



The Agreement on Movement and Access One Year On

One year after the signing of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) on 15 November 2005 between the Government of Israel (GoI) and Palestinian Authority (PA) the ability of Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip to access either the West Bank or the outside world remains extremely limited and the flow of commercial trade is negligible. Movement within the West Bank is also more restricted. There has been no peaceful economic development as envisaged by the AMA but rather a deterioration in the humanitarian situation and an increase in violence overall. The increased closure of Gaza's crossing points has contributed to the worsening of the economic situation over the last 12 months. In the Gaza Strip, unemployment levels have risen from 33.1% to 41.8% between 2005 and 2006 and already high poverty levels have risen by over two percent.¹ Gazan business owners' ² perception of the future is bleaker than at the beginning of the year: in January 2006 81.3% were optimistic about future productivity compared to just 22.6% in September.³

The intention of the AMA was *'to facilitate the movement of goods and people within the Palestinian Territories...'* and open *'...an international crossing on the Gaza Egypt border that will put the Palestinians in control of the entry and exit of people...'*⁴ and thereby *'...promote peaceful economic development and improve the humanitarian situation on the ground'*.⁵



GAZA - KARNI CROSSING POINT, OCTOBER 2006 | OCHA



Summary

AMA provisions

1 Rafah will operate as soon as it is ready to operate at an international standard with a target date of 25 November 2005.

Rafah will also be used for the export of goods.

2 The passages will operate continuously and ... the number of export trucks per day processed through Karni will reach ... 400 by the end of 2006.

Israeli will permit the export of all agricultural products from Gaza during the 2005 harvest season... Israel will ensure the continued opportunity to export

3 Israel will allow the passage of convoys to facilitate the movements of goods and persons between Gaza and the West Bank.

4 Consistent with security needs Israel will facilitate the movement of people and goods within the West Bank and minimise disruption to Palestinian lives.

5 Gaza seaport construction can start. The Gol will undertake to assure donors that it will not interfere with the operation of the port.

6 Discussions will continue on the issues of security arrangements, construction and operation of an airport in the Gaza Strip.

Progress

The crossing opened on 25 November and operated almost daily in the presence of international observers until 25 June. Since this time it has been closed by the Israeli authorities on 86% of days due to security reasons.

Rafah has not opened for the export of goods.

Karni crossing operations improved during the first two months of the AMA but since 15 January Karni has opened erratically, negatively impacting the import of humanitarian aid and commercial trade. The number of exported trucks have averaged 12 per day in 2006.

Less than 4% of the harvest was exported.

In relation to the operation of other crossing points: (1) No progress has been made towards opening Kerem Shalom crossing for commercial traffic as the PA object to its use as it is wholly located in Israel; and (2) Work on the Erez commercial crossing is due to be completed at the end of 2006 although operating procedures have not been discussed.

These have not been permitted by Israeli authorities and no talks have been initiated on this subject between the Gol and PA as required under the AMA.

The number of physical obstacles to movement has increased by 44%; in the West Bank. Further restrictions to movement have been imposed on individuals through the extension of the permit system.

The Gol has not given assurances to donors and no work has started on the construction of the seaport.

Discussions ceased.

I. Rafah

The first of the six points in the AMA was the re-opening of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, operating according to international standards and under the auspices of the European Border Assistance Mission (EU BAM). The target date for opening, 25 November 2005, was met and the crossing opened on all but one day until the 25 June 2006. During the first six months of 2006 the crossing was opening nine and a half hours a day with an average of 650 people crossing daily each way; almost double the average during the six months prior to the AMA (360 people a day).



Figure I. Crossing points to the Gaza Strip.

