



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

27 January - 2 February 2010

West Bank

Military activities affecting civilians; 16 Palestinians injured by Israeli forces

This week, Israeli forces injured 16 Palestinians in various incidents throughout the West Bank, bringing the total number of Palestinians wounded in Israeli-Palestinian violence since the beginning of 2010 to 67. The weekly average number of injured in 2009 was 17.

Four of this week's injuries were sustained during the weekly anti-Barrier protest held in Bil'in village (two) and a demonstration held by Palestinian residents of Deir Nidham and An Nabi Saleh villages against the expansion of Hallamish settlement in the Ramallah area (two); two Israeli forces were injured in the former. In the latter demonstration, one family, including five children were evacuated after Israeli forces fired gas canisters into their house; several other cases of tear gas inhalation were reported. Eleven Palestinians, including three boys and two pregnant women, were wounded during the week when physically assaulted by Israeli forces in various incidents. The remaining injury was caused by a rubber-coated metal bullet when clashes erupted between Israeli forces and Palestinians, who were planting seedlings near Burin village, off Road 60. Israeli forces were trying to clear the area, preventing friction between Palestinians and settlers, who were present on the road.

Again this week, the Qalandiya checkpoint barrier crossing was the scene of violence; Israeli forces shot and severely injured an Israeli truck driver after he rushed towards the checkpoint, escaping from stone-throwing Palestinians. As a result, several vehicles waiting at the checkpoint were damaged by the truck and a number of Palestinians were injured. Following this incident, the checkpoint was closed for three hours (5:00 pm until 8:00pm). Qalandiya checkpoint is the main entrance for Palestinians through the Barrier into East Jerusalem from the northern West Bank and is known for its long lines and heavy checks. Also this week, Israeli forces closed Wadi Nar checkpoint, the only route available Palestinians to drive between the northern and southern West Bank, for three hours (10:30 am until 01:30 pm) after allegedly finding a suspicious object in a Palestinian taxi. Palestinians also threw a Molotov cocktail at an Israeli army observation tower near Al Jalazun Refugee Camp (Ramallah), resulting in no injuries.

During the week, Israeli forces conducted 144 search operations inside Palestinian villages, significantly above the 2009 weekly average (103), the majority of which took place in the northern West Bank (109).

Improved access & movement in the South: 24 movement obstacles removed

This week, OCHA recorded the removal of 24 closure obstacles throughout the Hebron governorate, including 21 earthmounds, two roadblocks and a road gate. Eight of these obstacles had been located along Road 60, the main north-south traffic artery, and Road 356, preventing residents of eight Palestinian

communities (approximately 4,000 people) direct vehicular access to these roads. The remaining removed obstacles blocked routes leading to agricultural areas. These removals continue the gradual easing of Palestinian movement on areas to the east of the Barrier, implemented by the Israeli authorities during the past two years. Yet, as of 2 February, approximately 550 movement obstacles remain in place throughout the West Bank.

Overall this week, Israeli forces deployed throughout the West Bank a total of 143 "flying" checkpoints, more than double the weekly average during 2009 (65).

Israeli settlers take over a house in the Old City of Jerusalem; clashes between settlers and Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah continue

On 25 January, Israeli settlers took over a part of a house (two rooms) in the Old City of Jerusalem, in which an elderly Palestinian woman resides. The take-over followed an Israeli court ruling establishing the settlers' ownership over the two rooms. Afterwards, the court fined the Palestinian woman 20,000 NIS (New Israeli Shekels) for acting in contempt of a court order and 9,000 NIS for legal expenses. As a result of the takeover, 14 people are affected, including the woman, her son and daughter and their families, who regularly stay in the house with her.

In the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, where Israeli settlers have evicted 53 Palestinian residents and moved into their homes, clashes between settlers and two of the evicted Palestinian families took place on two separate occasions during the week. In one of the incidents, an armed settler physically assaulted and injured two Palestinians. Israeli border police intervened and stopped the clashes in the course of the two incidents, arresting a Palestinian and an Israeli settler, both of whom were released after a few hours on condition that they stay away from the neighborhood for 15 days. In the same area, over 400 Israeli, Palestinian and international activists held a demonstration against the eviction of Palestinian families from their homes. Israeli forces prevented the protesters from reaching the neighbourhood; this week, the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court ruled that the demonstrations, which have become a weekly occurrence, are not illegal.

Other Israeli settler-related incidents

In addition to the above, another six settler-related incidents affecting Palestinians and their property were recorded throughout the week. These included: two incidents involving Israeli settlers seizing agricultural land allegedly owned by Palestinian farmers in Al Beqa' (Hebron) and 'Abud (Ramallah) villages; one involving the uprooting of newly-planted seedlings nearby the village of Iraq Burin (Nablus); one involving settlers entering Iraq Burin village, which resulted in clashes between settlers and Palestinians, who were later dispersed by Israeli forces; and two involving stone throwing at and obstructing the movement of Palestinians cars traveling on Road 3265 in the south-west Hebron governorate. A seven-year long ban on the use of the latter road by Palestinians has been recently lifted by the IDF, following a decision by the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) in October 2009 (See Protection of Civilians; 13-19 January 2010). According to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, soldiers present at the scene refrained from intervening to stop the settlers, thus defeating the implementation of the HCJ's decision.

