



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

23 December 2009 - 5 January 2010

Latest Developments since Tuesday, 5 January

- 6 January: Clashes took place at Rafah Crossing between Egyptian forces and Palestinians protesting Egypt's refusal to allow the entry of an aid convoy into Gaza and the reported underground system to control access along the Egyptian side of the border. As a result, an Egyptian soldier was shot dead and dozens of Palestinians sustained injuries.
- On the same day, a bomb was detonated at a coffee shop in Gaza City during the night, resulting in the injury of a number of bystanders. No one claimed responsibility for the incident.
- 7 January: the Kerem Shalom Crossing has been closed after a number of rockets, reportedly launched by Palestinian armed groups, landed in its vicinity. This is the first time since 25 December 2008 that Israel has closed Kerem Shalom in direct response to Palestinian shooting. Since the beginning of the year, Kerem Shalom is the only operational crossing for importing goods into Gaza, except for the Karni conveyer belt.

West Bank

Three Palestinians killed in an Israeli raid on Nablus City

In a military operation conducted during the early hours of 26 December in Nablus City, an Israeli undercover unit killed three Palestinian men affiliated with the armed wing of Fatah movement (Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), and injured the pregnant wife of one of them. The three were suspected by the Israeli army of killing an Israeli settler in a shooting attack two days earlier while the settler was driving along a main road in the Tulkarm area. According to the army's spokesperson, the soldiers shot at the suspects after they refused to surrender. One of the victims was among a group of militants who were granted clemency by the Israeli authorities, following their commitment not to engage in violence and remain under the supervision of the Palestinian Authority. This is the third incident recorded in 2009, in which Israeli forces kill "wanted" Palestinian members of armed groups, representing a significant decrease compared to previous years.

During the reporting period, 14 Palestinians were injured by Israeli security forces in various circumstances, including the weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations in Ni'lin and Bil'in villages (eight injuries), incidents involving physical assault at checkpoints (four injuries) and search and arrest operations (two injuries). An Israeli policeman was also injured by stones thrown by Palestinians in Shuqba village (Ramallah) in a demonstration against the establishment of settlement infrastructure (a quarry) on the village's land, during which the Israeli army fired tear gas canisters and plastic-coated metal bullets.

Also during the two-week reporting period, Israeli forces conducted 220 search operations inside Palestinian villages, almost the same as the weekly average of operations since the beginning of 2009 (108). According to media reports, the day following the attack on the Israeli settler and in connection with that

attack, the security forces of the Palestinian Authority detained and interrogated about 150 men, most of whom were subsequently released.

Settler-related incidents; one settler killed and 15 Palestinians and six settlers injured

During the reporting period, there were 22 settler-related incidents affecting Palestinians, resulting in injury to 15, and another 22 incidents affecting Israeli settlers, resulting in the killing of one settler (reported above) and the injury of six others.

In three separate incidents, 12 Palestinians were wounded in stone throwing incidents by Israeli settlers; one affecting Palestinians travelling on a bus near Yitzhar settlement (Nablus), causing the bus to overturn and another two in the Sheikh Jarrah area of East Jerusalem. The remaining three Palestinians were injured when physically assaulted by settlers in a house in Sheikh Jarrah area, falling while escaping from settlers from an outpost near Giv'at Ha Harsina settlement (Hebron) and when settlers opened fire during a dispute with Palestinians over land ownership near Bat Ayin settlement (Bethlehem).

During the two-week reporting period, a total of 18 separate stone-throwing and three Molotov cocktail throwing incidents by Palestinians towards settler vehicles driving on West Bank roads were reported, resulting in an injury to five settlers, including a woman and two children. Following the killing of the Israeli settler in Tulkarm area, hundreds of settlers held protests, demanding to tighten Palestinian movement control by reinstating removed closures, including roadblocks and checkpoints.

In three separate incidents involving property damage, Israeli settlers from the settlement of Mevo Horon uprooted around 300 olive trees belonging to farmers from Beit Nuba village (Ramallah), settlers from Qedumim (Qalqiliya) damaged 100 trees belonging to Kafr Qaddum village (Qalqiliya) and settlers from Shave Shomeron (Nablus) broke into a nursery near the settlement and vandalized a greenhouse and some seedlings.

Protests by settlers against the 10-month freeze on new residential construction in West Bank settlements (excluding East Jerusalem) continued during the week. In this context, there were ten incidents, in which settlers threw stones at Palestinian vehicles driving in the vicinity of settlements. Also during the reporting period, a group of settlers from Yitzhar settlement threw stones at a Palestinian house in Burin village (Nablus), after which clashes occurred between settlers and Palestinians, resulting in the injury of one settler; the windows of the house were broken. Israeli media reports indicated that despite the construction freeze, dozens of settlements in the West Bank are experiencing a building boom.

