



## GAZA HUMANITARIAN SITUATION REPORT 13 SEPTEMBER

### SUMMARY POINTS

1. Rafah and Karni crossings have now been closed for over three months significantly impacting on the lives of the Gazan population and local economy.
2. Qassam rockets and mortars continue to be fired by Palestinian militants towards Israel and resulted in 69 injuries at an IDF base on 11 September.
3. The health strike continues in Gaza with concerns about the quality of secondary health care that is currently available.
4. Power outages are still occurring throughout areas of the Gaza Strip as a result of insufficient capacity at the Gaza power station.
5. The private sector continues to retract while international agencies continue to face considerable difficulties in implementing projects.

### PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Since 1 September a total of 11 Palestinians have been killed and 28 injured by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). The majority of those Palestinians killed were militants including six members of Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade who launched an attack against an IDF base to the east of Maghazi refugee camp on 6 September. The Israeli Air Force (IAF) has launched four air-to-ground missile attacks.

Palestinian militants continue to fire Qassam rockets and mortars from the Gaza Strip towards Israel. Since 1 September a total of 39 rockets and 51 mortars have been launched. On 2 September one rocket landed on a kindergarten in Sderot with 12 children subsequently needing treatment for shock, while 69 soldiers were injured on 11 September when a rocket fired by Islamic Jihad hit an IDF base at Ziqqim, 1 km north of the Gaza-Israel border.

Growing tensions are present on the ground between Fatah and Hamas activists. These have been seen in recent public clashes coinciding with Friday prayers.

Palestinian human rights organizations continue to express concerns over human rights infringements and the absence of a formal legal system. Concerns focus on freedom of expression, the use of non-State organizations for arrest and detention as well as reported injuries arising during detention.

### GAZA CROSSINGS, THROUGH FLOWS AND IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

Karni and Rafah crossings have now been closed for over three months resulting in severe personal and economic hardships for Gaza's 1.4 million population. The closure has been effective since the first half of June following the defeat of Fatah forces by Hamas which has resulted in a break down in the former Israeli-Palestinian coordination mechanisms at the crossings.



Since 19 June, a total of 7,116 truckloads have been allowed through the crossings, including 652 from humanitarian agencies (compared to 20,016 truckloads including 8,730 truckloads of aggregates allowed through Karni during April and May before the full closure was imposed). The current through flow of supplies represents an average of 106 truckloads per day, as opposed to an average of 238 truckloads per day which were allowed into Gaza prior to mid-June. Food supplies represent 86% of the total commercial supplies transported into Gaza.

**Karni crossing**, the principle entry and exit point for humanitarian and commercial supplies has been closed since 12 June. One conveyer typically operates twice a week for the import of wheat grain and animal feeds. The equivalent of 828 truck loads of grains and animal feed have entered Karni since 19 June. No other types of produce have entered Gaza and no exports have left.

**Rafah crossing** which serves as the Gazans' gateway to the outside world, was last open on 9 June. Since its closure an alternative crossing route has operated periodically to allow the departure of urgent, "special cases" from Gaza and these are primarily students and those Gazans with overseas residency permits. The alternative route involves leaving Gaza by Erez crossing and then traveling by bus under IDF escort to the Nezana-Al Awja crossing on the Israel-Egypt border.

Those Gazans wishing to leave must apply to the Palestinian Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) in Gaza who then forward the request to the MoCA in Ramallah. The finalized list is then sent to the IDF at Erez crossing who will facilitate the passage of those who are approved notwithstanding security concerns. Over 5000 Gazans are estimated to have applied to the MoCA. Since 1 September four convoys have left Gaza under these arrangements with approximately 180 passengers each time. No similar arrangements are in place for arrivals.

It is clear that while such a mechanism allows travel for the most urgent cases falls far short of meeting the needs of the general population who have to leave Gaza for health reasons, business or family related reasons. Up until 25 June 2006, when Rafah terminal operated on a seven day basis approximately 1200 passengers were crossing in and out of Gaza each day. On the basis of this figure and the fact that Rafah has now been closed for three months, at least *100,000 Gazans who may have been expected to enter or exit Gaza have been denied passage.*

As a result of the Karni closure, Sufa and Kerem Shalom crossings continue to function as the principle alternative entry points for commercial and humanitarian supplies.

**Kerem Shalom.** On 27 August 130 tons of potatoes were exported out of Kerem Shalom destined for Jordan. These were the first exports to leave Gaza since 11 June. Since then there have been no further exports due to Hamas's opposition to the use of Kerem Shalom as an alternative exit point for Gazan produce. Hamas maintains that Karni should be reopened.