Also during the week, there were eight incidents affecting Israeli settlers, during which Palestinians threw stones and a Molotov cocktail at Israeli vehicles driving near Palestinian villages in the Ramallah, Hebron and Nablus areas. Two of the incidents resulted in injury to two Israeli settlers, both in Ramallah governorate, while the rest resulted in damage to vehicles.

A new wave of demolition orders in the West Bank

This week, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) delivered stop work orders against 20 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C of the West Bank, including 16 residences, due to the lack of an ICA-required building permit. The orders, which affect structures in the Hebron, Bethlehem and Qalqiliya governorates, include 14 inhabited residences, placing over 100 people at risk of displacement. Also targeted are five structures under construction (including a clinic) and a water cistern.

In 2010, Israeli forces have demolished 37 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C, displacing 109 Palestinians, compared to the 2009 monthly average of 16 structures demolished and 27 persons displaced. The large majority of demolitions in 2010 took place on 10 January in Khirbet Tana, a community of herders and farmers living for decades in an area east of Nablus, which since the early 1970s has been designated by the Israeli army as a “closed military zone” for military training (“firing zone”). This week, Israeli forces requisitioned a tractor in this village on the grounds that the owner had entered a “closed military zone”. In two additional incidents this week, the ICA requisitioned construction materials and equipment in Abu Dis village (Jerusalem) for lack of an ICA-required permit and four deer belonging to a monastery in Al Qubeiba village (Ramallah), which were allegedly held in violation of Israeli regulations.

Also in Area C, Israeli forces issued a military order requiring Palestinians from the village of Safa (Hebron) to uproot within 48 hours 100 newly planted trees in an area adjacent to Abu Rish Valley, on grounds that this area has been declared in the past as “state land” and the farmers were not given authorization from the ICA to use it. Two days later, on 30 January, Israeli forces declared the area a “closed military zone” for a period of one day in an effort to prevent land owners and their international supporters from accessing the land; as of the end of the reporting period, the trees had not been uprooted. Nearly 30 percent of the West Bank is considered by Israel to be “state land” and has been included by the Israeli authorities in the boundaries of the Israeli settlements’ Regional and Local Councils, therefore precluding their use by Palestinians.

Gaza Strip

One fatality and four injuries; access restrictions to fishing areas continue

After two weeks of relative calm, in which no Palestinian casualties were recorded in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict inside the Gaza Strip, one Palestinian was killed and four others were injured in two separate incidents involving airstrikes on tunnels and shooting towards fishing boats. In one incident on 2 February, Israeli airstrikes targeted and bombed tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border, resulting in the death of one Palestinian civilian and the injury of three others. This is the first airstrike on tunnels since 8 January 2010. In another incident, Israeli naval forces opened fire targeting fishing boats in the Rafah area, injuring one fisherman. In another four separate incidents during the week, Israeli naval forces fired warning shots towards Palestinian fishing boats, forcing them ashore. Since the beginning of 2010, nine Palestinian were killed and ten others were injured inside the Gaza Strip.

This week, Israeli forces entered on three separate occasions a few hundred meters within Gaza and withdrew after conducting land-leveling operations. Palestinian armed factions continued to fire rudimentary rockets towards southern Israel, including military bases, resulting in no injuries or

damage to property; a number of rockets reportedly landed inside the Gaza Strip or exploded prematurely.

Also during the period, an IDF spokesperson reported finding two barrels containing 15-20 kg of explosives on Israeli beaches of the coastal cities of Ashkelon and Ashdod, north of the Gaza Strip; the explosives were neutralized by the Israeli military. The Islamic Jihad group claimed responsibility for the explosives. The Israeli military is concerned that there may be additional explosives present in the water, which endanger the lives of Israeli and Palestinian civilians [A third barrel was found on 3 February and later neutralized].

Tunnels continue to claim lives; two Palestinians killed

In addition to the airstrike fatality, this week, two Palestinians were killed in two separate incidents involving tunnel collapse and electrocution while working inside tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border. Since the end of Israel's "Cast Lead" offensive, at least 74 people have been killed and 133 others injured in various tunnels-related incidents. In spite of the risks posed to those who work in them, the tunnels constitute a lifeline for the Gaza population, providing goods, which are unavailable through the official crossings with Israel, due to the Israeli imposed blockade in place since June 2007.

