



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
occupied Palestinian territory

## Humanitarian Update – February 2005

### **I. Overview**

**II. Humanitarian Reports:** PCBS: *Impact of Israeli measures on conditions of Palestinian households*; MDM: *The Ultimate Barrier*;

**III. Humanitarian Assistance to the oPt**

**IV. Events affecting the humanitarian situation:** *New West Bank Barrier route; The Gaza Strip: Access and movement update; Palestinian house demolitions; Targetted assassinations; Prisoner release;*

**V. Humanitarian monitoring issues:** *Casualties; Access; Curfews; Demolitions; Land Levelling*

### **I. Overview**

On 8 February in Sharm el-Sheikh, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon met and stated their intentions to try to end the more than four years of violence between the two sides.

The Israeli Cabinet on 20 February approved the Israeli Gaza Strip disengagement plan which includes the dismantlement of all Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and four in the West Bank.

On 24 February, the Palestinian parliament approved a 24-member new cabinet. The new ministers will serve for five months.

On Friday 25 February, a suicide bombing killed five and injured approximately 50 people at the entrance to a nightclub in Tel Aviv.

A total of 15 Palestinians were killed and 42 were injured in this reporting period.<sup>1</sup>

### **II. New humanitarian reports:**

#### **1. PCBS: Impact of Israeli measures on conditions of Palestinian households**

About half of Palestinian households lost more than 50% of their usual income, and about 16% of them suffered from highly critical living conditions, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) survey on the impact of Israeli measures on the conditions of Palestinian households.

The PCBS report noted the following:

- the median monthly income in the occupied Palestinian territory decreased from NIS 2,500 before September 2000 to NIS 1,500 at the end of 2004;
- 58.2% of households reduced their expenditure on basic needs;
- 67.5% of households reported that they needed assistance – the need for food was the top priority;

<sup>1</sup> February figures reflect casualties between 2 February and 1 March.

- 53.6% of households have access problems to health services. *For more information, please see: [http://www.pcbs.org]*

## **2. MDM: The Ultimate Barrier**

In February, Médecins du Monde (MDM) France issued a report titled “The Ultimate Barrier, impact of the Wall on the Palestinian health care system”. The report is based on 83 testimonies collected from people living in the West Bank and Jerusalem from July to October 2004, and the medical expertise of MDM.

The report notes that patients are facing increased difficulties in accessing health care services, and health is being affected in different ways. Reduced access endangers the health of those who need immediate care; it “leads them to delay the medical consultation or to self prescribe medication, which can exacerbate their health status thus potentially increasing recovery time and cost.” *To read the full report, please see: [http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2005/mdm-opt-14feb.pdf]*

## **III. Humanitarian assistance to the oPt:**

### **1. €250 million support to the Palestinians in 2005**

The Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner announced the European Commission expects to make around €250 million available in 2005 to support further steps toward the creation of a viable Palestinian state.

The funding package will include: support for political and financial reform in the Palestinian Authority (PA); a contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); and infrastructure facility to support urgent projects and basic services. *For more information, please see: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\_relations/gaza/intro/index.htm]*

### **2. US \$41 million released for quick impact development projects**

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the US government is accelerating the release of around US \$40 million in development funds earmarked for projects in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The money will be used to expand existing programs and to fund new projects. At least 12 "quick impact" projects will be launched or expanded with the newly available funds.

The projects include: the construction of 20 "pocket parks" or green spaces in urban centres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; modernizing computer labs at 20 community colleges to improve internet access and skills training for 5,600 students; and libraries at 11 universities will receive new resources to facilitate student and faculty access to global information. *For more information, please see: [http://www.usaid.gov/]*

### **3. Emergency grant aid to Palestinians**

On 18 February, the Japanese government decided to implement emergency grant aid totaling US \$30 million through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Trust Fund for the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People and UNRWA.

This assistance will be provided for five projects implemented by UNDP and two projects implemented by UNRWA. It is expected that implementation of these projects will create job opportunities for about 2,600 Palestinian workers a day.

#### **4. New shelters for Rafah homeless**

UNRWA handed over 122 new homes to 135 Palestinian families from Rafah refugee camp whose homes were destroyed by the Israeli military during the last four years. The 122 buildings will house almost 700 people and are part of a five-phase project that will eventually provide 431 new homes. The total cost of this part of the project, including the infrastructure work, is approximately US \$2.3 million.

Since September 2000 through December 2004, a total of 2,991 shelters home to more than 28,483 people had been demolished or damaged beyond repair in the Gaza Strip. In total in the Gaza Strip, 903 shelters have been rebuilt or are at the planning and tendering stage.

