

OCHA

occupied Palestinian territory

humanitarian UPDATE

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INSIDE Humanitarian Overview: Deaths & Injuries ▪ Access ▪ Water

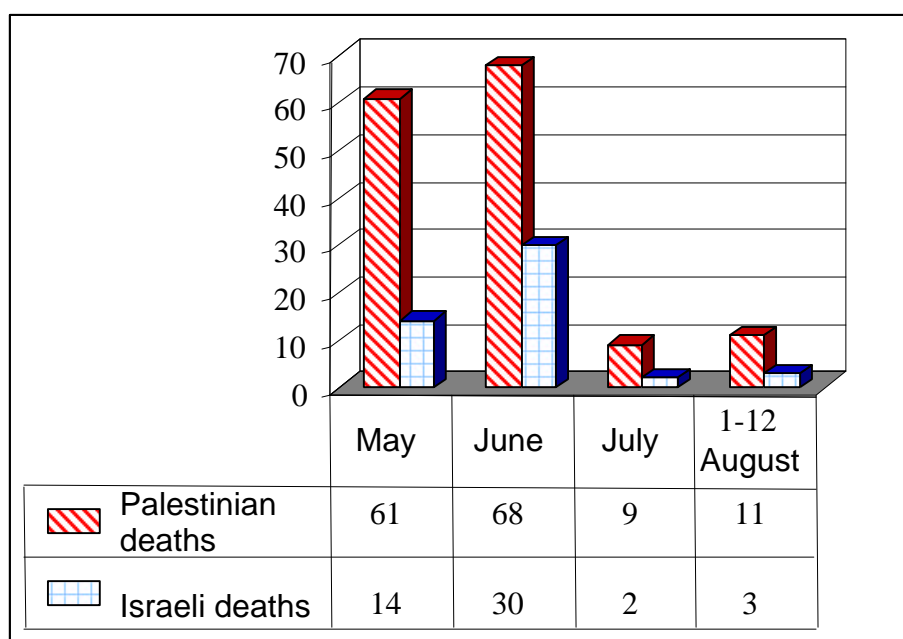
Humanitarian Overview – June/July 2003

There have been some noticeable improvements in the humanitarian situation in the occupied territory since the start of the truce or “hudna” (29 June) declared by Palestinian militant groups.

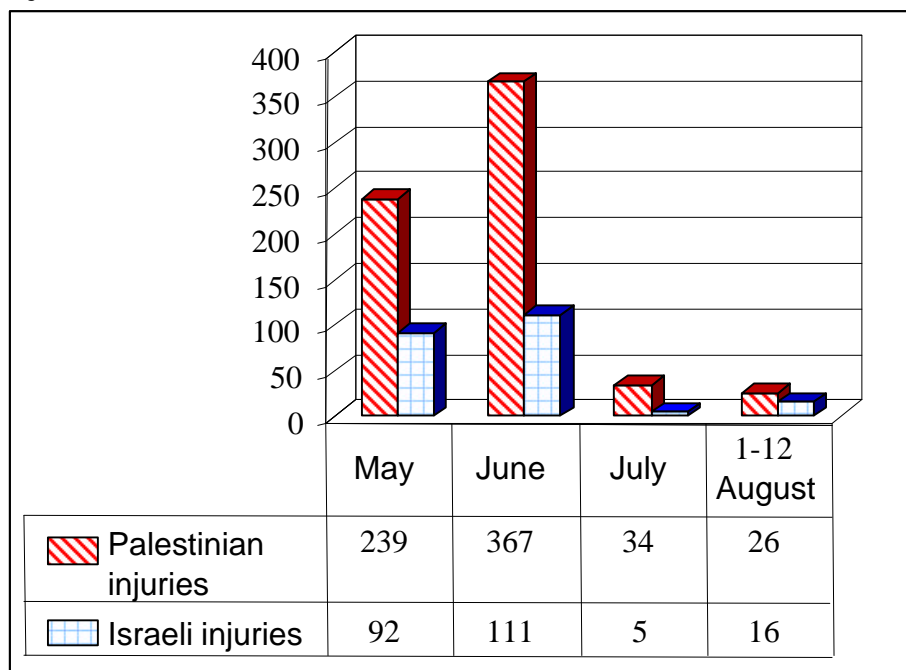
Deaths & Injuries

Palestinian and Israeli deaths and injuries declined dramatically during July. However, casualty numbers rose again during the first two weeks of August – a result of increased IDF operations and two Palestinian suicide attacks. The question is whether these are isolated incidents or a return to the pre-July situation.