Internal attacks result in two injuries

In two separate incidents, unknown perpetrators detonated a car belonging to a Hamas leader and set fire to a resort in Gaza. In the former incident, two children, who were sleeping in their home, were injured when they were hit by glass fragments as a result of the explosion. The latter incident resulted in damage to the entrance of the resort. Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights reported that the number of similar types of incidents continues to increase, raising concerns over the state of security in Gaza.

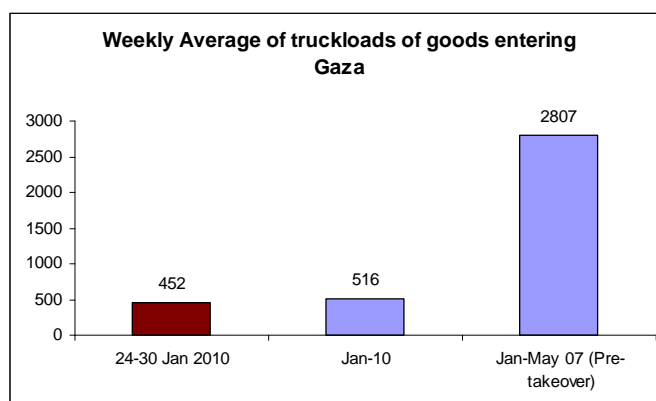
Electricity crisis in Gaza continues despite slight improvement

During the week, the majority of the Gaza population continued to experience long rolling blackouts up to 12 hours, 4-5 days per week, when one of the two turbines at the Gaza Power Plant had to shut down as a result of shortages of industrial fuel. The situation was triggered by a shortage of funds to purchase industrial fuel for the GPP, after the commitment of the EC (European Commission) to cover this expenditure expired in November 2009.

By the end of the reporting period, however, there was a slight improvement in electricity production and supply, after nearly 1.2 million litres of industrial fuel were delivered (on 31 January and 1 February) and electricity production went back up to 65 megawatts (MW), with two operational turbines at the Gaza Power Plant (the electricity deficit is nearly 30 percent). As a result, the scheduled blackouts were reduced to 6-8 hours, 4-5 days per week throughout the Gaza Strip. Some 40,000 people also remain completely without electricity due to damage incurred to electricity networks during the "Cast Lead" offensive; these damages cannot be repaired due to the shortages of spare parts and other essential supplies resulting from the Israeli-imposed blockade. Electricity cuts are directly affecting refrigerated food, water pumping and household heating in individual households, as well as the provision of essential basic services, including water supply, sewage removal and treatment and medical treatment.

Limited shipments of exports and entry of glass continue

Despite the continued prohibition on exports, this week, seven truckloads of cut flowers and strawberries exited Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing. Since 10 December 2009, 47 truckloads have exited Gaza; 19 truckloads of cut flowers (2,274,840 stems) and 28 truckloads of strawberries (47 tonnes). Prior to this, there had been no exports from Gaza for over seven months (since 27 April 2009). The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC) indicated that 300 tonnes of strawberries and 30 million cut flowers are slated for export during this season (ending on 15 February for strawberries and 20 May 2010 for cut flowers).



The entry of truckloads carrying glass continued during the week. Since 29 December 2009, a total of 66 truckloads carrying 59,009 sheets have been imported. Also, two truckloads of A4 paper for the private sector were allowed entry, the first time since 3 September 2009. Entry of other major essential goods including materials for reconstruction (cement, steel bars, wood and others), spare parts for water and sanitation projects, cloths, housewares, furniture, electrical materials, IT equipment and vehicles remain either restricted to limited quantities, or barred from entry.

Phase one of the new Northern Gaza Sewage Treatment Plant completed

This week, the Palestinian Water Authority announced that the first of three phases of construction for the new Northern Gaza Sewage Treatment Plant was completed. The building of this plant will help divert sewage away from the Beit Lahiya site, which flooded in March 2007, killing five people and causing extensive damage to civilian property.

Cooking gas (24-30 January 2010)

This week, there was an approximately 38 percent decline in the quantity of cooking gas that entered Gaza compared to last week (476.6 tonnes vs. 764.5 tonnes), representing only 34 percent of the estimated weekly needs (1,400 tonnes) of gas, as indicated by the Gas Station Owners Association. The decline in cooking gas quantities has resulted mainly from diverting fuel imports to Kerem Shalom Crossing, which has reduced capacity to transfer fuel, after the Nahal Oz Crossing officially closed at the beginning of the year.

The Gas Station Owner Association also indicates that at least 2,000 tonnes of cooking gas needs to be transferred into Gaza, in addition, to an uninterrupted transfer of at least 250 tonnes each day, to overcome the ongoing shortfall. Since November 2009, the shortfall has led to a gas rationing scheme throughout the Gaza Strip, in which quantities of gas available at the Palestinian General Petroleum Corporation (PPC) are being distributed to bakeries and hospitals first, as a priority.