UNRWA still needs more than US \$54 million to meet the current requirement for a further 2,532 new shelters to house homeless families throughout the Gaza Strip. In 2004, donations to Palestinian refugees passed US \$500 million, the largest amount ever donated to UNRWA in one year. *For more information, please see:* [<http://www.un.org/unrwa/>]

#### **5. Gaza Strip students receive boost to support their education**

On 8 February, about 10,000 children in the Gaza Strip received educational supplies to support their commitment to education, UNICEF announced. Included in the School-in-a-Box kits were exercise books, pencils, erasers, plastic cubes for counting and other materials needed by grades one to four to boost efforts to ensure educational activities continue in an innovative manner. *For more information, please see:* [<http://www.unicef.org/oPt.>]

#### **6. \$13 million employment project**

The US government announced on 3 February the launch of a new US \$13 million project to create employment opportunities through the construction and renovation of 360 classrooms and youth centres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The project, which comes under the Palestinian Infrastructure for Needed Employment program, is being funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and is expected to generate more than 204,000 person-days of employment. In February, USAID also unveiled a girl's school in Artas and a garden for senior citizens in Beit Jala, West Bank. Both projects were implemented for USAID by Catholic Relief Services. *For more information, please see:* [<http://www.usaid.gov/>]

#### **7. Support for judicial education**

On 10 February, it was announced that Canada will provide \$100,000 to support legal sector reform and good governance in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The funding will be provided by the Canadian International Development Agency and will come under the auspices of Canada Corps.

#### **IV. Events affecting humanitarian issues:**

##### **1. New West Bank Barrier route**

On 20 February, the Israeli cabinet approved a revised route for the West Bank Barrier. The new route runs closer to the Green Line in some places and incorporates 2% less West Bank land than the prior route.

Once completed, the new Barrier route will be 670 kilometres compared to 622 kilometres of the prior route. If two of the sections “pending completion of detailed staff work” - Ma’ale Adumim and Ari’el/Emmanuel settlements- are included, then approximately 35,660 dunums (3,566 hectares) or about 10.1% of West Bank land will lie between the Barrier and the Green Line, including East Jerusalem.

Approximately, West Bank 49,400 Palestinians and more than 170,000 Israeli settlers will be located between the Barrier and the Green Line. This constitutes 76% of the West Bank Israeli settler population, an increase of 21% compared to the prior route. *For more information, please see [<http://www.ochaopt.org>]*

##### **2. Gaza Strip:<sup>2</sup>**

###### **a. Access: Overview**

Following the meeting of Palestinian and Israeli leaders on 8 February in Sharm el-Sheikh, the internal and external access restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on the Gaza Strip’s population of 1.4 million have become less prohibitive. Although, access problems still persist.

On 19 February, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced there would be an increase in the number of workers entering Israel and Erez industrial zone, and age restrictions imposed on Palestinian males exiting the Gaza Strip via the Rafah crossing would be lifted. This announcement on 19 February followed moves earlier in the month.

- 7 February: Karni Crossing reopened for the passage of agricultural goods and humanitarian aid.
- 9 February : Erez Crossing and Erez industrial zone opened for workers. Also on 9 February, Abu Houli checkpoint became operational 24 hours a day for vehicular traffic. Prior to this, the opening hours had been from 7am until 6pm.

While there is now 24 hour movement through Abu Houli junction linking the southern Gaza Strip with the rest of the Gaza Strip, restrictions still exist. Movement of traffic through Abu Houli is not simultaneously two way and delays occur. As the traffic moves

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<sup>2</sup> Israel made humanitarian commitments to Catherine Bertini, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s personal humanitarian envoy, during a mission to the region in August 2002. These include, among other concerns, facilitation for health and humanitarian workers, increased shipments at Karni crossing, increased permits for Palestinian workers in Israel. Please also see section V below.

from north to south across the junction, vehicles on the southern side wait for 20 to 30 minutes; the process is then reversed as the traffic from the south gets priority.

Furthermore, movement into the three Palestinian enclaves , Al Mawasi, Siafa and Al Ma'ani, in the Gaza Strip remains tightly controlled by the IDF.

#### **b. Rafah crossing**

In February, the number of people leaving the Gaza Strip steadily decreased. In a 19 February announcement, the IDF acknowledged that security precautions have increased with the lifting of age restrictions. During the first half of February, up to 450 passengers were departing daily, this figure dropped to approximately 250 by the end of the month, due to increased secured screening for Palestinian males aged 16 to 35 .

#### **c. Erez crossing and the industrial zone:**

During the first half of January, a total of 1,801 Palestinian workers and merchants aged 35 and older were allowed to enter Israel and the Erez industrial zone. Erez crossing was almost entirely closed between 14 January and 12 February. (The closure followed an attack by Palestinian militants in the Karni Terminal area on 13 January that killed six Israelis.) The total number of Palestinian workers and merchants permitted entry to Israel and the Erez industrial zone in February was 16,531.

