



## PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

24 - 30 March 2010

Please note, due to the Easter holiday, OCHA will not release the Protection of Civilians report next week. The following report will cover a two-week period.

### West Bank

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#### Reduced tensions in East Jerusalem; 11 Palestinian injuries

Following several weeks of demonstrations and intense clashes in and around the Old City of Jerusalem, the situation calmed this week, leading to a significant decline in the number of injuries. In total, Israeli forces injured ten Palestinians, compared to 57 wounded last week. In addition, a 14 year-old child, was injured following the explosion of an UXO, left by Israeli forces in the village of Deir Nidham (Ramallah).

Injuries this week included two Palestinian students, aged 14 and 15 years, who were physically assaulted and injured in the Old City of Jerusalem, while trying to access their school in Al Aqsa Mosque compound (see access section herein). Another Palestinian was wounded when physically assaulted at Qalandiya checkpoint (Jerusalem). The remaining seven Palestinians sustained their wounds in the following contexts: one during clashes between Israeli forces and residents of Iraq Burin village (Nablus); two in the weekly demonstration against the expansion of Hallamish settlement (Ramallah); one during a protest at Gilo checkpoint (Bethlehem) on the occasion of Palm Sunday; and three during a protest commemorating Land Day in Budrus village (Ramallah). Similar demonstrations took place in other parts of the West Bank, with no injuries reported.

During the reporting period, Israeli forces conducted 45 search operations inside Palestinian towns and villages, significantly below the 2010 weekly average of 108. As in previous weeks, the majority of operations took place in the northern West Bank (23).

#### IDF reportedly alters its West Bank rules of engagement

Israeli media reports indicate that the IDF Central Command has recently modified its rules of engagement in the West Bank, implementing more restrictive open-fire directives in situations of stone throwing and Molotov cocktail throwing by Palestinians. According to the new rules, soldiers are not allowed to open fire, in the air or otherwise, in situations where Palestinians throw stones at them. Opening fire is allowed only if a Molotov cocktail is being thrown at a civilian car. Additionally, soldiers now need permission from higher-ranking commanders before opening fire in the air.

#### Israeli settler-related incidents continue; four Palestinians injured

During the week, there were five settler-related incidents affecting Palestinians, resulting in the injury of four Palestinians. Two people were injured when a group of settlers from Shilo settlement stoned Palestinian vehicles driving on Road 60 near Al Mughayyir village (Ramallah). Two other people, including a 13 year-old child, sustained wounds in two separate incidents when physically assaulted by settlers near

the settlement of Teqoa and inside the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron City (H2). Also during the week, settlers attacked a Palestinian house (nine inhabitants, including seven children) in Ras Al Amoud neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, damaging the main entrance of the house. The Israeli police arrived at the scene after the settlers left the area. Since the beginning of 2010, 22 Palestinians have been injured as a result of settler violence in the West Bank.

Three additional incidents occurred during the week involving Palestinians hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli-plated vehicles driving on roads near villages in the Ramallah area; no injuries, but damage to one vehicle, was reported. Israeli forces carried out search operations in nearby Palestinian villages following two of the incidents.

## Demolitions and demolition orders update

In Area C of the West Bank, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) distributed stop work orders against three residential structures in the Jordan Valley community of Khirbet Samra due to the lack of building permit. As a result, three families comprising 19 persons, including 12 children, are at risk of displacement. The families have until 15 April to appeal the orders. In addition, during the previous reporting period, the Jerusalem Municipal authorities distributed administrative demolition orders against two inhabited houses in Al Walaja (Bethlehem) due to lack of a building permit. The orders affect two families, comprising 15 people. Since the beginning of 2010, the Israeli authorities have demolished a total of 57 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C, while three houses were self-demolished in East Jerusalem.

## Access updates

The Israeli authorities imposed a general closure on the West Bank for a period of eight days, from 29 March through 6 April 2010, due to the Jewish holiday of Passover. During a general closure, even West Bank ID holders with valid permits are prevented from entering East Jerusalem and Israel, with the exception of employees of international organizations and humanitarian cases.

On 29 March, Israeli forces restricted entry into Al Aqsa Mosque compound (Jerusalem) to Palestinians with Jerusalem IDs over 50 years of age. As a result, over 600 Palestinian students were unable to reach the three schools located inside the compound. According to the principal of one of the schools, since the beginning of this academic year, students have lost a total of 14 school days, due to restrictions on accessing the Old City and Al Aqsa compound.

Also during the week, the Israeli authorities closed for three days Gilo checkpoint (Bethlehem), the main entry point to East Jerusalem for Palestinians from the southern West Bank. The closure followed the protest that took place at the checkpoint on the occasion of Palm Sunday. Due to the closure, tourist buses were prevented from accessing Bethlehem City and Palestinian medical cases were not allowed into East Jerusalem through the checkpoint.

