



OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report - 290

17 - 23 December 2008

Latest Developments:

- On 24 December Palestinian militants fired dozens of rockets and mortars today at Israeli cities and towns resulting in extensive property damage but no reported casualties.
- The Gaza crossings have been closed completely for eight consecutive days including for humanitarian supplies. This is the second longest period the crossings have remained closed since the Hamas takeover in June 2007.
- The ongoing closures have significantly reduced the capacity of UN humanitarian agencies to provide assistance in the event of an escalation in violence. UN humanitarian assistance programs have run out of stock for several essential supplies and are facing severe difficulties in implementing their regular programmes. UNRWA has no flour or cash-notes to distribute, affecting thousands of dependant beneficiaries. WFP has been unable to preposition stocks; in case of an emergency, it has no food available within the Gaza Strip. There are shortages of over 100 essential pharmaceuticals and critical emergency surgical kits. Over one hundred containers of humanitarian assistance at Ashdod port cleared for entry into Gaza.
- Due to the lack of fuel and spare parts, the power plant in Gaza remains shut down since 19 December. This is affecting all aspects of daily life including sanitation, water and power supply to households, schools, and civilian institutions. In particular, 60% of the Gaza population is receiving running water once every five to seven days. The wastewater treatment plant, unable to operate regularly, has since Saturday doubled the amount of raw sewage it is dumping into the sea to 40 million litres per day.

Military activities involving civilians

On 19 December, the six-month long Egyptian brokered Israel-Gaza "calm" officially expired, raising the prospect of an escalation in cross-border fighting.

During the reporting period, an unarmed civilian and four militants were killed, and two others were injured (a woman and child) by Israeli missile fire. Palestinian militants fired over 100 rockets and mortars either towards Israel or IDF troops inside the Gaza Strip; one foreign worker was reported injured. Nine Israeli missiles were fired into Gaza, two of which targeted property reportedly owned by a Hamas militant, and a metal workshop in the outskirts of Rafah. This is the first time since the 19 June "calm" that buildings have been targeted by IAF missiles..

West Bank: During the reporting period, a total of 17 Palestinians were injured by the IDF, twelve of whom (including two children) were injured during anti-Barrier demonstrations held in Ni'lin and Bil'in (Ramallah), Jayyus (Qalqiliya) and Ma'sara (Bethlehem). Despite a significant increase in the number of IDF search operations in the West Bank—113 compared to 67 in the previous week, there was a sharp reduction in the number of arrests of Palestinians by Israeli forces (56 compared to 96). Almost a third of the Israeli search-and-arrest

operations took place in the northern governorates. In one such operation in Qabatiya village (Jenin), hidden explosives were found and detonated in an uninhabited house. In Nablus, IDF operations resulted in damages to at least two Palestinian residences and one private vehicle. Curfews lasting several hours followed search-and-arrest operations in several villages including Az Zubeidat (Jericho governorate) and Harmala (Bethlehem governorate).

Prison Riot: During a prison riot on 20 December at the Ofer (Israeli) military prison (Ramallah governorate), eight Palestinian detainees were shot by Israeli prison guards with rubber-coated metal bullets and tear gas canisters. Although the cause of the riot remains unclear, initial reports have indicated that the detainees were protesting the manner by which searches of their private belongings were being conducted. Three Israeli guards were also reported injured. The incident sparked several protests and demonstrations by Palestinians in Ramallah and at the Qalandia checkpoint.

Gaza Crossing Activities: All imports halted, with severe impact

This week, as all Gaza goods crossings were closed, no imports entered the Gaza Strip. Since the intensification of the closure regime on 5 November, the amount of imports entering Gaza had been severely reduced to an average of 16 truckloads per

day—down from 123 truckloads per day in October and 475 trucks per day in May 2007—before the Hamas takeover. The prolonged closure of the crossing has led to an almost complete depletion of the stocks of basic commodities and has severely affected the operational capacity of humanitarian agencies.