Deaths



Injuries



Access ... on balance no significant change

The most significant factor in the decline in the Palestinian economy that has led to the humanitarian crisis is the closure of roads and movement restrictions throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

As part of the confidence building measures for the Road Map, the IDF removed approximately **8 roadblocks** in the Jenin, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron areas. But some of these were replaced by IDF-manned or roaming checkpoints on nearby roads, or are still closed periodically.

Last week, the IDF re-established the two roadblocks in the Bethlehem area – DCO Beit Jala and Beit Sahour - which it had removed under the confidence building measures.

Although welcome, the impact of lifting these roadblocks is limited when put in context with the total number of IDF barriers and blocks throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. In just the northern West Bank, for example, OCHA counted **388 roadblocks**. Of these, **48 were manned checkpoints** and the remainder consisted of a combination of over 300 roadblocks, earth mounds, ditches and gates. These have been mapped and are available on the OCHA website. (see www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt).

These barriers prevent or seriously restrict access between Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps. Palestinians continue to make long and complicated detours to reach their homes, workplaces, educational facilities and hospital services.

Medical Access ... much improved in July

Ambulance access improved markedly in July. The easing of internal restrictions in Gaza and the withdrawal of Israeli tanks from Beit Hanoun benefited the Gaza area. There were also improvements in the West Bank.

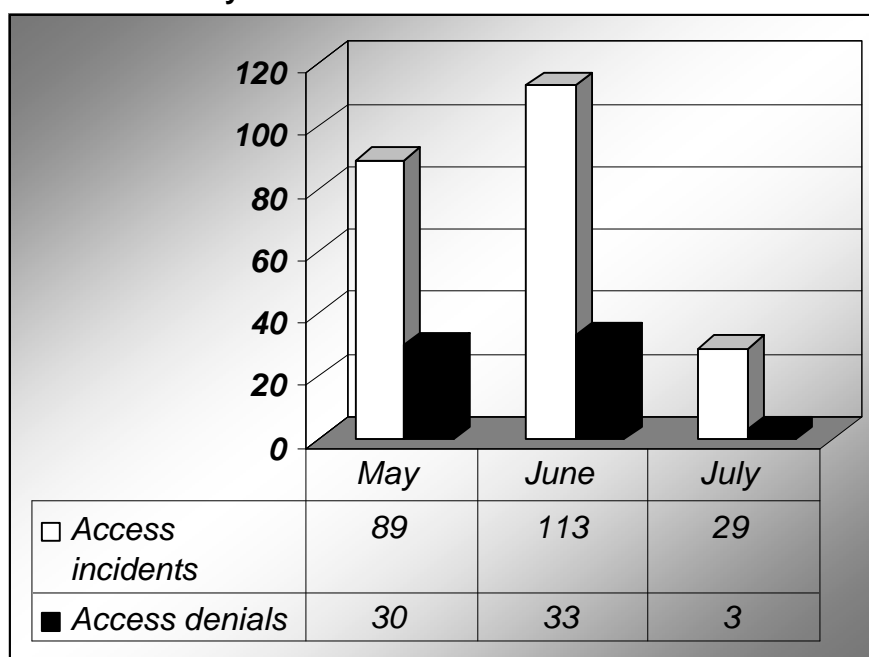
Prior to this, during the month of June, there were 113 reported incidents involving medical evacuations of critically sick patients or injured. In one-third of these cases, access was completely denied – the highest figure since December 2002.

The average delay of ambulances at checkpoints rose from 71 minutes in May to 94 minutes in June. This was accompanied by an increase in incidents of IDF violence, verbal abuse and other types of harassment against Palestinian paramedics.

Half of all ambulance incidents occurred at 10 checkpoints in the Nablus governorate – Shave Shamron, Beit Iba, Huwwara, Beit Furik, Deir El-Sharaf, Za'tara, Awarta, Salim, Nablus DCO and Quseen.

In Gaza, IDF incursions into Beit Hanoun in the north during June made it almost impossible to move the sick and injured.

Ambulance delays or denial of access



Humanitarian access ... improvements

UN agencies and international NGOs faced their most difficult access problems in June. UNRWA, the UN agency providing services to Palestinian refugees, recorded the highest number of access restrictions (mainly in the West Bank) on their staff and vehicles since September 2000. Humanitarian operations were also disrupted when the IDF closed internal checkpoints in the Gaza Strip.

Throughout May and June, staff for the UN and international NGOs travelling into Gaza also continued to experience long delays at the Erez/Beit Hanoun and vehicles entering Gaza were searched.

By July, UN and international staff movement into and within Gaza eased considerably, particularly with unrestricted access at the Abu Houli junction in central Gaza. But the enclaves of Al-Mawasi and Seafa (north Gaza) – Palestinian communities surrounded by Israeli settlements – still face highly restricted access. UN and other international agencies

continue to be required to unload all supplies and reload them onto vehicles from the enclaves – a cumbersome and time-consuming task that impedes distribution.

