general closures: the first, from 18 – 21 September for the Jewish New Year; the second, from 27 – 28 September for Yom Kippur. During the former, all Palestinians with West Bank IDs, including permit holders, were prohibited access into Jerusalem and Israel, with the exception for employees of international organizations and humanitarian cases; during the latter, staff of international organizations was also denied entry.

Settler-related incidents

During the reporting period, OCHA recorded an average of seven settler-related incidents affecting Palestinians per week, the same as the weekly average since the beginning of 2009 (7). Aside from the clashes at Al Aqsa mosque compound, reported above, there were a number of serious incidents, most of which resulted in property damage.

In the southern West Bank, Israeli settlers from Ma'on settlement damaged two brick houses belonging to the village of Tuwani (Hebron). Inside the same settlement, settlers carried out large-scale, basic infrastructure work. Also in Hebron, in the Israeli-controlled section of Hebron City (H2) around 150 Israeli settlers accompanied by Israeli security forces entered a section of the Ibrahimi Mosque dedicated for Muslim use, without prior coordination with the Islamic Waqf. In the northern West Bank, settlers from Yitzhar settlement uprooted 125 olive trees belonging to Burin village

(Nablus) and a group of Israeli settlers from Gilad outpost (Nablus) set fire to olive groves belonging to Jit, Immatin and Far'ata villages, causing damage to 50 olive trees. The latter incident occurred when a fire of unknown origin erupted in a field near the outpost, during which six settlers suffered from smoke inhalation and three settler structures were damaged. Four Palestinians were arrested in connection with the incident, while fighting the fire on their land. In addition, there were several incidents of stone-throwing at Palestinian-plated vehicles, resulting in damage to cars.

Israeli media reports indicate that the IDF has identified a trend of rising settler violence and has established a rapid-response security team to prevent "friction and violence between Israeli settlers, security forces and Palestinians." In general, the Israeli authorities have failed to enforce the rule of law on Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

Also during the reporting period, there were six reported incidents affecting settlers, one of which resulted in the injury of a settler, when a Palestinian opened fire at his vehicle while driving on Road 60 near Shilo settlement (Ramallah). In response, Israeli forces searched Palestinian vehicles driving in the area. In another incident, Palestinians hurled Molotov cocktails towards Israeli vehicles driving near Azzun village (Road 55), resulting in no injuries. The Israeli army, subsequently conducted a search operation and imposed curfew on the village. The four remaining incidents included stone throwing towards Israeli vehicles.

Also, on 18 September, Israeli media reports indicate that three Palestinians, armed with knives, attempted to infiltrate Gush Etzion settlement, but were captured by the Israeli army.

Nearly 60 percent of the Palestinian population denied access to Friday Prayers in East Jerusalem

Due to Jewish holidays, which coincided with the last Friday of Ramadan, a comprehensive closure of four days was imposed on the West Bank. Nearly 60 percent of Palestinians, including all of Gaza's population and over 40 percent of the West Bank population, have been prohibited from entering East Jerusalem for Friday prayers during Ramadan this year.

Access for Palestinians holding West Bank IDs is severely obstructed by the Barrier and is restricted through only one of the four authorized checkpoints (Qalandiya, Gilo, Shufat Camp and Az Zeitun). While official figures are not yet available, observers report that fewer people were able to enter Jerusalem on the last Friday of Ramadan than the previous week. During the first, second and third Fridays, the Israeli authorities report that 60,000, 130,000 and 190,000 people entered, respectively. Access continued to be restricted to men over 50 and women over 45 years of age, and boys and girls under 12, who could pass without permits, and men between 45-50 and women between 30-45 years of age, who are allowed to enter with special permits. No Palestinian injuries were reported on the fourth Friday. At least 100 injuries took place during the previous three Fridays, including one Palestinian fatality; at least 40 others, predominantly women and children, were transferred to hospitals for medical care.

Continuing threat to Jordan Valley structures

During the period, OCHA received reports of the Israeli authorities' distribution of nine stop work and demolition orders due to lack of permit for structures in Area C. The Israeli military distributed three orders in the village of Al Jiftlik (Jericho), affecting a school and two residential structures. A further two orders were distributed in Khirbet Makhoul, near Al Hadidiya in the northern Jordan

Valley, affecting seven structures, including four residential structures and three animal pens. In the Bethlehem governorate, four orders were distributed in Kisan village, affecting the Village Council's offices and three residential structures. There are some 3,000 outstanding demolition orders affecting structures in Area C of the West Bank.

Gaza Strip

Escalated violence; five Palestinians killed

During the reporting period, Israeli forces killed five armed Palestinian men and injured three others, including two children, in the Gaza Strip, compared to one death (a 15 year-old boy) and four injuries during the previous two weeks.

In one incident on 20 September, Israeli troops stationed at the Gaza-Israel border shot and killed two armed Palestinians near the border fence (Jabalia). In a separate incident on 29 September, also near the border fence, two children (aged 15 and 17) were injured when an Israeli tank shell hit a civilian house (Deir El Balah). Three other armed Palestinians were killed and another one has been injured on 25 September, when an Israeli air strike targeted and hit their car, east of Gaza City. This is the first Israeli air strike targeting a militant's car since the end of the "Cast Lead" offensive on 18 January 2009. According to Israeli media reports quoting the Israeli army, the three Palestinians were preparing a launch a rocket towards Israel. Since that time, a total of 49 Palestinians and one Israeli have been killed, and 104 Palestinians and seven Israelis injured, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza and southern Israel.