Depletion of wheat stocks and shortage of basic food items: Due to shortage of wheat grain, all Gaza mills shut down on 18 December. Long queues were observed at the operating bakeries, which reportedly have only a few days' of flour in stock. As of 23 December, the stock of wheat stands at 400 metric tonnes—equal to one day's wheat requirement in the Gaza Strip. On 18 December, UNRWA halted its food distribution to 750,000 people in Gaza, due to irregular border access and the depletion of its wheat flour stocks. WFP also reported a severe shortage of sugar, tomato paste, dairy products and lentils throughout Gaza. Following delays, WFP resumed its food distribution for the October and November allocations. The food distribution will be over mid-January.

Fuel imports halted and electricity cut durations increase: No fuel of any type was allowed into Gaza this week. On 19 December, Gaza's only power plant was shutdown for the fifth time since 5 November 08, due to the lack of fuel. The Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO) has implemented stricter rationing with longer power cuts due to increase in demand of electricity. This increase is the combined result of the severe shortage of cooking gas and the colder weather. Gaza City and northern and middle districts are now experiencing 12-hour power cuts per day. The functioning of operating water wells (only 20% are fully operational) was further affected by the fuel shortage, with the amount of water pumped going down to 140,000 cubic metres per day from 220,000 cubic metres before the shut-down of the Gaza power plant. The Coastal Municipal Water Utility has 7,000 litres of fuel of stock, enough to cover 1-2 days of their daily needs.

Health: No drug or medical supplies have been allowed into Gaza since 16 December. Over 20% of essential drugs and medical supplies were reported to be out of stock (less than one month supply) by the Central Drug Store. As the emergency stocks in Gaza are not replenished, there is an increasing risk of an acute shortage of medicines in the event of a major escalation in violence and large numbers of people injured.

The Free Gaza Boat arrived in Gaza from Cyprus on 20 December carrying one tonne of medical supplies and humanitarian aid from Qatar. In addition, the boat carried an eleven member delegation of international academics, and humanitarian and human rights workers. There have been four such trips made to Gaza in August, October, and November 08.

Gaza tunnels

Two Palestinians were killed in two tunnels collapses along the Egypt-Rafah border. A large number of tunnels have been constructed during the past 18 months, following the blockade imposed on Gaza in June 2007, following the Hamas takeover. Since the beginning of 2008, approximately 50 people have been killed in tunnels related incidents. The number of casualties is reportedly due to a combination of poor tunnel construction and increased use.

East Jerusalem Demolitions

On 21 December, a Palestinian family of five, including three children, were displaced when the home owner demolished his own residence in the East Jerusalem of Beit Hanina neighbourhood to avoid paying fines following a demolition order from Israeli authorities two weeks prior. Despite the voluntary demolition, the owner still received an order to pay a fine of 70,000 NIS for building without a permit. On the same day, for the fourth time in as many weeks, Israeli security forces dismantled the solidarity tent set up near the house in Sheikh Jarrah from which Al Kurd family was evicted. A new tent was re-erected.

OCHA releases comprehensive report on Israeli-Settler violence

This week OCHA released a new report addressing the phenomenon of Israeli settler violence in the West Bank. The report provides an in-depth look at settler-related incidents targeting Palestinians and their property in first ten months of 2008. There were 290 settler-related incidents of violence or property damage, reflecting a worrying trend, since it surpasses the total number of incidents in each of the previous two years. Similarly, Palestinian casualties resulting from settler violence in 2008 exceed the parallel time periods in each of the previous two years. Approximately half of all Palestinian injuries from settler violence each year since 2006 have been made up of children, women, and the elderly over 70 years of age. By contrast to recent weeks' escalation, there were relatively few incidents reported this week, with only five resulting Palestinian injuries.

This week at a glance:

Palestinian – Israeli conflict related casualties

- Palestinians killed: 2 in Gaza,
- Palestinians injured: 2 in Gaza - 17 in West Bank. 1
 - Of whom 3 are children
- Israelis injured: 4
- Internationals injured: 5

**Israeli military search operations: 113 (previous week 67)
Palestinians arrested by the IDF: 56 (previous week 96)**