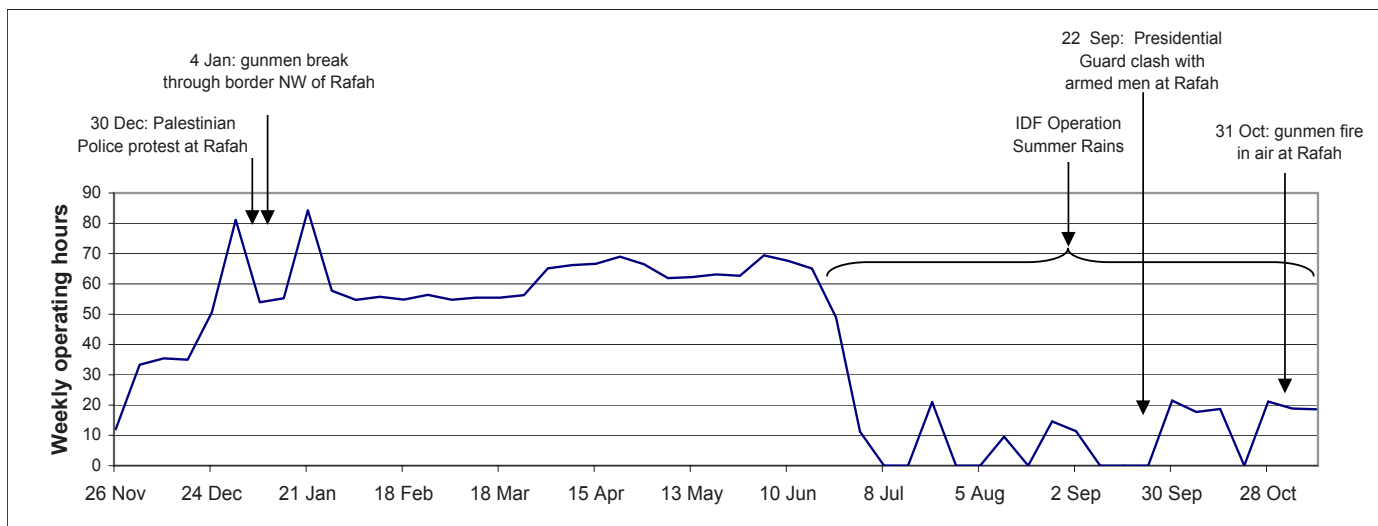


Figure 2. Operation of Rafah Crossing.

However, following an attack by Palestinians on an Israeli military post at Kerem Shalom and the capture of an Israeli soldier, on 25 June, the crossing closed. Since then, the opening of the crossing has been intermittent and erratic (open only 14% of days) preventing the regular passage of businessmen and patients referred for medical treatment abroad. The use of the crossing by ordinary Palestinians has been severely restricted as the operators of the crossing, faced with high demand, have been forced to prioritise a few key categories of people.⁶ The Israeli authorities prevent the crossing opening by preventing EU-BAM access to Rafah through Kerem Shalom.

2. Crossing Points

Karni crossing. The operation of the primary commercial crossing point of Karni remains well below target. The implementation of the AMA started promisingly with Karni being open all scheduled hours in December 2005 and the average number of trucks being exported doubling to 66 per day by the end of the month. However the improvement was short-lived: the crossing opened for only ten days (for fewer than 20% of scheduled hours) in January 2006 since when there has been little improvement.

By 29 March, Karni crossing had been closed 46 days in 2006 or 53% of the year by the Israeli authorities citing security concerns. In comparison Karni was closed for a total of 18% in 2005 and

19% in 2004. Since the beginning of April, Karni has been closed 54% of the scheduled operating days by the Israeli Authorities for security reasons, including suspicions of planned attacks and tunnel construction. As of 26 April, no Palestinian militant attacks have been reported, although on 30 August, the IDF announced the discovery of a tunnel leading to Karni.

On average only 12 truckloads of goods have been exported each day during 2006 which is only 8% of the target set in the AMA of 150 per day by December 2005 and well short of the target of



GAZA - RAFAH CROSSING POINT, OCTOBER 2006 | OCHA



400 per day to be reached by the end of 2006 (see Figure 3). Currently the opening of bays for exports is controlled by the Israeli authorities at Karni and the number varies daily. Bay opening times, and, therefore, the capacity for goods to be exported, is provided only one day in advance to two committees chaired by the PA Ministries of Agriculture and National Economy that are, in turn, responsible for coordinating, prioritising and preparing the daily list of exports on the Palestinian side. On average only 40% of the trucks scheduled for export manage to do so due mainly to slow operating procedures, limited numbers of bays open for exports or unscheduled/early closure of the bays. This uncertainty prohibits commercial companies from planning and maximising resources.

The inability of Palestinian merchants to transport sufficient quantities of goods out of the Gaza Strip had a dramatic impact on export revenues. The Palestine Trade Centre (PalTrade) estimated daily Palestinian export losses for the first quarter of 2006 at \$600,000 – or more than \$30m in total. The Palestinian Economic Development Company (PEDC), responsible for the cultivation of agricultural produce in the former settlements was particularly affected by the closure and estimated that by the end of March it had donated/destroyed nearly 1,000 MT of produce with a value of \$6 million.

