



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

9-15 December 2009

Latest Developments since Tuesday, 15 December

- The Beit Iba checkpoint, which controlled traffic along the main access route into Nablus City from the west, ceased to be staffed by Israeli forces on a permanent basis, while most of its infrastructure remained in place. This measure was adopted, according to the Israeli authorities, in preparation of the relocation of the checkpoint.
- A tunnel under the Gaza-Egypt border collapsed, resulting in the death of one Palestinian.

West Bank

Military activities affecting civilians; 11 Palestinians injured by Israeli forces

This week, Israeli security forces injured 11 Palestinians throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, compared to a weekly average of 17 Palestinian injuries since the beginning of 2009.

Five Palestinians were shot and injured by live ammunition and rubber-coated metal bullets during the weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations in Ni'lin village (Ramallah). Following the demonstration, the Israeli army closed the partial checkpoint (a checkpoint staffed on an ad-hoc basis) at the entrance of the village for seven hours, preventing movement through the checkpoint. Another three injuries occurred during confrontations that erupted between Palestinians and Israeli forces in the Beit Safafa neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, after the Jerusalem municipality demolished a mechanical workshop lacking a building permit. The remaining three Palestinians were injured when physically assaulted by Israeli security forces in the south (one) and in East Jerusalem (two).

Israeli forces conducted 92 search operations inside Palestinian villages, the majority of which took place in the northern West Bank (67). This compares to a weekly average of around 100 operations since the beginning of 2009. The number of Palestinians arrested during search operations in the northern West Bank has more than doubled this week (41) compared to the last week (20).

The Palestinian media reported that on 14-15 December the security forces of the Palestinian Authority (PA) have arrested 80 people allegedly affiliated with Hamas throughout the West Bank. According to the media, Hamas has earlier accused the PA of arbitrarily detaining its members to prevent the celebrations of its 22nd anniversary from taking place.

Significant increase in settler-related incidents

This week, there were 19 settler-related incidents reported throughout the West Bank, almost twice the weekly average since the beginning of 2009 (eight). Of the total incidents, 11 affected Palestinians, resulting in the injury to four and in damage to property; the remaining eight incidents affected Israeli settlers, resulting in injury to three settlers.

During the reporting period, protests continued by settlers against the 10-month freeze on new residential construction in West Bank settlements (excluding East Jerusalem), announced by the Israeli cabinet in late November 2009. A group of Israeli settlers entered Yasuf village (Salfit) on 11 December and set fire to the mosque, resulting in damage to the mosque's library, carpets and loudspeakers. They also sprayed the Hebrew expression "price tag" on the mosque's floor, in reference to their policy of avenging any settlement evacuation or freeze by the Israeli government. After the attack, Palestinian residents clashed with members of the Israeli Border Police. In another related incident, Israeli settlers from the Karne Tzur settlement (Hebron) blocked Palestinian traffic on Road 60 next to the settlement entrance, hurling stones and damaging five Palestinian cars.

In four separate incidents, Israeli settlers physically assaulted and injured four Palestinians, including three boys. One of these incidents, which occurred on 9 December, involved a 13 years-old boy from Qarawat Bani Hassan village (Salfit), who was physically assaulted and injured by two Israeli settlers from the Revava settlement, while he was walking in the vicinity of the settlement with a knife. Due to the gravity of the injuries, the boy was evacuated to an Israeli hospital; after his condition stabilized, he was transferred to an Israeli detention center under suspicion of attempting to attack the settlement and released on the following day.

During the week, Israeli settlers from Adei Ad settlement outpost uprooted 260 olive seedlings from a plot of land belonging to a Palestinian farmer from Al Mughayyir village (Ramallah). According to the owner, the same plot of land has been previously vandalized in July 2009 and December 2008. In a separate incident, settlers from Tel Rumeida settlement in Hebron City (H2) ploughed over a plot of land belonging to Palestinian residents of the city.

Also this week, over 200 Israeli and international peace activists held a demonstration in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood protesting recent evictions of Palestinian residents of the neighborhood. During the demonstration, Israeli forces fired tear gas to disperse the protestors and physically assaulted several of them, injuring one Israeli activist. Moreover, 24 activists were arrested, 21 of whom were released on the condition that they stay away from the Sheikh Jarrah for 30 days. During this demonstration, dozens of Israeli settlers performed prayers beside one of the recently evacuated houses.

