



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS WEEKLY REPORT

2 - 15 March 2011

PLEASE NOTE: There will be no weekly Protection of Civilians report next week due to internal capacity

LATEST DEVELOPMENT SINCE 15 MARCH

16 March: two Palestinian members of armed groups were killed, and two others were injured, when an Israeli fighter jet fired two missiles targeting a Hamas military site in an area south of Gaza city.

17 March: IAF jets dropped flyers over the north and middle of the Gaza Strip warning Palestinians from presenting or approaching areas located within 300m from border fence with Israel.

West Bank

Settler-related incidents: Israeli family killed in a settlement

On 11 March, at close to midnight, five members of an Israeli family, including two boys of eleven and three years of age, and a three-month-old infant girl, were stabbed to death while sleeping in their home in Itamar settlement in the Nablus governorate. The UN Secretary General Bahn Ki-moon strongly condemned the killings, and called "for the perpetrators to be brought to justice, and for all to act with restraint."

Following the incident, Israeli military forces deployed in the neighbouring village of 'Awarta, which was placed under curfew until 16 March, and conducted large-scale operations in the village and the surrounding areas in search of the assailants. Dozens of Palestinians were taken for interrogation in connection to the killings. In addition, large numbers of flying checkpoints were erected throughout the Nablus governorate and intensive vehicular searches in the area were reported, as well as general restrictions on the movement of Palestinians in the northern West Bank. Security forces of the Palestinian Authority have reportedly launched an investigation into the fatal incident. (See also next section)

Israeli forces were also deployed in several areas throughout the West Bank to contain attempts by Israeli settlers to attack Palestinians and their property, in reprisal to the killings. Despite these efforts, during the three days following the incident, OCHA recorded 32 incidents perpetrated by settlers that resulted in injuries to Palestinians (eight) or damage to their property (24). In the immediate aftermath of the Itamar killings, Israeli settlers rioted in the village of 'Awarta, setting fire to tires and assaulting an 18-year-old Palestinian. Additionally, incidents of settler stone-throwing and vandalism were reported in the Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqiliya, and Hebron governorates, resulting in 13 Palestinian injuries and damage to tens of vehicles, several homes and other private and commercial structures.

In the days before the killings in Itamar, there was already a sharp increase in the number of settler incidents, beginning on 3 March, when Israeli settlers held a "day of rage" in protest of the demolition of a number of structures in Havat Gilad settlement outpost by the Israeli authorities, during which they rioted and blocked major roads and intersections throughout the West Bank. Overall, during the two-week reporting period, there were ten incidents involving Israeli settlers that resulted in 15 injuries to Palestinians, and 34 additional incidents resulting in damage to Palestinian property.

Palestinian village placed under military curfew for five days

Immediately following the killings in the Itamar settlement, the Israeli forces searched homes in the nearby Palestinian village of 'Awarta, and ordered all men under 40 to be gathered at the school and the mosque of the village for interrogation; at least 43 villagers were arrested. The village was placed under curfew for a period of five days, during which time people were not allowed to leave their homes to buy food, children were not allowed to attend school, and ambulances entering the village were delayed. While at one point, some villagers mistakenly believed the curfew to have been lifted, broke the curfew to buy food and other items from a small shop in the village. Others villagers reportedly ran out of food, fuel, and medicine, and the Nablus Governor's office had to distribute bread and non food items to village residents. In addition, during the time of curfew, Israeli settlers erected an outpost on 15 dunums of privately-owned village land.

65 Palestinian injured by Israeli forces

During the two-week reporting period, Israeli forces injured 65 Palestinians, including 25 children, in various incidents throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; three Israeli policemen were also reportedly injured. Thus far in 2011, Israeli forces have killed five Palestinians in the West Bank and injured 271 others.

As in previous periods, a large number of the Palestinian injuries (28, including 16 children) occurred in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan during clashes that erupted between local residents and the Israeli Police. Two Israeli border policemen and one Israeli settler were hit and injured with stones thrown by Palestinians during the clashes.

Moreover, during the reporting period, 10 Palestinians were arrested from Silwan, including seven children between 12 and 17 years of age. Violence and clashes in this area are taking place in the context of protests against settler activity in the neighborhood, as well as the threat of mass house demolitions by the Jerusalem Municipality.

Another 11 Palestinians, including five children, sustained their injuries during the week in clashes that occurred during regular weekly demonstrations protesting the isolation of land by the Barrier, in Ni'lin and Bil'in villages (Ramallah), and settlement expansion and take over of land in Deir Nidham (Ramallah) and Beit Ummar (Hebron) villages.

