



GAZA ACCESS & INFRASTRUCTURE SITUATION REPORT 15 September 2005

Overview

The withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip from the early hours of Monday 12 September 2005 has had an immediate and beneficial impact on the lives of the 1.4 million Gazan residents.

This report reviews the key changes to access that have occurred and a preliminary overview of the status of infrastructure.

Internal Closures

The withdrawal of the IDF has resulted in the lifting of all internal closures within the Gaza Strip and has had a particular impact on the residents of the five Gaza enclaves: As Seafa, Al Mawasi, Al Ma'ani, Abu Nahia and Abu al Ajin. These were isolated Palestinian communities in close proximity to Israeli settlements or settlement roads where:

- Access was controlled by the IDF through a gate or checkpoint;
- Vehicles were not permitted to cross;
- Goods, including drinking water and cooking gas, were carried by hand or donkey cart;
- Humanitarian organisations required prior coordination with the IDF;
- The back-to-back transfer of patients through coordination was required; and
- Students often missed classes due to irregular opening hours at the gates/checkpoints.

In the northern Gaza Strip up to 190 Palestinians who live in the As Seafa area now have complete freedom of movement to access schools, health clinics and shops in the nearby towns of Beit Lahia and Jabalia. Prior to disengagement:

- As Seafa was located in the west of the northern settlement block.
- This area was fenced off and isolated from the rest of Gaza since October 2000 with the residents subject to strict restrictions on movement.
- A gate controlled by the IDF in the fence was the only access to the outside world for its residents and its use strictly controlled including through limited opening hours (twice daily at 7:30 am and 2 pm) and limitations on use (only 3-4 residents allowed to cross each day and prior coordination required for residents between the ages of 16-30 years).
- Entry and exit of goods was problematic.

In the central Gaza Strip, the approximately 180 Palestinian residents of the Al Ma'ani enclave now have freedom of movement to access services in nearby Wadi Salqa, Deir el Balah and the rest of the Gaza Strip. Prior to disengagement:

- Al Ma'ani was next to the Kfar Darom settlement and was declared a Closed Military Zone following a suicide attack on 27 February 2004.
- Prior to this attack, the IDF on 20 July 2002 had erected a fence around the area and prohibited all vehicles from entering the enclave.
- All movement was tightly controlled including through limited opening hours of the gate (four times daily for one hour at 6.30 am, 10.30 am, 1 pm and 4 pm).

In the southern Gaza Strip, the area of Al Mawasi has approximately 5500 Palestinians residents. Al Mawasi residents are now able to move freely to the nearby towns of Khan Younis and Rafah. This is particularly important for children of school age whose education is believed to have suffered as a result of movement restrictions over the last five years. There was insufficient capacity within Al Mawasi not least in terms of qualified teachers to cope with the number of students. Prior to disengagement:

- Al Mawasi was located along the coast line of the Gush Katif settlement block.
- Tight restrictions on movement were placed on the population from October 2000 with access only possible via Tuffah checkpoint to the west of Khan Younis. Tel es Sultan checkpoint in the south of Al Mawasi was closed in January 2004.
- The checkpoint was only accessible twice daily at approximately 8 am to 1 pm and 2.30 pm to 5 pm.
- All male Mawasi ID holders aged 30 and below required prior coordination as did unmarried females aged between 18 -25 years.
- No vehicles were allowed to directly enter or exit the enclave with the exception of international agencies with prior coordination.

On the grounds of security the IDF regularly divided Gaza into three and on occasion four segments. The principal closure points were at the Coastal road to the west of Netzarim settlement and Abu Holi junction. Abu Holi junction is now open 24 hours a day allowing free movement of people and goods throughout Gaza. Prior to disengagement:

- Abu Holi junction was subject to sporadic opening times including periods when it was completely closed. For instance, it was closed between 12 - 23 July 2005 after an escalation of violence. It was then re-opened but only for limited hours.
- Access through Abu Holi had improved between February and mid-July 2005 when the checkpoint was operational around the clock for vehicular traffic. In March 2005 private vehicles were once again allowed to pass through the junction with the requirement of four people to a vehicle in May 2005 reduced to two people.
- Pedestrians were still not allowed to cross.

