



Increasing need, decreasing access: Humanitarian Access to the West Bank

UN agencies have been informed by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials that all crossings into the occupied Palestinian territory will be standardized by the end of 2007 by which time much of the construction of the Barrier will be completed. Already, UN agencies are seeing increasing restrictions at crossings into the West Bank similar to those already in place into Gaza. This Fact Sheet explains how existing and planned restrictions will seriously impair the ability of humanitarian organisations to operate.

Humanitarian supplies into the West Bank:

Until January 2007 the crossing regime consisted of twelve crossings at which humanitarian organisations could truck supplies through the Barrier. Trucks were allowed to drive directly into the West Bank from Israel and containers cleared at the port of entry could be taken directly to West Bank destinations.

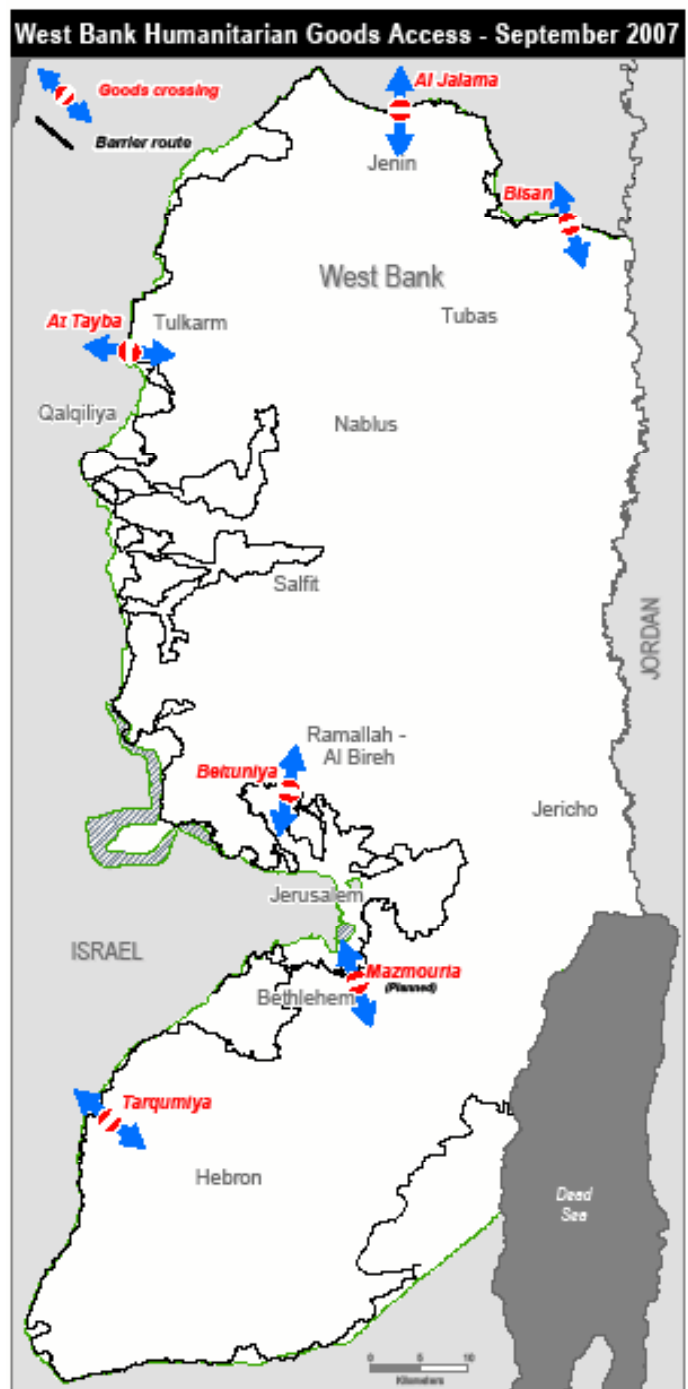
The IDF was the sole controlling authority at all crossings; final responsibility rested with the Ministry of Defense through the office of Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories.

Since January there has been a steady tightening of restrictions on the access for humanitarian goods and a reduction in the number of crossings that can be used.

By early 2008 the planned regime will include:

A reduction from 12 crossings to five for all import and export trucks. A sixth crossing near Bethlehem (Mazmouria) is scheduled to open towards the end of 2008. Three of the six crossings - Beitunya, Mazmouria and Tarqumiya - are inside the Green Line on Palestinian territory.

A 'back-to-back' system will be installed whereby goods will have to be unloaded from trucks on the Israeli side of the Barrier, scanned, and then loaded onto trucks on the Palestinian side, and vice versa.



Goods will have to be on palettes and scanned. Container loads may have to be 'palettised' in Israel before crossing into Israel or into the West Bank. Even if UN goods can remain in containers, UN agencies are concerned that the Palestinian transport sector will not have sufficient trucks requiring multiple contracts and resulting in long delays. They are also concerned that certain commodities may be restricted, as is currently the case in Gaza. For example, 20% of UNRWA's humanitarian supplies are not amenable to containerisation.

A variety of authorities will be at the barrier crossing points including IDF, Border Police, civil Police, private security firms and Customs Department officers, answering to at least three different Ministries which will preclude a common and coherent chain of command.

Impact: The impact on humanitarian services will be serious. There will be large additional costs for more trucks, drivers, and handling. Long delays, and damage to goods through extra handling can be foreseen. The security of goods will not be guaranteed. Humanitarian organisations anticipate major difficulty meeting the needs of the population.