**Sufa crossing** has been the primary entry point for humanitarian and commercial supplies since the closure took effect. Concerns have been raised by humanitarian agencies over the use of Sufa during the winter months when heavy rains can be expected to turn this open and exposed area into a mud bath and could considerably hamper the movement of supplies into Gaza.

Local media sources in Gaza speculated earlier in the week that Sufa crossing would soon be closed for the import of humanitarian and commercial supplies. The Erez Coordination, Liaison and Administration (CLA) office has confirmed to OCHA that it has no knowledge of such intentions.



The most recent economic assessment by **Paltrade** on 12 September highlights the continuing deterioration in the Gaza Strip's private sector as a consequence of the inability to import raw materials and to export final goods. Over 75,000 private sector employees have now been laid off in the last three months.

Accumulated private sector losses are now estimated at \$51 million compared to \$35 million on 14 August. Within this total, an additional \$4 million has been lost in the furniture sector over the last month bringing total losses to \$12 million; the garments and textiles sector has lost a further \$5 million with total losses now standing at \$20 million.

International organizations working in Gaza are not immune to the closure regime either.

- UNRWA, UNDP and the World Bank have suspended infrastructure projects with a value in excess of \$200 million due to the inability to import raw materials.
- While UNRWA has brought in sufficient quantities of food to allow it to undertake its September distribution it has incurred additional costs of \$65,000 a month to palletize its commodities. This does not include the additional accumulated costs for container storage and demurrage. WFP has experienced similar expenses.
- UNRWA is currently unable to import spare parts for its large vehicle fleet along with computer equipment, some medical supplies and teaching aids. While those companies supplying UNRWA text books did finally receive the paper, printing plates and toner for over 350,000 books at the end of August, one third of UNRWA students started the new school year without these books and the final delivery will not be until 15 September.
- On 9 and 10 September UNICEF received 19,500 school bags and 7,850 copy book sets via coordination with the Erez CLA office however it still awaits over 1000 musical instruments for 14 adolescent centres, as well as 88 computers, 8 printers and two photocopiers for PA schools and adolescent centres.
- UNICEF is still trying to obtain coordination to bring in two water pumps and electrical motors for its water sanitation project with the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU). The CMWU made a direct appeal to donors in local newspapers on 11 September to request their assistance in facilitating the entry of much needed equipment and spares parts to Gaza.
- The Italian NGO, GVC suspended its ECHO-funded water sanitation project in the middle area of Gaza on 1 September due to its inability to bring in the necessary materials in spite of numerous requests for coordination via the Erez CLA.

## HEALTH STRIKE

The Union of Medical Professions (UMP) announced on 12 September that it will continue its current strike, initiated on 26 August, until the end of Ramadan. Union members comprising most health personnel except nurses who belong to a separate union, have been on a "work to rule" basis, limiting their service to the hours between 8 and 11 am.

So far, according to WHO, the strike has impacted less on health service provision at the primary health care (PHC) level than at the secondary levels. Visiting PHC facilities has always tended to be a "morning habit" and thus the relevant health professionals are present for diagnosis and treatment. The "Executive Minister" responsible for the Gaza Ministry of Health has also appointed some volunteers in PHC clinics and hospitals to provide coverage after 11 am.



The situation at the secondary care level is less sustainable as doctors working in hospitals often have high degrees of specialization which can not be found among volunteer staff. According to WHO, only urgent surgical operations are now being carried out and elective surgery has been suspended. WHO is also concerned about sufficient numbers of medical staff being present to provide after-care treatment for those patients who have had surgery.

The strike has been called by the UMP in protest at the imposition and replacement of senior health professionals at a number of Gaza health institutions by the Gaza Ministry of Health.

## **GAZA POWER STATION**

Power outages are still being reported in various areas of northern Gaza and Gaza city however the cuts are considerably fewer than those seen throughout the Gaza Strip between 19 and 22 August.

The current outages are due to a continuing lack of capacity at the Gaza power station. Only two out of a total of four turbines are currently operational. One turbine that left Gaza for maintenance in Israel on 7 August was returned on 4 September and is due to be reinstalled by a visiting team of European technicians on 15 September. At the same time, this team will service a fourth turbine that has been standing idle for a number of weeks again due to the need for maintenance. All four turbines of the power station should be functional by the end of September.

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