This week, the IDF revealed new arrangements to allow Palestinian vehicles to use the West Bank portion of Road 443 in the Ramallah governorate; vehicles will be able to enter and exit the road, after checking, near Beit Sira and Beit Ur Al Fauqa (Ramallah). Vehicles will also be able to exit Road 443 in the areas of Kharbatha Al Misbah and Al Tireh (Ramallah) and a security crossing will be built near Ofer military camp and prison. A total of 173.2 dunums of land from the towns of Beituniya and Al Tireh have been requisitioned for construction of the checkpoint and a fence along the road. These developments follow a December 2009 ruling by the Israeli High Court of Justice finding that the Israeli military's ban on Palestinian use of the West Bank section of Road 443 (25 km long) was illegal

### **Tensions run high along the border; two Palestinians and two Israeli soldiers killed**

Armed clashes and subsequent Israeli airstrikes in the area along the Gaza-Israel border resulted in the killing of two Palestinians, including one civilian, and two members of Israeli forces. In addition, 13 Palestinians and three members of Israeli forces were injured. Thus far in 2010, 12 Palestinians and three Israeli soldiers (including one soldier killed by “friendly fire” in southern Israel) have been killed and another 59 Palestinians and four Israeli soldiers have been injured in the Gaza Strip.

On 26 March, Palestinian armed groups clashed with Israeli forces east of Khan Younis, after the latter spotted a group of militants attempting to plant an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) next to the border. As a result, one Palestinian militant and two members of Israeli forces were killed and another three Israeli soldiers were injured. In addition, several Palestinian families living in the area were forced to temporarily leave their homes during the clashes in fear of further escalation; the families returned back to their homes the same day after Israeli forces withdrew from the area. Later that day, Israeli air forces launched air strikes in the same area, resulting in the killing of one Palestinian civilian and the injury of six others, including a 13 year-old child.

Earlier this week, on 24 March, Israeli airstrikes targeted a group of Palestinian militants, in northern Gaza; no injuries were reported but three houses and a water reservoir were partially damaged. A number of rudimentary rockets were fired by Palestinian factions towards southern Israel, including military bases, resulting in no injuries or damage to property during the week. One rocket reportedly exploded prematurely and another one landed inside Gaza, near the border fence.

### **Israeli restrictions to land and sea continue; seven Palestinians injured and 20 detained**

During the week, two Palestinians were wounded, including a 15 year-old boy who was seriously injured, while they were collecting rubble in the “buffer” zone along the Gaza-Israel border. Four other people sustained injuries when Israeli forces opened fire towards demonstrators in three separate locations near the border, in commemoration of Land Day (30 March). Also this week, on five occasions, Israeli tanks and bulldozers launched incursions a few hundred metres inside Gaza and withdrew after conducting land leveling operations. During one of these incidents, on 24 March, Israeli forces detained 20 Palestinians, including four children, while they were collecting rubble; 15 were released the same day after questioning, while five remain in custody. In another incident, on 27 March, one uninhabited house was completely destroyed in southern Gaza during an Israeli incursion into a border area, east of Khan Younis.

Palestinian farmers indicate that for some rural families, collecting rubble is increasingly becoming a sole source of income in light of continued restrictions on access to agricultural land near the border. The rubble is sold to brick factories, which recycle it and use it for construction purposes, due to the lack of construction material as a result of the Israeli blockade.

Similar access restrictions continue to be enforced on fishing areas beyond three nautical miles; this week, Israeli naval vessels opened warning fire towards Palestinian fishing boats in three separate incidents. In one of the incidents, a Palestinian fisherman was critically injured and his boat was severely damaged.

## Tunnel-related incidents

In two separate incidents this week, the Egyptian authorities located and destroyed seven tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border; no injuries were reported. On 30 March, the Egyptian border police arrested 12 Palestinians while they were working inside the tunnels on the Egyptian side. Since the beginning of 2010, 12 Palestinians were killed and 21 others injured in tunnel-related incidents, including airstrikes, tunnel collapse and electrocution.

## Despite an increase in fuel and cooking gas, shortages continue (21-27 March)

This week, imports of industrial fuel increased slightly, compared to last week (1.45 vs. 1.04 million litres). However, this amount represents only 46 percent of the actual estimated weekly amount of fuel required for the power plant's full operation. As a result of fuel shortages, the power plant has continued to operate at 38 percent of its full capacity, causing the majority of Gaza's population to experience rolling blackouts of 8 - 12 hours per day; additional power cuts frequently occur due to extensive overloads on the electrical network. Cooking gas imports also increased this week, by 15 percent, compared to the previous week (966 tonnes vs. 840 tonnes last week). This week's quantities of cooking gas constitute 69 percent of the weekly needs (1,400 tonnes), as estimated by the Gas Stations Owners Association.

## New items enter Gaza; limited exports continue (21-27 March)

A total of 612 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, around 22 percent of the weekly average that entered during the first five months of 2007, before the Hamas takeover. The majority of imported goods (90 percent) were food and hygiene items.

This week, UNRWA received a shipment of 25 tonnes of cement (half a truckload) via Kerem Shalom for the construction/up-grading of a UN pumping station in southern Gaza. The imported cement, however, represents only a small portion of the construction materials needed to complete a number of other UN projects, which are pending due to the lack of construction materials.

Glass imports also continued during the week; since 29 December 2009, a total of 142 truckloads carrying over 90,000 sheets of glass were imported. Also this week, six truckloads of cut flowers were exported from Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing. Since 10 December 2009, 110 truckloads have left Gaza, including 77 truckloads of cut flowers (over 12 million stems) and 33 truckloads of strawberries (52 tonnes).