Of the three Israeli settlers injured this week by Palestinians, one was a woman, who was stabbed at a bus station near Gush Etzion settlement bloc (Bethlehem). The other two Israeli injuries resulted from stone-throwing towards Israeli-plated vehicles driving on roads in the Ramallah area.

Main Nablus-Jenin road closed off

Since 10 December, the Shave Shomeron checkpoint, located on the main road connecting Jenin and Nablus governorates (Road 60), has been closed by Israeli military forces for all movement. As a result, all residents of the Jenin governorate (274,000) travelling southwards, as well as West Bank residents travelling to Jenin, are forced to make detours in order to reach their destinations. This step has been reportedly adopted to facilitate the rehabilitation of a segment of Road 60, north to the checkpoint, scheduled to take place during the next nine months.

Between August 2005 and August 2008, Palestinian movement through this checkpoint was totally banned. This closure was originally announced as a "temporary measure" in the context of the evacuation of Israeli settlements in this area, as part of the disengagement plan.

New report addressing Area C

This week, OCHA issued a new report entitled "Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in Area C of the West Bank". The report examines the planning and zoning regime applied by the Israeli authorities in Area C of the West Bank. Under this regime, Palestinian construction is effectively prohibited in some 70 percent of Area C, while in the remaining 30 percent, a range of restrictions virtually preclude the possibility of obtaining a building permit. In practice, the Israeli authorities generally allow Palestinian construction only within the boundaries of an Israeli-approved plan and these cover less than one percent of Area C, much of which is already built-up. As a result, Palestinians are left with no choice but to build "illegally" and risk demolition of their structures and displacement. The consequences of the current regime are wide-ranging and extend to the entire Palestinian population of the West Bank.

Gaza Strip

One Palestinian killed near the Gaza-Israel border

An unarmed Palestinian civilian was shot and killed by the Israeli military near his house, located 700 metres from the Gaza-Israel border, east of Al Bureij camp, on 12 December. According to Al Mezan human rights group, the killing occurred in the context of an armed clash, in the course of which, a Palestinian armed group fired anti-tank missiles at Israeli military vehicles patrolling along the border fence, after which the Israeli forces responded by firing tank shells. A number of Palestinian homes were also damaged as a result of this firing. Since the end of the "Cast Lead" offensive on 18 January 2009, a total of 89 Palestinians and one Israeli have been killed and another 154 Palestinians and seven Israelis injured in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza and southern Israel.

Israeli forces have continued to prevent access into areas next to the border fence and beyond a fishing area of three nautical miles from the shore, through opening warning fire towards people entering or approaching these areas. In one incident this week, Israeli soldiers opened fire at two Palestinian boys aged 16 and 17, who were collecting rubble near the border fence, northeast of Gaza City. Subsequently, the soldiers entered the area, detaining the two boys and took them for interrogation within Israel; one of the boys was released after a few hours while the other remained in custody. In a separate incident, Israeli troops opened fire towards farmers working the land next to the border fence east of Khan Younis, forcing them to leave the area. Also, on three separate occasions, Israeli forces launched an incursion a few hundred metres into the territory of Gaza and withdrew after conducting land-leveling activities. On two separate occasions, Israeli naval forces opened fire towards Palestinian fishing boats, forcing them to return to shore; while no injuries or damage were reported, five fishermen were arrested and then released after a few hours and one boat was confiscated.

Palestinian factions have continued to fire mortar shells and rudimentary rockets towards southern Israel, including military bases, resulting in no injury or damage to property; some of the rockets reportedly landed within the Gaza Strip. Also this week, one Palestinian died when a tunnel under the Gaza-Egypt border collapsed.

NGOs targeted inside Gaza

In one incident on 13 December, unknown perpetrators broke into the offices of two NGOs, the CHF international and the Palestinian NGOs network (PNGO) in Gaza City, stealing \$US 900. Local police

have opened an investigation. In a separate incident, the offices of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) in Khan Yunis were broken into and one computer was stolen.

UNRWA hand over the first temporary shelter in the Gaza Strip

This week, UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency) handed over to a Gazan beneficiary the first of the 122 Compressed Earth Block (CEB) temporary shelters to be distributed in the coming weeks. This is part of UNRWA's response to the immediate needs of families who had their homes destroyed or seriously damaged during the "Cast Lead" offensive and are currently living in tents, tented camps or makeshift shelters next to their homes. Addressing the shelter needs of these families is particularly urgent given the rains and low temperatures expected in the coming months. During the handover ceremony, UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, John Ging, called for the lifting of the blockade, in particular the ban on the import of construction material to allow thousands of displaced families to reconstruct their homes.

