



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

26 May - 1 June 2010

Latest Developments since Tuesday, 1 June

2 June The Egyptian authorities exceptionally opened the Rafah border crossing in both directions, for humanitarian cases and aid, for an unspecified period of time. It is expected that an average of 750 people will cross daily. In addition, on the day of the opening, 13 electrical generators for the Al Quds hospital and five truckloads of clothing, bed sheets, blankets, tents and shoes were allowed into Gaza.

2 June Israeli settlers set fire to agricultural land in four villages in Nablus governorate. According to the Palestinian Fire Brigade, a total of 450 olive trees and 300 almond trees were damaged.

West Bank

At least 20 Palestinians injured by Israeli forces

This week, Israeli forces injured at least 20 Palestinians, including six children, in clashes and demonstrations that took place in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, compared to nine Palestinians wounded last week. Nine members of the Israeli forces and one foreign activist were also wounded. In 2010, six Palestinians and one Israeli soldier have been killed, and 657 Palestinians and 84 members of Israeli forces injured in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

At least 14 Palestinians and nine Israeli policemen were injured in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem during a series of violent clashes that took place on four consecutive days. The incidents began on 27 May following a confrontation between Palestinian residents and Israeli private security guards deployed by the Israeli authorities at the Beit Yonatan settlement in the neighbourhood, which resulted in the injury of three women, one of whom is pregnant. The last and most violent clash in this series erupted on 29 May between Palestinian residents and Israeli security forces, and resulted in the injury of at least five Palestinians and, according to Israeli media, nine Israeli policemen. The latter arrived at the neighborhood after security guards from the above settlement opened fire at Palestinian vehicles and houses in unclear circumstances, damaging a number of them. The following day, Palestinian residents set fire to a house that had been taken over by settlers, after which security guards fired live ammunition in the air, along with tear gas; one Palestinian pregnant woman (seven months) lost her baby after inhaling tear gas.

Also this week, five Palestinians sustained wounds in a number of demonstrations that took place to protest Israeli settler attacks, including violence and harassment (Iraq Burin, Nablus); settlement expansion and the taking over of land by settlers (Hallamish settlement, Ramallah); as well as Barrier construction (Bil'in, Ramallah). During the latter protest, one dunum of olive trees was set on fire and partially damaged by tear gas canisters fired by Israeli forces. Palestinians, together with international activists, also protested at Qalandiya checkpoint (Jerusalem) against the killing of the "Gaza Flotilla" activists (see Gaza section).

During the protest, Israeli forces fired tear gas canister at stone-throwing protesters; one international female activist lost her eye after being hit in the face with a gas canister.

Israeli settler-related incidents

OCHA recorded six attacks perpetrated by Israeli settlers resulting in either Palestinian injuries or damage of Palestinian property this week. In 2010, 120 such incidents were recorded, more than two-fold the number of incidents (56) in the equivalent period in 2009.

During the week, Israeli settlers injured five Palestinians in two separate incidents: one of the incidents, which resulted in the injury of four Palestinians, occurred when Israeli settlers threw stones at Palestinian-plated vehicles driving in the Qalqiliya area; the other incident involved the physical assault of a Palestinian man in the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron City (H2).

The four remaining incidents resulted in damage to Palestinian property; two of these incidents involved setting fire to agricultural land near 'Ein Samiya village in the Ramallah area and next to Tel village in the Nablus area. Reports from the latter village indicate that seven dunums of land planted with wheat and barley and 15 trees of olive and almond trees were damaged. In a separate incident, Israeli settlers entered an agricultural area in the Al Lubban Ash Sharqiya village (Nablus), vandalized crops and burned agricultural tools. Additionally, Israeli settlers from Elon Moreh settlement entered a private park belonging to Palestinians from Al Badhan village (Nablus), damaged the cafeteria and stole electrical equipment.

According to the Israeli military, on six separate occasions, Palestinians threw stones at Israeli-plated vehicles travelling on West Bank roads in the Ramallah area, resulting in damage to the cars.

New easings on Palestinian movement implemented

The Israeli military began implementing the previously announced package of easings to Palestinian movement. In the Hebron governorate, an earthmound located at the entrance of Ad Dahiriya town was removed, thus providing the 35,000 residents of the town with direct vehicular access to Road 60. A road gate has been installed at the same site and has remained open. While this opening improves the movement between towns and villages in the area, its impact on access of residents to Hebron city, the main economic and service hub in the area, is still limited, as the main entrance to the city from the south remains blocked. An additional seven roadblocks were removed in the Hebron area, including two located at the entrance of two communities (Wadi Al Hafayer and Khirbet Bism) and five leading to agricultural land.