The AMA specifically stated “On an urgent basis, Israel will permit the export of all agricultural products from Gaza during the 2005 harvest season...and will facilitate its speedy exit and onward movement so that quality and freshness can be maintained. Israel will ensure the continued opportunity to export”.

According to PEDC, of the total 2005/2006 harvest (just under 14,000 MT) only 465 MT were exported. While a further 3,440 MT were sold in local markets and through Israeli wholesalers, the vast majority of the crops were donated and destroyed. As a consequence the PEDC will not proceed with seeding for the 2006/2007 season and will hand over its resources to the Ministry of Agriculture. The future employment of the 4,200 PEDC manual workers is unclear.

Sufa crossing. Sufa is used for the import of construction materials, primarily gravel, and periodic humanitarian supplies from UN agencies. The crossing operated on most scheduled days following the implementation of the AMA until 14 February when it closed. Sufa reopened in the last week of March but closed again on 25 June, since when it has not opened regularly. Overall Sufa crossing has been open only 60% of scheduled days during the first year of the AMA implementation, severely restricting the importation of aggregates into the Gaza Strip.

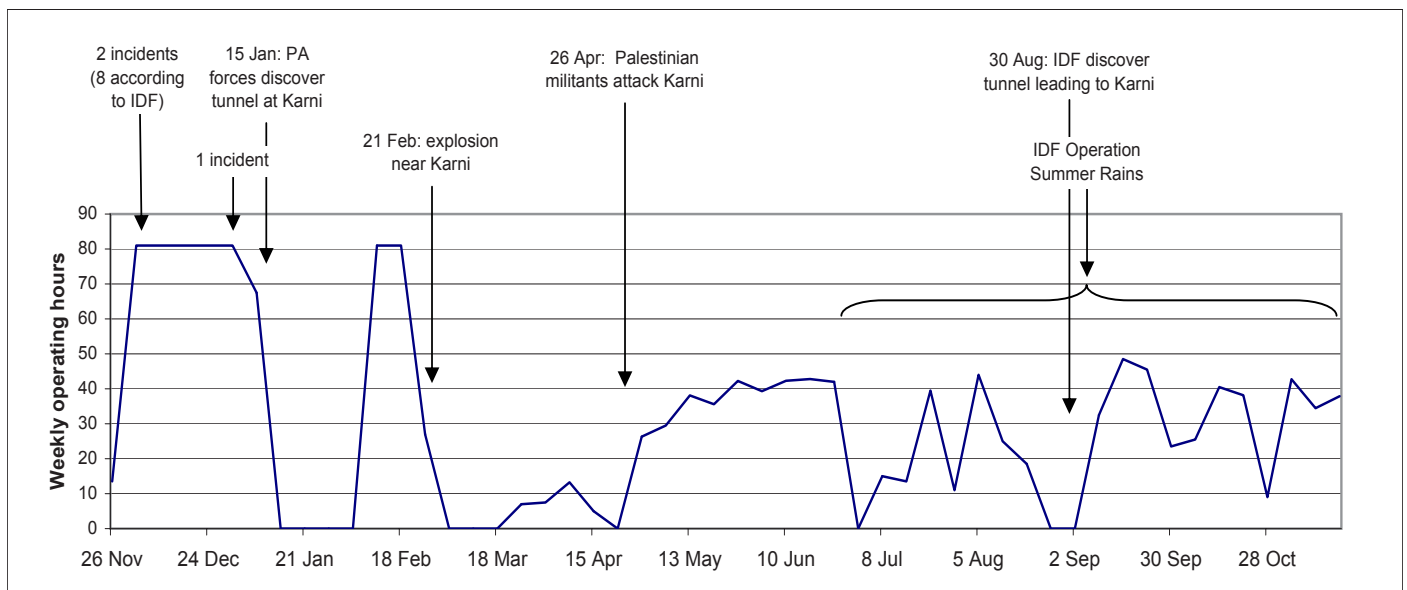


Figure 3. Operation of Karni Crossing

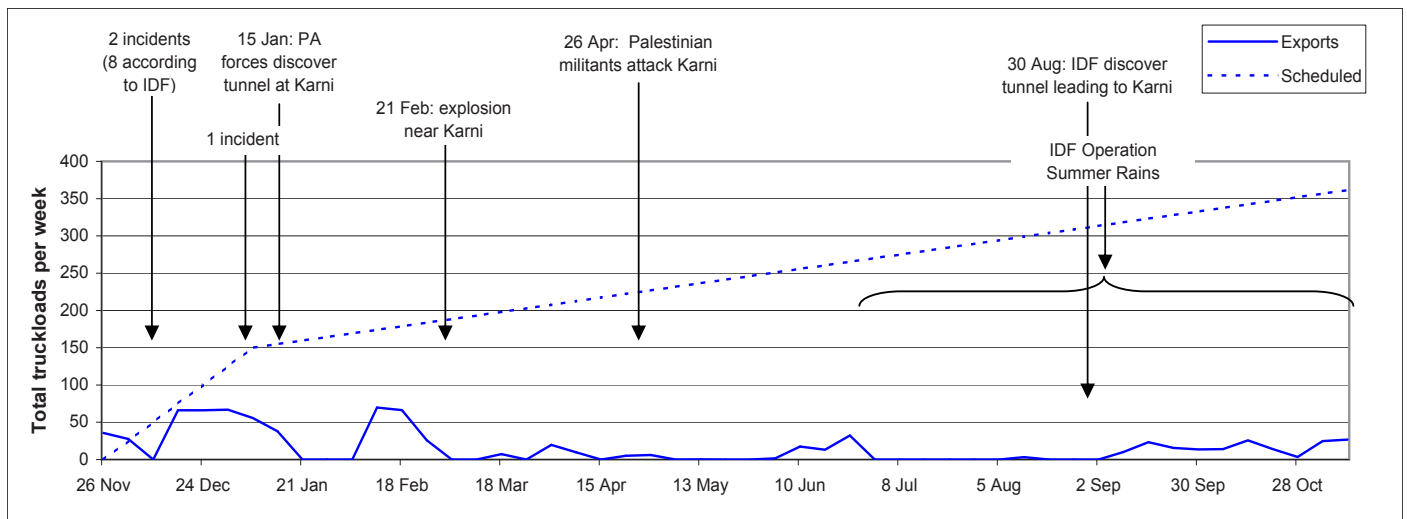


Figure 4. Exports through Karni Crossing

Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings. The AMA provides for the management system used at Karni to “be adapted to the passages at Erez and Kerem Shalom”. However, as Kerem Shalom is located within Israel, the use of this crossing point for commercial goods import and export has been unacceptable to the PA. Therefore, Kerem Shalom has only been open for humanitarian goods that originate outside of Israel although due to the capacity at Kerem Shalom the daily through flow is limited to 15 trucks. Karni is thus the preferred entry point for humanitarian goods and the only acceptable one for goods originating in Israel or the West Bank.