UNRWA has stated; "We will be unable to meet the needs of the population if these conditions exist".

Access for humanitarian staff into the West Bank

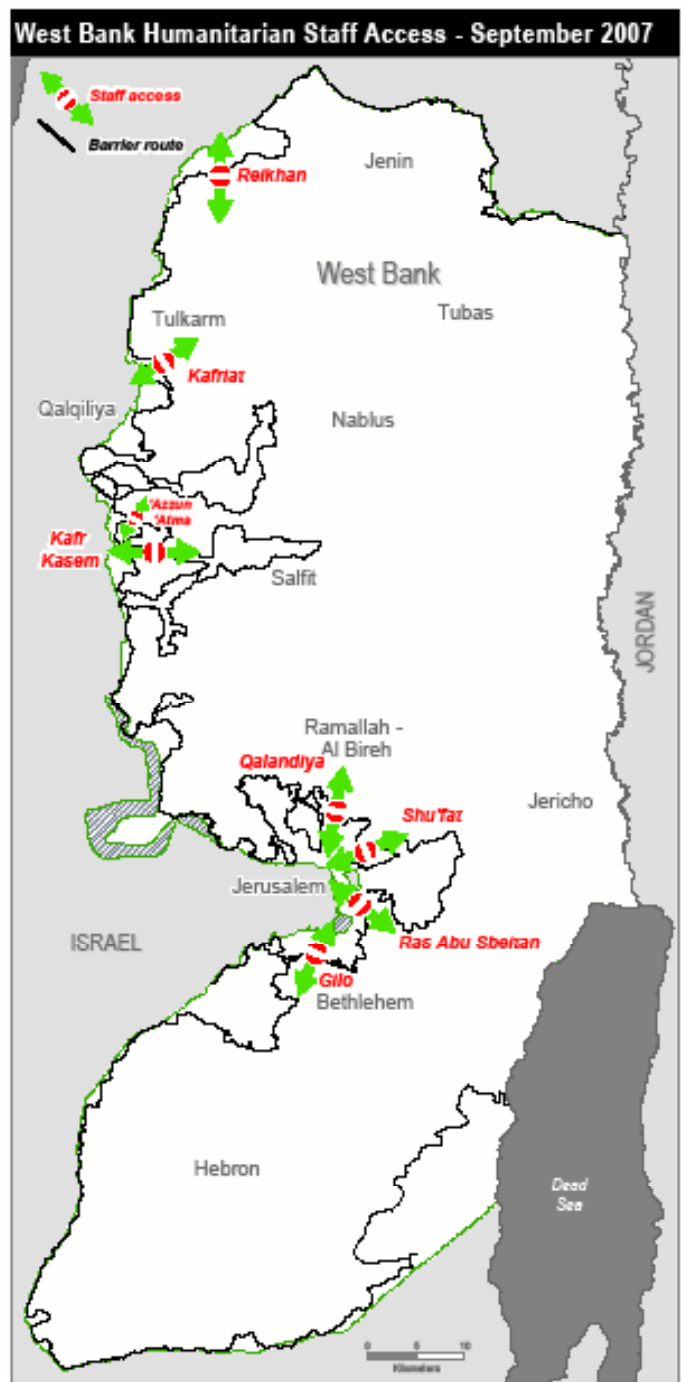
Humanitarian organisations, whether UN, international NGO or local NGO depend on their Palestinian staff to function. All humanitarian staff face difficulty crossing checkpoints, despite having authorized identity cards, but national staff face more problems than their international peers.

Currently national UN staff are required to show their organizational identification to cross the Barrier (i.e. from the West Bank into East Jerusalem or into the Seam Zone areas). They can remain in the organisation's vehicle and are not subjected to searches.

Soon this will change. UN agencies staff have

been informed that all Palestinians, regardless of their UN affiliation will have to leave their vehicle and walk through a pedestrian lane where they will go through a metal detector, their property will be x-rayed, and potentially they will be subject to a body search. Checkpoints are places of heightened danger so getting out of cars will put staff at greater risk.

The UN has been told that national staff may require permits to access some communities isolated by the Barrier. Requiring such permits is a breach of Israel's obligation to facilitate relief schemes on behalf of the Palestinian population. Added to that is the unavailability of private business licenses permits



does not guarantee access. On any day a doctor or a teacher cannot be sure they will reach the people who need them. Approximately 30 patients will not receive treatment if a mobile health clinic is delayed by one hour; and 41 students will not receive tuition if a school teacher is delayed.

Such difficulties are already occurring. During August 2007, UNRWA mobile clinic staff were refused access to people in Palestinian territory in Barta'a enclave. They were unable to deliver important treatment to their patients.

Impact: These changes will have a negative impact on the ability of humanitarian organizations to function. They need staff to move between the areas of the West Bank that lie to the west of the Barrier

(East Jerusalem and other communities isolated by the Barrier) and the rest of the West Bank. Aside from East Jerusalem, there will be a population of over 75,000 in these isolated communities when the Barrier is complete.

Israel, the occupying power in the Palestinian territory, has the responsibility under international law to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population in the entire oPT. Monitoring shows that conditions in the West Bank are deteriorating with increasing poverty, decreasing employment and more people receiving food aid. There is escalating hardship, and the current and planned restrictions on access mean there will be a decrease in the ability of UN and other organizations to meet this increasing need.



UN vehicles waiting at Reikhan checkpoint, UNRWA 2007.



UN staff passing through a West Bank checkpoint. UNRWA, 2007