



Escalation in the Conflict in the Gaza Strip

Report as of 12:00 pm

The cease-fire between Fatah and Hamas announced on 19 May that ended the week long internal violence still holds.

During the last week, 55 Palestinians were killed and 243 were injured as a result of the internal violence. Since the beginning of this year, more than 150 Palestinians were killed due to factional violence and over 750 injured compared to 146 killed in 2006 and just 19 in 2005.

All roads in Gaza City have now been cleared from barricades, snipers and military installations which has improved movement and access and delivery of services.

However, there has been a marked escalation in Palestinian - Israeli violence. Palestinian militants fired 173 Qassam rockets towards Israel. The Israeli Air Force (IAF) conducted 26 air strikes mainly against groups and installations linked to Hamas including the Executive Support Force (ESF). The IDF fired 37 artillery shells.

The strikes and shooting from the border have killed 36 Palestinians, including seven children, and more than 133 injured including 27 seriously.

During the last week one Israeli woman was killed in Sderot, the first death from Qassam fire since November 2006. An additional 13 Israelis and two IDF soldiers were injured during the same period.

Hundreds of Sderot residents have been relocated by the Israeli government to safer places inside Israel as the Israeli Government declared a state of emergency in Sderot, the Gaza envelope areas and four additional villages within the Qassam firing range.

Qassam rockets firing had previously declined to two to three a week at the beginning of May this year after a Palestinian-Israeli ceasefire announced on 26 November 2006.

Damage to Property and Infrastructure

Electricity for about 50,000 people was cut off on 21 May during an IAF air strike on a workshop East of Gaza City.

At least three structures were completely destroyed and several houses were damaged in Rafah and Gaza City during IAF air strikes on Hamas linked targets. The IAF has also attacked and destroyed six metal workshops alleged to be involved with manufacturing Qassam rockets.

Qassams caused damage to Israeli property including private homes, a synagogue, school and other public buildings. Several workshops in an industrial zone near the city were severely damaged. Fires in 60 hectares of farming land destroyed crops. An estimated \$16 million damage to industry was incurred in Sderot according to the western Negev, the Manufacturers Association of Israel. Employee absences affected 85% of the 40 large factories operating in the western Negev.

Access and Movement

- On 17 May up to 30 IDF armoured vehicles entered the northern and eastern parts of Beit Hanoun, 800 meters into the former Erez Industrial Zone and into the former Israeli settlement of Dugit. The IDF, still stationed at the above areas, is restricting people's movement in and out.

In the Dugit area the IDF ordered the local residents to minimise their movement, establishing a temporary position blocking the coastal road, one of the entry points to Al-Seafa area home to 250 Palestinians. IDF bulldozers erected sand mounds blocking all vehicular movement into the area.



- Karni crossing, the main crossing point for the movement of goods and supplies in and out of the Gaza Strip, was partially reopened on 20 and 21 May allowing the passage of imports only. On 20 May five truckloads of food supplies were allowed through. Karni was closed between 15 and 19 May due to last week's internal violence and Israeli security concerns. Paltrade reported no signs of shortages in basic food commodities in the Gaza Strip. The ICRC succeeded in importing a shipment of medical supplies on 21 May.
- Rafah Crossing, the only crossing linking the Gaza Strip to the outside world, was last open on 14 May. Palestinian travellers, including chronic patients and students are blocked at both sides of the crossing. The EU has approved a new one year extension for the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) at the Rafah Crossing. The mission assumed its work in mid November 2005.