Access Incidents – International Organisations

2003 / Month	Access incidents	Access denials
May	199	88
June	302	81
July*	69	0
Total	570	169

- July figures include access incidents reported by UNRWA for West Bank only

Water Crisis ... getting worse

An increasing number of the West Bank and Gaza communities are experiencing massive water shortages. This is primarily seen in the decline of the average per person per litre supply. The average water supply in 31 communities in July was **39.5 litres per person per day**¹ – WHO considers 100 litres a day to be the optimal level. In several rural communities water supply was as low as **11 litres of water per person per day** (Rantis/Ramallah) and 18 litres (Al Midya/Ramallah).

Several factors in July worsened an already critical water supply situation in the West Bank and Gaza.

Mekorot ... turning down the tap

The Israeli water company, Mekorot – that controls the majority of Palestinian water resources – significantly reduced water supplies to Palestinian communities.

As a result, around 106,000 Palestinians in 18 communities now face critical water shortages. The village of Al Bira in Hebron, for example, faces a 95 percent decline in water flow. Dahiyat Sabah Al Kheir village in Jenin, has suffered an 80 percent reduction.

A number of other areas also had pipes broken by military incursions. Nine communities in the Gaza Strip, with a population of 169,400 persons, had water networks and wells badly damaged by the IDF in June 2003.

Jayyus village (Qalqiliya) – the Wall adding to the Crisis

The humanitarian situation in the village of Jayyus (Qalqiliya area) has, over the past week, become more desperate. Two weeks ago, the IDF closed the main access gate to the village's six wells denying residents access to agricultural land located on the western side of the separation "Wall". (Jayyus is located on the eastern side of the Wall). Initially, the IDF had informed the villagers that the gate would only be closed for a couple of days. The closure has caused a serious shortage in the village's water supply and farmers are unable to cultivate their land. The only other access gate to the wells and land entails a three-hour journey each way. In the village, residents buy water from tankers (around 20 litres/person/day), which is becoming difficult to afford. Villagers in Jayyus reported that on 31 July, the IDF shot and damaged 25 water tanks. One-third of the population of Jayyus is dependent on humanitarian aid and two-thirds are dependent on the income from their farmlands.

Several communities have experienced both a reduction in the Mekorot supply and destruction of water infrastructure such as Nuseirat refugee camp and Deir Al Balah (Gaza), and the Nablus villages of Azmut, Deir Al Hatab and Salim.

¹ A consortium of international and Palestinian organizations (EWASH) conducted a survey of the water situation in 59 villages in West Bank and Gaza during July.

Increasingly, communities now rely on water supplied by tankers. But for these communities, roadblocks and checkpoints on main roads have caused tankers to take longer secondary routes. The result is higher transport costs and more expensive water.

This problem is compounded by a drop in Palestinian incomes – and, therefore, a lack of purchasing power to pay for the increased water prices. **Thirty-four (34)** out of the 59 villages, with a total population of 47,500 face severe water shortages as a direct result of the closure regime.

Under international humanitarian law, the Occupying Power, to the fullest extent possible, "...has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs...and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate." (Article 55 - Fourth Geneva Convention)

Education in Hebron ... closed again

The IDF has extended the closure of Hebron University and Hebron Polytechnic for another month until 11 September, and welded the gates to prevent access. The announcement came one day before the University's graduation ceremony for over 1,000 students, which was subsequently cancelled. Students demonstrated in the city centre demanding the right to education and the re-opening of the University and Polytechnic.

After the expiration of the initial 6-month closure order which was imposed in January 2003, the IDF began to extend the closure on a monthly basis. This is now the eighth consecutive month that students cannot access either of these higher education institutions.

Hebron University's eight faculties provide higher education to over 4,500 students, 63% of whom are female. The increase in the percentage of female students is a recent development (post-2000) and reflects the constraints families face in sending their daughters to universities in other parts of the West Bank. Closures, curfews, roadblocks and checkpoints and, in the opinion of University officials, the frequent raids on campuses throughout the West Bank, have been the determining factors in choosing local education facilities as opposed to those in other cities. Around 2,500 students are enrolled in the Polytechnic, which is the only one of its kind in the West Bank.

The University authorities have come to an arrangement with the PA Ministry of Education to provide lessons for students in five local elementary schools as a way of continuing courses. However, since the laboratories are in the main campus all science courses requiring laboratory facilities and equipment for "hands on" classes (affecting mostly the Polytechnic students) have had to be cancelled. The main library is also located on the campus and students are unable to access the required course reading materials.

In early September when the new school year begins and children return to the schools, university classes will have to take place after 1.00pm.