Israeli forces have continued to enforce access restrictions by opening warning fire in the direction of farmers and fishermen, accessing agricultural areas along the border fence and fishing zones beyond three nautical miles from the coast, respectively. On five incidents during the reporting period, Israeli patrol boats opened warning fire towards Palestinian fishing boats, forcing them to return to shore. During one of the incidents, the Israeli navy arrested five fishermen and confiscated their boats. In addition, on nine separate occasions, Israeli tanks and bulldozers have entered a few hundred meters into border-adjacent areas, forcing Palestinian farmers to leave their agricultural lands.

Palestinian armed groups have continued to fire sporadic rockets and mortar shells towards southern Israel, including military bases. No Israeli casualties or damage were reported during the period.

Tunnels continue to claim lives; four killed and 18 injured

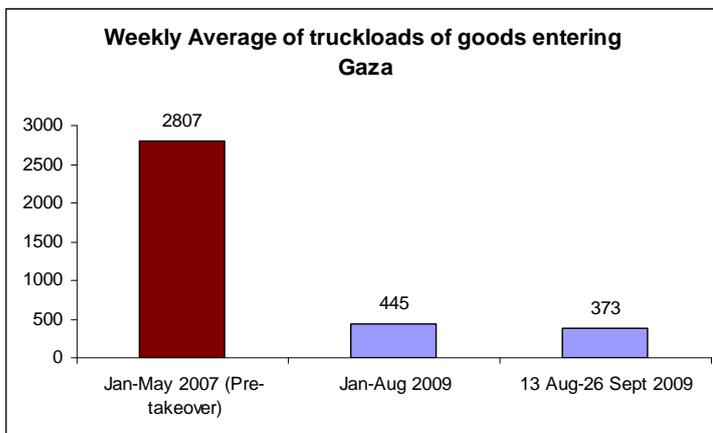
During the reporting period, four Palestinians working in the tunnels under the Rafah-Egypt border were killed and another 18 injured in various tunnel-related incidents, including tunnel collapse, electrocution and fuel leakage. Since the imposition of the blockade in June 2007, OCHA has recorded the death of 103 people in tunnel-related incidents, 47 of whom were killed in 2009.

In a statement issued last week, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza reiterated that most of the people working in tunnels come from very poor backgrounds which force them to undertake risky jobs in order to provide income for their families under the difficult socio-economic conditions caused by the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Al Mezan also urged the Hamas authorities to ensure that all necessary safety measures are in place. While the tunnels provide some short term relief to the

population, through the supply of otherwise unavailable goods, they do not constitute a sustainable alternative to lifting the blockade.

Weekly average of imported truckloads remain below needs (13- 26 Sep 2009)

Due to Muslim and Jewish holidays over the past two weeks, there was a 19 percent decline in the average level of imports, compared to the weekly average of truckloads that entered Gaza since the end of “Cast Lead”; 373 vs. 445 truckloads. Moreover, this weekly average constituted only 13 percent of the parallel figure for the first five months of 2007 (2,807 truckloads), before the Hamas takeover. Similar to previous weeks, food and hygiene items made up the majority of imported goods (82 percent of total imports), with the remaining including limited shipments of agricultural materials, packaging materials, medical supply and non-edible consumables.



The entry of other major essential goods, including materials for reconstruction (cement, steel bars, glass, wood and others), spare parts for water and sanitation projects, packaging material, industrial and electrical materials, IT equipment and vehicles, remain either restricted to limited quantities, or barred from entry. No exports were allowed this week. Gaza’s last shipment of exports was on 27 April 2009.

Imports of cooking gas also declined during the reporting period; a weekly average of 510 tonnes entered during the period, compared to a weekly average of 800 tonnes that entered since the end of “Cast Lead”. This amount remains well below the needs of 1,750 tonnes of cooking gas per week in Gaza. No Israeli petrol or diesel entered during the reporting period. However, Egyptian petrol and diesel, which is transferred through the tunnels, remain available on the open market.

Power cuts slightly reduced, while scheduled blackouts remain in place

A weekly average of around two million litres of industrial gas entered during the reporting period, constituting approximately 72 percent of the weekly amount of fuel needed to operate the Gaza Power Plant. The combined shortage of fuel, spare parts and construction material has continued to affect the supply of electricity in the Gaza Strip. According to the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company, the recent demand on electricity has been slightly reduced by the end of summer. As a result, scheduled rolling blackouts, which affect 90 percent of the population, declined from 4-6 hours to 4-5 hours, four days per week. The remaining 10 percent of the population have remained without electricity as networks, which sustained severe damages during the “Cast Lead” offensive, have not been repaired yet.

Ad hoc opening of the Rafah Crossing allows limited access for people

Access for people into and out of the Gaza Strip remains largely restricted. Only a limited number of medical or humanitarian cases with special authorisation are allowed to leave or enter Gaza. Rafah Crossing, which has been closed since June 2007, opening on only two to three days during the month, was exceptionally opened on four days during the reporting period. Out of 6,000 people granted exit/entry coordination, 1,527 people were able to return to Gaza and 3,731 were able to exit. The Gaza Ministry of Interior indicated that 320 out of 627 students who were waiting to exit Gaza, were allowed out. The remaining 307 students will wait until the next opening of the crossing. Prior to Israel's imposition of the blockade, an average of 650 people crossed each way per day via Rafah during the first six months of 2006, the period following the signing of the Agreement on Movement and Access. This is compared to a daily average of only 79 people entering and 86 exiting via Rafah per day in the first eight months of 2009.