Following a decision by the Israeli High Court of Justice from December 2009, the Israeli authorities opened to Palestinian-plated vehicles the West Bank section of Road 443 in the Ramallah governorate. During the past eight years, this road served, almost exclusively, Israelis traveling between Jerusalem and the coastal area, as well as Israeli settlers commuting to Israel. The impact of this opening for Palestinians, however, remains limited due to the fact that access to Ramallah and to East Jerusalem for Palestinians using this road continues to be prohibited. The prohibition is now enforced by a new, permanently staffed checkpoint installed at the eastern end of Road 443, next to the Israeli prison Ofer. Additionally, access to the road for Palestinians is allowed only at two points (Beit 'Ur al Fauqa and Beit Sira villages), where two new staffed checkpoints have been installed, requiring Palestinians to pass a security check. Following the installation of the new checkpoint next to Ofer prison, the Israeli authorities ceased the permanent staffing of three checkpoints located further south on routes leading into East Jerusalem (Ramot, Atarot and Qawasmi checkpoints), transforming them into partial checkpoints.

In the same area, the Israeli military opened a Barrier checkpoint (Al Jib) controlling access to and from two Palestinian communities isolated by the Barrier (Al Khalayleh and Nabi Samuel) for vehicular access of residents of these communities. While this opening facilitates access of the latter to Ramallah, visitors and service providers are still prohibited from accessing the checkpoint.

In the northern West Bank, the Israeli army re-installed a checkpoint alongside a road connecting Nablus city to a cluster of villages to the north; the checkpoint has not been staffed. A fully staffed checkpoint at this site ('Asira Ash Shamaliya checkpoint), originally installed in 2002, was dismantled in October 2009. In the same area, 150 olive trees owned by Palestinians and located on the sides of a military road were burned, as access of the Palestinian Fire Brigade was delayed by the Israeli military.

Additional people at risk of displacement in Area C and East Jerusalem

While no demolitions have been carried out in Area C for over a month, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) continues to deliver stop-work orders, the administrative measure preceding the issuance of a demolition order, due to the lack of building permit. This week, the ICA delivered such orders against 26 Palestinian-owned structures, including 11 houses in Yatma village (Nablus) and seven residential tents in the Qawawis area (Hebron) and near Nahhalin village (Bethlehem). The remaining structures included an animal shelter, a water cistern, six restrooms and an extension to a house.

In East Jerusalem, two Palestinian families comprising 12 members living in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood received eviction demands from an Israeli lawyer, demanding them to evacuate their houses within 45 days.

In 2010, the Israeli authorities have demolished a total of 65 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C, displacing 129 people, including 47 children, and one structure in East Jerusalem; three houses were also self-demolished in East Jerusalem by their Palestinian owners to avoid further punitive measures, including fines, displacing seven people. In the parallel period in 2009, the Israeli authorities demolished 57 structures in Area C and 31 in East Jerusalem, displacing 171 and 147 people, respectively.

Gaza Strip

Ships carrying aid to Gaza intercepted; at least nine international activists killed

In the early morning of 31 May, Israeli naval commando forces intercepted six ships carrying hundreds of international activists and tonnes of humanitarian aid to Gaza, while sailing in international waters. While the full sequence of events remains unclear, according to information released by a number of sources, during the commandos' take-over of one of the vessels, clashes erupted between the soldiers and some of those onboard. At least nine activists were killed and many others injured; ten Israeli soldiers were also injured. According to the Israeli media, after holding hundreds of activists incommunicado for several days, Israel has now released and deported most of them to their countries of origin. Goods carried by the flotilla included cement, generators, wheelchairs, medicine, clothes and blankets, and toys. While the Israeli authorities declared their intention to transfer the goods to Gaza, the coordination needed for transferring these goods has not yet taken place and none of them had actually entered Gaza as of the end of the reporting period.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon expressed shock at the killings and injuries and called for a full investigation of the incident; this call was echoed in a Security Council presidential statement. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), John Holmes, condemned the waste of life over a humanitarian issue and said that such an incident should never have happened, stressing that the blockade of Gaza by Israel has been unacceptable, unnecessary and counterproductive from its beginning in 2007. Holmes noted that the blockade has worsened conditions of life for Palestinians, deepened poverty and food insecurity, prevented reconstruction, and increased aid dependence by destroying livelihoods and economic activity. The ERC called for the flotilla disaster to be the occasion for this collective punishment of the people of Gaza to be lifted once and for all.