Although a small number of trucks with emergency humanitarian goods were imported through Erez during the IDF Operation Summer Rains, the crossing is not operational for commercial goods and the management system is not established. A new terminal is under construction at Erez, although its capacity to handle commercial traffic is unknown.

From 22 January to 11 March an average of 2,700 workers and 120 traders crossed through Erez each day. For the eight months since 11 March Erez has been closed to Palestinian workers with the exception of some urgent humanitarian cases (usually medical patients) who are allowed to cross subject to prior coordination with the Israeli authorities.

3. Link Between the Gaza Strip and West Bank

The target date for establishing bus convoys was 15 December 2006 and for establishing truck convoys 15 January 2006. Neither deadline was met and there has been no movement towards implementation of this provision of the AMA. The movement of people between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank remains virtually impossible and expensive. Goods movement between these two areas is dependent on Israeli freight companies and requires off and on-loading at Karni commercial crossing.

4. Gaza Seaport

The construction of a seaport has not started. The Gol has not assured donors that it will not interfere with the operation of the port and the parties have not established a US-led tripartite committee to develop security and other relevant arrangements as required under the AMA.

5. Gaza Airport

Discussions on the issues of security arrangements, construction and operation of the airport have not continued.

6. Movement within the West Bank

The aim of the AMA, ‘to facilitate the movement of people and goods within the West Bank and to minimize disruption to Palestinian lives... [by developing] a plan to reduce [the number of obstacles] to the maximum extent possible...by December 31 [2005]’ was not met. The number of obstacles has increased by 44% over the year⁷ and the movement for Palestinians within the West Bank has become more difficult.⁸

The effect of the physical obstacles is the division of the West Bank into ten segments (not including the ‘closed areas’ between the Barrier and the Green Line). In addition, Palestinians are channelled through permanently manned checkpoints when they move between these segments.