Scheduled rolling blackouts throughout Gaza reach up to 32 hours a week

The majority of the population in Gaza is experiencing power cuts that reach up to 32 hours per week due to the ongoing electricity deficit, which is around 25 percent compared to the winter season demand, as estimated by the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO). Restrictions on the entry of industrial fuel to operate the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) remain one of the main causes for the power cuts. Approximately 2.25 million litres of industrial fuel entered Gaza this week, constituting around 70 percent of the weekly amount of fuel needed to operate the GPP. If more is fuel allowed into Gaza, electricity production could increase from 60 to 75 megawatts.

In addition, over 40,000 people remain with no electricity, as networks that sustained severe damage during Israel's "Cast Lead" offensive have not yet been repaired. This is due to the continued Israeli restrictions on the entry of the supplies needed to repair these networks; according to GEDCO, there are currently 240 items waiting to be cleared to enter Gaza.

Death toll of Influenza A (H1N1) virus reaches nine in Gaza

During the week, the Ministry of Health (MoH) announced the death of two more Palestinians due to Influenza A (H1N1) virus, bringing the death toll to nine since the discovery of the virus in Gaza on 5 December. As of 15 December, the MoH and the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed another 208 suspected cases of H1N1 in the Gaza Strip, of which 107 were diagnosed with the virus and 101 have recovered. While Tamiflu tablets for treating the virus are available, WHO is still waiting to receive H1N1 vaccination from the MoH in Ramallah.

The Israeli High Court upholds the ban on visits to Gazan prisoners

This week, the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected the petitions submitted a year and half ago by two Israeli human rights organization (Hamoked and Adalah), challenging the sweeping ban on family visits by Gazan residents to their relatives serving prison sentences in Israel. This ban was imposed in June 2007, following the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, and is directly affecting approximately 1,000 Gazans imprisoned within Israel and their families.

In its ruling, the Court reiterated its view that since the 2005 Disengagement, the Gaza Strip is no longer under Israeli occupation and therefore Israel's obligations towards its residents are strictly

limited to allowing access to “basic humanitarian needs”, which do not include family visits to incarcerated relatives. The Court also established that Israel’s policy on this matter is lawful given that it does not target the right of prisoners to receive visits but only the right of Gazan residents to enter Israel. The ruling did not address the petitioners’ argument that the holding of civilians in prisons outside the occupied territory contravenes the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Despite increase in cooking gas supply, shortages continue

Nahal Oz fuel pipelines continued to operate on only one out of five scheduled days, while fuel pipelines located at the Kerem Shalom Crossing operated on six days, with the latter allowing entry of increased quantities of cooking gas (467 tonnes vs. 233 tonnes last week). While there was an approximate 40 percent increase in the overall amounts of cooking gas that entered during the reporting period (700 tonnes), compared to the previous week (496 tonnes), this constituted around half of the weekly needs, as estimated by the Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA). As a result of continuing shortages of cooking gas, a gas rationing scheme throughout the Gaza Strip is being implemented, in which quantities of gas available at the Palestinian General Petroleum Corporation (PPC) is being distributed to bakeries and hospitals as a priority.

A limited amount of petrol entered the Gaza Strip this week (36 million litres), while no commercial diesel was allowed in. Egyptian petrol and diesel, which is transferred through the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border, remain available on the open market, with nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 100,000 litres of petrol transferred into Gaza per day.

Weekly average of imported truckloads remain below needs

During the reporting period, a total of 615 truckloads of goods entered Gaza. This week’s figure is almost three times the weekly average of truckloads that entered during December 2008 (215 truckloads), when the blockade intensified dramatically, but only one fifth of the parallel weekly average during 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 - 461 truckloads or 75 percent of total imports. Truckloads carrying non-edible consumables, including blankets, made up 19 percent (117) of the total number of truckloads; this is the largest shipment of non-edible consumables since the imposition of the blockade in June 2007. The remaining six percent of goods included limited shipments of agricultural materials, medical supply, electrical/industrial material and stationery. On 10 December, one truckload of 30,000 carnations exited Gaza via the Kerem Shalom Crossing; this is the first export from Gaza since 27 April 2009. The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC) reported that due to the ban on strawberries exports, the export sales loss amounted to about NIS 3,231,500 (\$861,800).

Entry of other major essential goods including materials for reconstruction (cement, steel bars, glass, wood and others), spare parts for water and sanitation projects, other electrical materials, IT equipment and vehicles remain either restricted to limited quantities, or barred from entry entirely.