Demolitions in Area C of the West Bank

During the reporting period, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) demolished five Palestinian-owned structures in Qusra village (Nablus) and in the Al Buweira area (Hebron), due to the lack of building permits. The demolished structures included two animal pens, a mechanical workshop, a gas station and a grocery. Overall, during 2009 the ICA demolished in Area C a total of 189 Palestinian structures, including 56 residential, resulting in the displacement of 319 people.

Also in Area C, the ICA delivered 30 stop-work orders in areas located in the northern and southern West Bank due to the lack of building permit. Of these, 18 orders targeted tents and animal pens

belonging to the community of Bir Al 'dd in south east Hebron, whose residents (20 families) were allowed to return to their homes in early November 2009, after being forcibly evicted by the Israeli authorities in 1999.

Ban on Palestinian use of a main road declared unlawful

On 29 December, the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) partially accepted a petition submitted by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and six Palestinian villages in western Ramallah area against the ongoing prohibition on the use of the West Bank section of Road 443 (25 km long) by Palestinians. As a result of this ban, the road, which is the main east-west traffic artery in the area and serving an estimated 160,000 Palestinians, became a road restricted for the exclusive use of Israelis, mainly those commuting between Jerusalem and the coastal areas. In a two-to-one decision, the HCJ ruled the current situation illegal on the grounds that under international humanitarian law, the military commander in an occupied territory has no authority to totally preclude the protected population from using a public resource for an indeterminate period of time and for the exclusive benefit of the occupying power's population. In 1980, the Court had rejected a petition by residents against the expropriation of their private land for the upgrading of the road on the grounds that it would be also for the benefit of the local population. The Court ordered the Israeli authorities to implement, within five months, an alternative arrangement for the use of this road, without determining the actual parameters of such arrangement. The potential opening of Road 443, when and if implemented, will improve the movement of Palestinians between villages in this area and enhance access to agricultural land along the road.

Significant movement obstacle removed

On 4 January, Israeli forces removed an earthmound along Road 60, which blocked the northern entrance of Halhoul town (Hebron). The removal of the closure facilitates the access for 5,000 local residents of Halhoul to Road 60, including 75 farmers who own land near Karmi Tzur settlement and along the road. As of 5 January 2010, 573 obstacles to movement remain across the West Bank.

Gaza Strip

Three Palestinian civilians killed in a border incident

On 26 December, on the eve of the first anniversary of Israel's "Cast Lead" offensive, an Israeli aircraft fired at four Palestinian men approaching the Gaza-Israel border, killing three of them; the fourth escaped unharmed. The four were reportedly attempting to enter into Israel from an area located west of Erez Crossing. In a separate incident on 5 January, an Israeli aircraft targeted a group of Palestinian armed faction members, east of Khan Younis, killing two of them and injuring another two. According to the IDF spokesperson, on 2 January, the Israeli air force conducted additional airstrikes targeting tunnels under the border with Egypt, which resulted in no casualties. Since the end of the "Cast Lead" offensive on 18 January 2009, a total of 94 Palestinians and one Israeli have been killed and another 156 Palestinians and seven Israelis injured in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza and southern Israel.

On eight separate occasions during the reporting period, Israeli forces penetrated a few hundred meters within the Gaza Strip and withdrew shortly after conducting land-leveling operations. Also, in 11 separate incidents, Israeli naval forces opened fire at Palestinian fishing boats along Gaza's

coast, forcing them to return to shore; no injuries or damage to the boats were reported. Since January 2009, the Israeli military has officially prohibited access of Palestinian fishermen to sea areas beyond three nautical miles from the shore, though in practice the distance can be sometimes less.

Also during this reporting period, a Palestinian armed faction launched a long-range rocket from Gaza towards southern Israel for the first time in months while others have continued to launch rudimentary rockets, some of which landed inside the Gaza Strip. None of these incidents resulted in casualties or property damage.

Death toll from Influenza A (H1N1) virus reaches 18 in Gaza

During the reporting period, the death toll from Influenza A (H1N1) virus reached 18 since the outbreak of the disease on 5 December. As of 5 January, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza and the World Health Organization confirmed another 214 suspected cases of H1N1 in the Gaza Strip, of which 40 are currently receiving treatment and 174 have now recovered. The MoH reported that while Tamiflu tablets for treating the infected cases are available, the transfer of H1N1 vaccination from its counterpart in Ramallah is delayed due to logistical reasons.

