



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

13-19 MAY 2009

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS SINCE TUESDAY, 19 May 2009

- Two Israeli soldiers and a Palestinian policeman were wounded during an IDF undercover operation on 21 May in Qalqiliya city. The incident is under investigation by both the PA and Israeli authorities.
- Israeli forces evacuated the tiny Israeli settlement outpost of Maoz Ester in the Jordan Valley region of the West Bank on Thursday.

West Bank

Military activities affecting civilians

This week, 21 Palestinians, including six children, were injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank, the same as the weekly average in the first quarter of 2009, and less than the 2008 weekly average (24). Most of the Palestinian injuries (eleven adults, six children) occurred during anti-Barrier demonstrations held in the villages of Ma'sara (Bethlehem) and Ni'lin and Bil'in (Ramallah). In Qalqiliya and East Jerusalem, two Palestinians were injured at checkpoints by Israeli forces, including an incident at Az Za'ayyem checkpoint (Jerusalem), where Israeli forces physically assaulted a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance driver transporting a Palestinian patient to a hospital in Jerusalem.

During the week, the number of Israeli military search operations was below the weekly average in the first quarter of 2009 (91 compared to 109). By far, the highest number of search operations occurred in the northern West Bank governorates (72), with the most occurring in Qalqiliya (22). However, the number of Palestinians arrested by Israeli forces during the week fell dramatically compared to the weekly average of arrests in the first quarter of 2009 (39 arrests compared to 80). In addition, Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces carried out six search operations (Ramallah and Bethlehem governorates) and arrested 27 Palestinians in the West Bank. PA arrests constituted approximately 40% of all arrests of Palestinians in the West Bank (by both the IDF and the PA), with most arrests taking place in the northern West Bank governorates.

Ongoing Israeli settler violence

This week one Palestinian was injured in Israel settler violence, down from a weekly average of 12 injuries over the previous six weeks. The injury occurred near Havat Gilad settlement outpost during a confrontation between Israeli settlers and farmers, who had prior coordination with the Israeli District Coordination Liaison Office (DCL) to enter the area. In a separate incident in the north, one Israeli settler was injured due to Palestinian stone throwing at vehicles near the village of Al Funduq (Qalqiliya), after which Israeli forces conducted a search operation in the village.

Despite the decrease in Palestinian casualties from Israeli settler violence, settler intimidation, harassment, and vandalism continued. In the northern West Bank, Israeli settlers from Yizhar and Havat Gil'ad outpost set fire to olive groves and wheat crops belonging to the villages of Burin (Nablus) and Jinsafut (Qalqiliya), damaging at least 600 olive trees. Israeli settlers from Mekhola settlement erected caravans on approximately 15 dunums of land in a bid to expand the settlement (Tubas). In the southern West Bank, Israeli-settlers continued to prevent Palestinian herders from grazing their sheep in areas close to various settlements.

From 12-13 May, some 1,500 Israeli settlers held IDF-approved rallies in the evacuated northern West Bank settlement of Homesh and visited Joseph's tomb in Nablus City. The settlement of Homesh was dismantled by Israeli authorities in August 2005 as part of the 2005 Disengagement plan. Confrontations took place between the settlers and residents of Burqa village (Nablus), following which the Israeli army forced Burqa villagers to retreat to the village. Israeli forces set up flying checkpoints at several points near the Burqa junction.

West Bank Access

General Closure

Israeli forces imposed a general closure on the West Bank from 14 - 16 May due to the commemoration of the 61st anniversary of what Palestinians refer to as '*Al Nakba*'. All Palestinians holding valid permits were prevented from entering East Jerusalem and Israel, excepting emergency medical cases and Palestinians working with UN agencies or international organisations.

Access of Palestinian farmers in areas surrounding many Israeli settlements in the West Bank is restricted and sometimes totally denied. During the week, following coordination with the Israeli District Coordination Liaison Office, Palestinian farmers were allowed to cultivate their land in areas near Israeli settlements in the northern West Bank governorates of Qalqiliya, Tulkarm and Nablus.

East Jerusalem demolitions and evictions

During the week, a Palestinian from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Jabal al Mukabbir demolished his own home by order of the Jerusalem Municipality; eight persons were displaced. Since the beginning of the year, OCHA has recorded the demolition of 20 structures in East Jerusalem due to lack of permit, displacing some 117 people, including at least 60 children. With one exception, all inhabited residences demolished in the West Bank in 2009 due to the lack of permits were located in and around East Jerusalem. (On 22 April, 101 Palestinians were displaced following demolition of their residential tents in the Nablus Governorate).

Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood continue to face the risk of displacement as a result of eviction from their homes. During the week, the Israeli District Court levied fines against two families in Sheikh Jarrah in the amount of NIS 259,000 per family. The families, who were ordered to evacuate their homes by 19 July 2009, are in the same area as that of the Kurd family, who were forcibly evicted from their home in November 2008. That eviction occurred after a Jerusalem court ruled in favor of a group of Israeli settlers claiming ownership of the land on which the house was built. The two Sheikh Jarrah families are affected by the same court decision, which is currently being contested.

Gaza Strip

Military activities affecting civilians

Eight Palestinians, including seven civilians, were injured by Israeli airstrikes in Gaza city, Khan Younis and Rafah this week. A home and a metal workshop were demolished, and eight other houses sustained partial damages. Israeli forces also frequently fired warning into border areas. Palestinian factions fired several rounds of rudimentary rockets and mortar shells into Israel, one of which hit and damaged house in the Israeli southern town of Sedrot. There were no Israeli casualties.

Israeli patrol boats opened warning fire on nine separate occasions towards Palestinian fishing boats west of Rafah, Deir Al-Balah and Beit Lahia, forcing the boats to return to shore. Since January 2009, Israeli military effectively reduced the fishing range allowed to Palestinian fishermen from six nautical miles to three, constraining the ability of fishermen to catch sardines, which are currently in season, and mainly prevalent in deeper waters.

There have been six child fatalities from unexploded ordnance (UXO) since the ceasefires implemented in the Gaza Strip on 18 January 2009. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has identified 273 locations with UXO risks. A joint operational plan is being implemented by organizations including UNDP, UNMAS, UNICEF and several NGOs for the education of Gaza civil society on the risks and avoidance of unexploded ordnance. This week, a 12-year-old boy killed in Khan Younis while handling a UXO.

Israel's Gaza Blockade

Average of weekly imported truckloads remains below needs (10-16 May 2009)

Israel's blockade, now in its 23rd month, continues to affect all aspects of life. This week, a total of 682 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, less than one quarter the weekly average of truckloads imported in the first six months of 2007 (before Hamas' takeover of Gaza). Thirty percent of the truckloads were designated for humanitarian aid agencies (180). Of these imports, food supplies made up the majority (84%). The remaining 44 truckloads were comprised of medical supplies, non-edible consumables, industrial/electrical appliance and other miscellaneous items including two truckloads of cement for water projects.

Israel continues to restrict access of goods to and from the Gaza Strip. Essential items, including clothing, school textbooks, agricultural products, and construction materials needed to rebuild thousands of homes damaged during Israel's "Cast Lead" military operation in Gaza, remain unavailable in the Gaza Strip. Tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border continue to function as a means of compensating for shortages of necessary items that are restricted from entry through Israeli-controlled crossings. This week, a Palestinian man was killed when a tunnel under the Gaza-Egypt border collapsed.

Limitation on fuel imports continues (10-16 May 2009)

Industrial fuel requirements for the operation of Gaza's Power Plant were not met during the week, with only 70% of weekly requirements imported. Due to the inadequate fuel supply, lack of spare parts, and lack of periodic maintenance, the Gaza Power Plant produces only 50-60MWs, triggering frequent power cuts of up to five hours per day.

Cooking gas imported into Gaza through Nahal Oz Crossing constituted 79% of Gaza's weekly needs as estimated by the Gas Station Owners' Association (GSOA); consequently cooking gas remains rationed in the Gaza Strip.

A ban on the import of petrol or diesel for commercial use has been in effect since 02 November 2008. Israel occasionally allows a limited amount of these types of fuel to enter Gaza for humanitarian use. With the absence of Israeli fuel, Gazans are mostly using fuel transferred through the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border.

Movement of people into and out of Gaza limited

The ability of Gazans to access the outside world remains restricted. Rafah Crossing, Gaza's main exit crossing, has been generally closed for people entering or exiting Gaza since the Hamas takeover in June 2007. This week, Rafah Crossing was partially opened from 16 to 18 May for limited numbers of people entering or exiting for humanitarian reasons; 952 Palestinians were allowed to cross into Egypt and 815 Palestinians were allowed to enter Gaza.

Limited cash transfer allowed into Gaza

This week, Israel allowed the transfer of 50 million NIS to Gaza towards the payment of the PA's Gaza staff of 65,000. Since June 2007, the flow of cash into Gaza has been restricted to infrequent shipments of 50-100 million NIS per shipment. These restrictions have left banks in Gaza without sufficient cash to allow PA staff to withdraw their salaries, as well as impeded many other financial transactions in Gaza, including the implementation of some humanitarian aid programs.