In most cases passage through a checkpoint requires a permit and the eligibility for permits varies between checkpoints. Different types of permit are issued for individuals; private vehicles; public vehicles; commercial trucks and commercial goods.

Furthermore, blanket restrictions on movement through these checkpoints are often imposed, frequently preventing men of working age accessing employment. The segments are further divided into pockets between which movement is restricted by channelling through partial (not permanently manned) checkpoints or choke points such as tunnels under ‘restricted’ roads used by settlers.

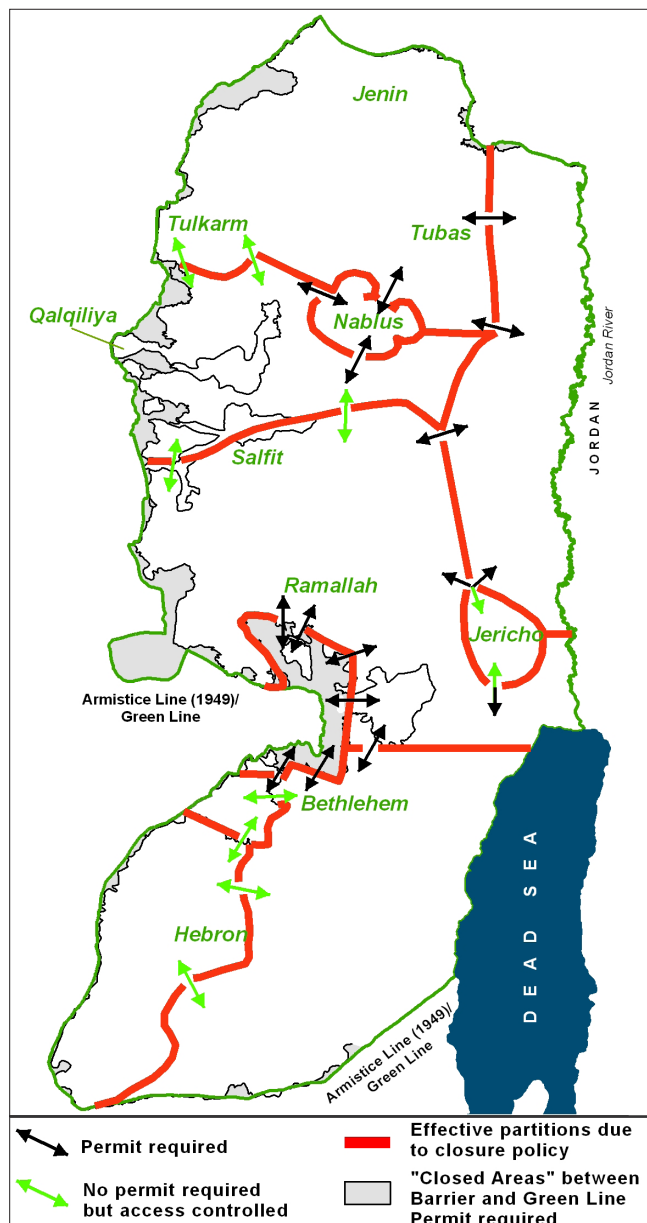


Figure 5. Schematic representation showing the effect on Palestinian movement of the closure and permit regime in the West Bank (simplified for the purposes of this map: other restrictions also apply).

Endnotes:

1. Unemployment data according to the ‘relaxed’ definition of unemployment comparing Q4 2005 with Q3 2006 (source: PCBS). Poverty levels are based on an income based definition of poverty comparing the situation in July 2005 to May 2006 (source: IUED, Geneva-based Institut universitaire d’etudes du developpement, Polls number 9 and 10).
2. Included in this category are an “enterprise or part of an enterprise in which one group of goods and services is produced (with the possibility of having secondary activities)”.
3. Source: PCBS, Survey on the perception of owners/managers of the industrial establishments towards economic conditions, September 2006.
4. Agreed Documents by Israel and Palestinians on Movement and Access from and to Gaza. S366/05 Jerusalem 15 November 2005
5. Opening sentence of the Agreement on Movement and Access 15 November 2005.
6. Businessmen; students; medical referrals; pilgrims and foreign residency permit holders.
7. The number of obstacles as measured by OCHA increased by 164 to 540. The IDF record 501 obstacles (not including gates which are usually left open) which is an increase of 125 or 33%.
8. OCHA, Territorial Fragmentation of the West Bank, May 2006 and West Bank Closure Count and Analysis, September 2006. Available at www.ochaopt.org.