One Palestinian dies in tunnel collapse

During the reporting period, one Palestinian was killed in an incident involving the collapse of a tunnel under the Gaza-Egypt border. Although posing high risks to lives of workers, the population of the Gaza Strip continues to rely on goods imported through the tunnels, as the goods are otherwise restricted through commercial crossings. Since the end of Israel's "Cast Lead" offensive, 65 Palestinians have been killed and 120 others have been injured in various tunnel-related incidents.

Glass allowed into Gaza for the first time since June 2007

For the first time since the imposition of the blockade, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of three shipments of glass into Gaza on 29 December. The Palestine Trade Centre (Pal trade) indicated that starting from this date and for the following 30 days (except Fridays and Saturdays), Israel will allow the entry of three truckloads of glass per day. As of 5 January, a total of 18 truckloads carrying glass have been allowed into Gaza. Glass has been identified as a top priority to address the winter needs of thousands of families living in houses with shattered windows, as a result of the "Cast Lead" offensive.

Overall, during the reporting period (20 December 2009-2 January 2010) a total of 1009.5 truckloads of goods entered Gaza. On a weekly basis this amount constitutes approximately 85 percent of the weekly average of truckloads in 2009 and around one-fifth of the weekly average during the first five months of 2007 (2,807), before the imposition of the blockade. Similar to previous weeks, food and hygiene items made up the majority of imported goods - 84 percent. The remaining 16 percent included truckloads carrying non-edible consumables, medical and agricultural supplies, electric parts for the Palestinian Telecommunication Company and gravel for the Wastewater Treatment Plant in northern Gaza. Entry of other essential goods including materials for major reconstruction and rehabilitation, other electrical materials, IT equipment and vehicles remain either restricted or barred from entry.

During the reporting period, ten truckloads, including five truckloads carrying around 417,000 cut-flower carnations, and another five carrying 8.5 tonnes of strawberries, were allowed out of Gaza, via Kerem Shalom Crossing, to European markets; since 10 December 2009, a total of 13 truckloads of cut

-flowers and strawberries have exited Gaza. Since the imposition of the blockade, exports from Gaza have been severely restricted by the Israeli authorities.

Limited openings of the Rafah and Erez crossings

The Rafah Crossing was exceptionally opened on 3 January for a five-day period (until 7 January), during which several thousand Palestinians, including medical cases and students enrolled in universities abroad, were allowed to leave Gaza, while a few hundreds have reportedly been turned back by the Egyptian authorities. Since its official closure in June 2007, following the Hamas takeover, the Rafah Crossing has been irregularly opened by the Egyptian authorities, with the last opening between 1 and 4 November 2009.

In addition, the Israeli authorities allowed around 500 Christians out of 560 who applied for permits to leave Gaza through the Erez Crossing in order to travel to the West Bank to celebrate Christmas. Since the imposition of the blockade in June 2007, this crossing has continued to operate regularly; however, only a few hundreds Palestinians considered by the Israeli authorities as “humanitarian cases” and granted special permits (mainly medical cases and family visits) have been allowed to leave Gaza through Erez every month.

Nahal Oz Crossing shut down

On 1 January, the Israeli authorities announced that the Nahal Oz Crossing, used for the transfer of fuels from Israel to Gaza, is no longer operational. This announcement follows a period of two months, during which this crossing opened only for one day a week, diverting the bulk of the fuel imports to the Kerem Shalom Crossing. As a result, except for a conveyer belt at the Karni crossing used for the import of grain, Kerem Shalom became the only operational crossing for the import of goods into Gaza. This development has generated significant concern due to the reduced capacity of Kerem Shalom, particularly regarding the import of cooking gas.

During the two weeks reporting period a total of 895 tonnes of cooking gas entered Gaza, a 30 percent decline compared to the previous two weeks and only 32 percent of estimated needs, as calculated by the Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA). While the amount of industrial fuel for the Gaza Power Plant that entered during the first week of the reporting period was slightly above the weekly average (2.27 million liters), the second week saw a sharp decline to one of the lowest levels recorded since the beginning of the blockade (0.4 million liters). According to the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO), scheduled rolling blackouts continue to affect the majority of the population (except for the Rafah area), at a rate of 6-8 hours, four days a week. In addition, approximately 40,000 people are still without electricity supply, as networks which sustained severe damage during Israel’s “Cast Lead” offensive, have not yet been repaired, due to restrictions on the entry of needed supplies.

No Israeli petrol or diesel entered Gaza during the two-week period. Egyptian petrol and diesel, which is transferred through the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border, remains available on the open market, with nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 100,000 litres of petrol transferred into Gaza per day.