Violence escalates: five Palestinians killed and 39 injured

This week saw a serious escalation in Israeli-Palestinian violence in the Gaza Strip, including firing across the border, airstrikes and armed clashes, in the course of which, Israeli forces killed five Palestinian members of armed groups and injured a total of 39 Palestinians, including 36 civilians. In 2010, 25 Palestinians (including seven civilians), three Israeli soldiers and one foreign national have been killed, and another 113 Palestinians (including 98 civilians) and five Israeli soldiers have been injured, in the context of the Palestinian- Israeli conflict in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel.

All of the fatalities and 34 of the injuries occurred as a result of airstrikes carried out by the Israeli air force, some of which were launched in response to the firing of rockets by Palestinian armed factions towards southern Israel. No injuries or property damage were reported as a result of the latter.

In two separate incidents on 1 June, the Israeli air force targeted and killed five armed Palestinians near the Gaza-Israel border; one of these airstrikes was launched, according to the Israeli military, after armed Palestinians were preparing to fire a rudimentary rocket towards Israel, while the other airstrike occurred in the course of an armed clash between armed Palestinians and Israeli forces. In a major airstrike earlier this week, a military training base in northern Gaza was targeted and hit, resulting in the injury of 31 Palestinian civilians, including seven children and six women. Twenty-six (26) houses in the vicinity of the base were severely damaged and 60 others sustained minor damage; the military base was totally destroyed. Another airstrike and shooting carried out on 27 May in an open area east of Gaza City resulted in the injury of three armed Palestinians and one elderly civilian.

Israeli forces continue to enforce restrictions on Palestinian access to the Israeli-declared “no go area”, or “buffer zone”, along the Gaza-Israel border. This week, four Palestinian civilians, including an elderly woman, were wounded in three separate incidents when Israeli forces opened fire at people collecting rubble and farmers working on their land. Access restrictions also continued to be enforced on fishing areas beyond three nautical miles from the shore. In one incident within this context, Israeli naval vessels opened “warning” fire towards Palestinian fishing boats, forcing them ashore.

National NGOs closed down by Hamas

This week, the local authorities in Gaza closed down six national NGOs and requisitioned some property. The grounds on which these measures were adopted remain unclear. The United Nations' Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, expressed concern about these steps and called on the local authorities to cease such repressive steps and allow the re-opening of these civil society institutions without delay.

Tunnels continue to claim lives; seven fatalities and 14 injuries

In one incident this week, six Palestinians were killed and 12 others were injured when a gas cylinder exploded while they were working in a tunnel under the Gaza-Israel border. In a separate incident,

one Palestinian was killed and two others injured as a result of a tunnel collapse. In 2010, 27 Palestinians have been killed and 48 others injured in tunnel-related incidents, including air strikes, tunnel collapse, electrocution and the explosion of gas cylinders.

Increase in imports; entry of building materials for two projects continued (23-29 May)

Increasing quantities of construction materials were allowed into Gaza this week through the crossings with Israel: a total of 29 truckloads of gravel (1,104 tonnes) and 15 others of cement (600 tonnes) for the UNRWA housing project in Khan Younis were allowed into Gaza. Thus far, 11 percent of the needed quantities of construction materials for this project has entered Gaza. In addition, one truckload of gravel (40 tonnes) for the rehabilitation of Al Quds hospital in Gaza City (which sustained severe damage during the “Cast Lead” offensive) entered. Also this week, for the second time since the imposition of the blockade in June 2007, 13 mini-buses and three ambulances purchased by UNRWA were allowed into Gaza. Imports of clothing, shoes, wood and aluminum continue; a total of 218 truckloads of clothing, 118 of footwear, 86 of wood and 46 of aluminum have entered Gaza since the beginning of April 2010.

Overall, this week, Gaza imports increased by 23 percent compared to last week (662 vs. 540 truckloads). This week’s figure constitutes around one-quarter of the weekly average (2,807 truckloads) that entered during the first five months of 2007, before the Hamas takeover. Similar to previous weeks, food and hygiene items made up the majority of imported goods (467.5 truckloads or 71 percent of total imports). No exports have left Gaza this week.

Imports of industrial fuel and cooking gas remain below estimated needs

Imports of industrial fuel used to operate the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) increased by 16 percent compared to last week (1.09 vs. 0.94 million litres). Despite this increase, the amount of fuel that entered represents only 35 percent of the quantity required for the power plant to operate at full capacity. As a result, the majority of the population continues to experience power cuts of 8-12 hours per day.

Similarly, imports of cooking gas increased by 35 percent this week (873 vs. 646 tonnes), representing 62 percent of the average weekly needs, as estimated by the Gas Stations Owners Association. As shortfalls continue, the rationing scheme for cooking gas, introduced in November 2009, remains in place.

While petrol and diesel for the general public continue to be prohibited through the Gaza crossings, this week around 45,000 litres of petrol for UNRWA entered Gaza. 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.