External Closures

Rafah passenger terminal is the principal point of departure for Gazans travelling overseas and is located on the Egyptian border. Rafah passenger terminal has remained closed since 7 September with the expectation it will not reopen for a further 6 months.

At the current time alternative arrangements for movement in and out of Gaza have still not been agreed between the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority (PA). If such a closure is maintained, it will impact on those several hundred patients who require regular secondary health care treatment in Egypt and other countries. However on the basis of an OCHA field visit earlier today:

- Hundreds of Palestinians continue to stream onto the Egyptian side, crossing the former **Philadelphi corridor** and remain in the area despite assurances from the PA that such unauthorised entry would be stopped from Wednesday evening.
- A buffer of approximately 150 metres covering the former Philadelphi corridor separates the Gaza and Egyptian sides of the border.
- At least one gate in the metal fence along the Gaza side of the border continues to be open and merchandise, in particular fuel, can be observed being brought into the Palestinian areas.
- A small number of PA Security Forces were observed in the area but were not witnessed taking measures to prevent movement.
- Members of the Egyptian Security Forces deployed along the Egyptian side of the Philadelphi corridor were making efforts to control the unauthorised entry. Despite this, movement continues.

Erez Crossing Point has remained open throughout the disengagement for the movement of international staff, senior PA officials and referred humanitarian cases with prior coordination. A small number of workers and merchants have been able to enter Israel on a daily basis with 179 workers and 170 merchants crossing today.

Israel has indicated that in the months ahead it will increase the number of daily permits available for Palestinian workers entering Israel and intends to make 15,000 available by 2006. The government has also stated that it does not foresee a Palestinian workforce in Israel by 2008.

Status of Infrastructure

Roads

An immediate priority of the PA and the Gaza municipalities has been to re-establish a unified road network that was disrupted by IDF imposed closures over the course of the last five years. Since Monday, 12 September 2005:

- **Salah ed Din** street is now open to the **south of Deir el Balah and Abu Holi** junction. This stretch of road had been **blocked** for nearly **5 years**. Resurfacing is currently taking place over large areas of the road however traffic can move in both directions.
- The **Salah ed Din-Netzarim junction** is now partially reopened with one lane of traffic operating. Additional repair work will be required by the Ministry of Public Works before the road is fully operational. This stretch of road had been **closed** to Palestinian traffic since **March 2002** although opened briefly after the July 2003 hudna.
- The **Coastal road** is now **fully open** from **north to south** Gaza, although some repair work is still required at the site of the former IDF positions to the south of Deir el Balah (the former Tel Katifa settlement).

- Traffic is now moving on both sides of the concrete blocks that still remain at **Abu Houli junction**. The eastern side of the blocks had previously been used exclusively by settlers for movement in and out of Kfar Darom.
- The **Rafah-Khan Younis western road** was reopened at 8 pm on Monday, 11 September 2005. It had been **closed** since **October 2000**.
- Rafah municipality was today resurfacing the road running out of southern Al Mawasi through the former Tel es Sultan checkpoint. This road had been previously been impassable on account of trenches and road blocks placed by the IDF since 2001.