In January, 751 permits were issued by the Israeli authorities for entry into Israel and 524 for Erez industrial zone, a total of 1,275. In February, the number increased to 1,129 permits for entry into Israel and 674 for Erez industrial zone, a total of 1,803. None of these permits allowed for overnight stays in Israel.

#### **d. Status of Gaza Strip fishing**

The Palestinian Department of Fisheries reported an increase in the distance of the fishing zone available to Palestinian fishermen. Since the election of Mahmoud Abbas, the Israelis are now permitting fishing up to 10 nautical miles from the Gaza Strip coast compared to 6 nautical miles previously. Fishing is still not permitted over most of the Al Mawasi coastline as has been the case since October 2003. *For more information, please see: For more information, please see [<http://www.ochaopt.org>] and [<http://www1.idf.il/dover/>]*

### **3. Palestinian house demolitions**

In February, the Israel Defense Ministry recommended an end to the punitive policy of demolishing Palestinian houses. However, it stated that the demolition policy would be reintroduced if there was an extreme change in circumstances. The defense ministry's decision was in response to an army panel's assessment that the practice did not deter attacks and should cease. The recommendations do not include halting the demolition of Palestinian homes suspected to be used by militants, demolitions to widen security roads or demolitions of homes built without permits.

Since the beginning of the second Intifada, the IDF has demolished, as a punitive measure, 628 housing units, which were home to 3,983 Palestinians, according to

B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. *For more information, please see: [http://www.btselem.org/]*

#### **4. Targetted assassinations**

Israeli officials said that the government decided to halt its assassination policy following understandings reached in Sharm el-Sheikh. At the same time, during a hearing regarding a petition against the assassinations submitted by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), the government argued that the issue was no longer relevant following the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting. PCATI stated that it was important not to leave the legality of the judicial and ethical questions on assassinations unanswered, since the policy could resume at any time.

PCATI said that until May 2004, the assassination policy killed 362 Palestinians, 237 of these were targetted for assassination and 125 were innocent people. In addition, 585 persons were wounded during these attacks, only seven were the intended victims. Many more have been killed and wounded since May according to PCATI. *For more information, please see: [http://www.stoptorture.org]*

#### **5. Prisoner release**

Israel freed 500 Palestinian prisoners in a good-will gesture. None of the prisoners had been found guilty of attacks that killed or injured Israelis. Most had already served at least two-thirds of their sentences. The prisoners were released at crossing points to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; the release was the biggest since 1996. Approximately 8,000 prisoners are currently detained by Israel on security grounds.

Prior to the prisoner release, Israel allowed 16 Palestinians exiled in the Gaza Strip to be transported to Ramallah. However, the 16 have not been allowed to return to their homes in the West Bank.

### **V. Monthly snapshot of humanitarian monitoring issues<sup>3</sup>**

**Casualties** – Between 2 February and 1 March, 15 Palestinians were killed, and at least 42 were injured. Five Israelis were killed and 62 were injured in the same period. One international was also reported injured.

**Incidents involving ambulances/medical teams** – There were four incidents of an ambulance or medical team being denied access, and 12 reported incidents of delays. In recent months, access for ambulance and medical teams has improved.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society reported that on 15 February, a woman in labour (Jerusalem ID holder) was denied access by the Israeli soldiers at Qalandiya checkpoint, while en route to a hospital in Jerusalem. The soldiers claimed that her husband did not have permission to enter Jerusalem. A PRCS ambulance that was in the area was asked to help the woman. The crew immediately began to assist the woman who delivered a baby boy – who was reported to be in good health.

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<sup>3</sup> February figures reflect casualties between 2 February and 1 March.

There was also one incident where shooting/damage to a vehicle was reported.

**Curfews** – There were at least six incidents of curfew reported.

**Demolitions/people displaced** – At least 13 structures were demolished in the oPt in this reporting period (compared to 33 in January and 97 in December). In addition, at least 16 evacuation orders were delivered and military orders were issued for the demolition of three private irrigation wells and one house.

**Land levelling and requisitions** – At least 15 dunums (1.5 hectares) of land were reported levelled. There were additional reports of land levelling, mostly for Barrier construction, where it was not possible to estimate the amount of land involved. Furthermore, requisition orders for at least 2,056 dunums (205 hectares) of land were issued or received. Ninety-five trees were also reported uprooted. *For more details, please see Humanitarian Briefing Notes at: [http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/]*

*Sources: OCHA, FCU, PRCS, UNRWA, IDF, MoFA, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, PCHR, Palestinian DCL, Village Council*

*For more information on humanitarian monitoring issues, go to OCHA Updates at: [http://www.ochaopt.org/]*

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*This update will be produced regularly by OCHA oPt to capture the main events and trends of humanitarian developments in the territory. OCHA invites UN agencies, international organisations, NGOs and donors to submit contributions for future issues. An Arabic will be made available on the OCHA website: [http://www.ochaopt.org/]*

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