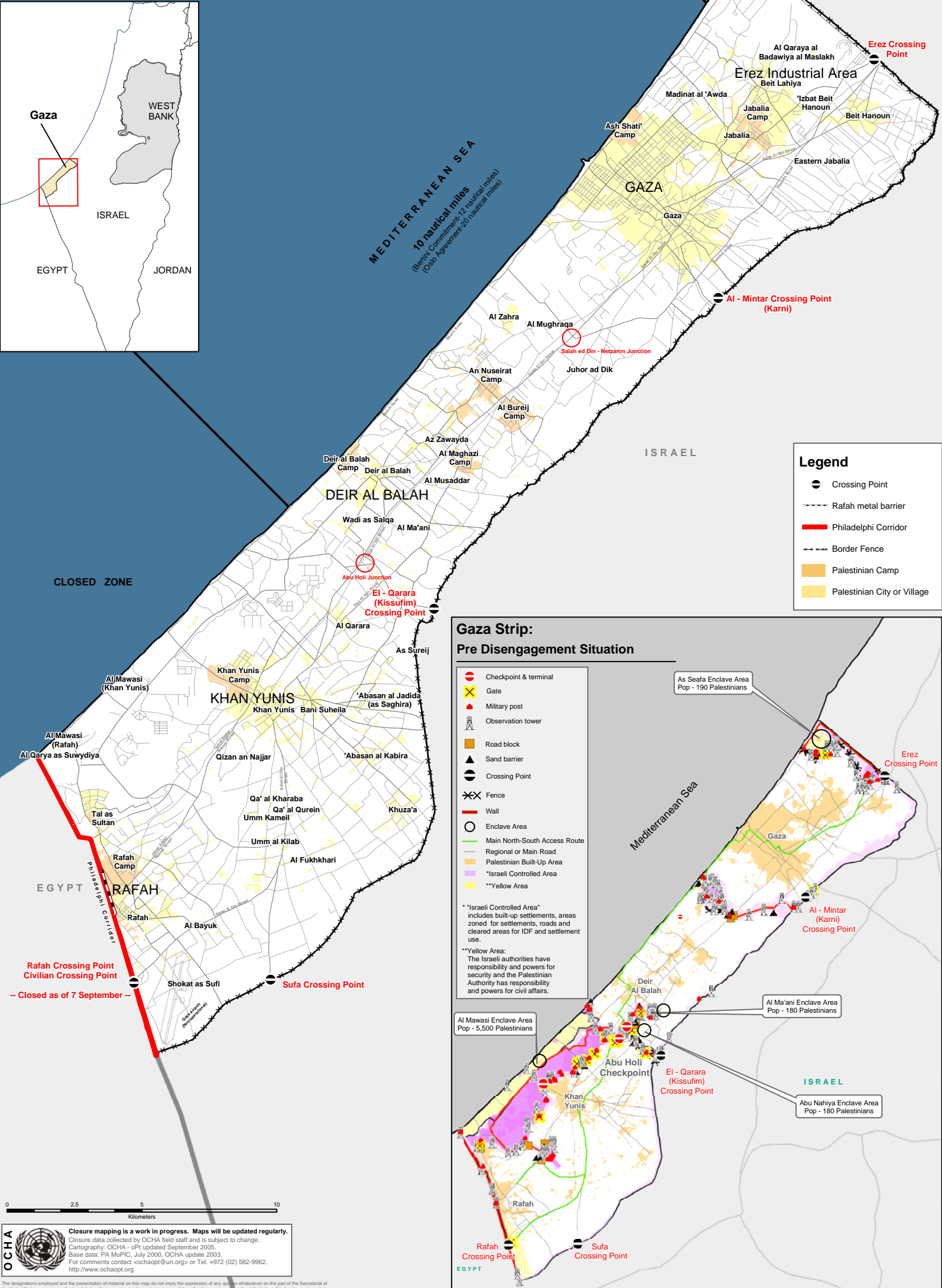
Other Infrastructure

PA Security Forces have been observed since 13 September deployed at the entry points to the former settlements to protect and secure the remaining public buildings, including synagogues:

- Palestinian security forces report a minimal amount of looting by Palestinians when entering the former settlements. All homes had been demolished prior to the handover of control to the PA and only rubble remained. In the case of public buildings, the contents had been removed prior to the Israeli departure so only the structures remain. There was no obvious signs of vandalism or wanton destruction of former settlement property.
- The Palestinian Economic Development Company (PEDC) entered into the settlement areas on the first day of PA control to assume responsibility for the greenhouses. PEDC reports that 700 persons are being trained to take over the running of the greenhouses in the former **Ganei Tal** settlement, including former Palestinian settlement workers. PEDC observed that they currently have no access to water or electricity for the greenhouses however once these networks are established the greenhouses could be operational between 7 – 10 days. PEDC stated that quite a number of greenhouses had fallen into disrepair and this was likely due to lower levels of maintenance by their former owners as the disengagement approached.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Gaza Post Disengagement Situation Map

September 2005



OCHA Closure mapping is a work in progress. Maps will be updated regularly. Closure data collected by OCHA field staff and is subject to change. Cartography: OCHA - oPT updated September 2005. Base data: PA MoPT, July 2000; OCHA update 2003. For comments contact <ochaopt@un.org> or Tel. +972 (02) 582-9962. http://www.ochaopt.org

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