Most of the remaining Palestinian injuries by Israeli forces (19) occurred in incidents where Israeli troops intervened during clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. Of note, on one occasion on 7 March, a group of Israeli settlers uprooted olive seedlings from land in the village of Qusra (Nablus). When the Palestinian village residents confronted the settlers, clashes occurred. Israeli forces intervened, firing live ammunition, rubber-coated-bullets and tear gas grenades at the Palestinians. As a result, eight civilians, including three children, were injured, most of them with live ammunition.

Demolitions and displacement

During the reporting period, 65 structures in the Hebron and Nablus governorates were demolished, resulting in a total of 119 people displaced, including 42 children. An additional 204 people were affected by the demolitions. In addition, a Palestinian family living in Sur Bahir in East Jerusalem self-demolished part of their home, following orders to do so from the Jerusalem Municipality, resulting in four people being displaced.

All of those displaced by demolitions are from the community of Khirbet Tana east of Beit Furik village (Nablus), in which Israeli forces demolished 26 residential structures and 25 animal shelters on 2 March, on the grounds that the community is located in an area declared closed for military training. An additional 22 families consisting of 163 members, including 62 children, were also affected by the demolitions. This is the fifth time Khirbet Tana has faced extensive demolitions since January 2010, and the sixth time since 2005.

In the Hebron governorate, the Israeli authorities demolished a water cistern in Al Ba'qa, a cave, an animal pen and two tents in Khashem ad Daraj, and an animal barrack in Beit Ummar. All of the structures were demolished due to lack of Israeli-issued building permits. A total of 41 persons, including seven children were affected.

Since the beginning of 2011 153 structures have been demolished in Area C, resulting in the displacement of 278 people including 124 children.

Gaza Strip

No casualties reported

Although airstrikes, shooting incidents and rocket fire continued intermittently during the two-week reporting period, no deaths or injuries were reported. This follows an escalation during the previous reporting period, when two Palestinian fatalities and 22 injuries were recorded.

On 4 and 5 March, Israeli forces launched several air strikes, with a number of targets, including a vehicle allegedly carrying Hamas members, a Hamas training camp, and several other commercial structures, resulting in property damage. Also during the period, Palestinian armed factions launched a number of rockets at various sites in southern Israel. No injuries or damage to property were reported.

Access restrictions continued to be enforced in areas of up to 1500 meters near the Gaza fence and on fishing zones beyond three nautical miles from the shore, with Israeli forces reportedly opening fire on several occasions towards farmers working in their fields, and on Palestinian fishing boats off the coast of Gaza. No injuries were reported in any of these incidents.

So far in 2011, eight Palestinians including three civilians have been killed in the context of Israeli-Palestinian violence in the Gaza Strip, and 58 Palestinians (at least 44 civilians) have been injured. In addition, one member of the Israeli military forces have been killed and four others have been injured.

Six Palestinians killed in tunnel-related incidents

In nine separate incidents, six Palestinians were killed and ten others injured in tunnel-related incidents. Since the beginning of 2011, eight Palestinians have been killed and 24 others have been injured in such incidents. While the overall number of operating tunnels has declined since the Israeli decision to ease the blockade on 20 June 2010, the number of those dedicated to the smuggling of building materials, whose import remained restricted, increased.

Rafah Crossing

Between 2 and 15 March, 980 Palestinians crossed into Gaza and 2,426 left for Egypt through the Rafah Crossing. However, 367 people, mainly students and visa holders were denied entry to Egypt for unclear reasons

Rafah Crossing has been open since 22 February for Palestinians stranded in Egypt and humanitarian cases leaving Gaza. Due to the restricted travel to 300 people per day, a registration mechanism for those needing to travel to Egypt - mainly medical patients, students, foreign passport holders and Palestinians holding visas for third countries was implemented by the Gaza border authority. Over 3,000 people have registered. According to the border and crossing authority in Gaza, the crossing will remain open five days per week from 11:00 am - 4:00 pm.

According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), the decision to restrict the entry of Palestinians to Egypt via the Cairo Airport has resulted in thousands of Palestinians being stranded abroad and unable to return to Gaza. On 16 March, the Palestine embassy in Egypt announced that Palestinians who wish to return to Gaza by flying to Cairo airport must obtain Egyptian embassy-issued entry visas to enter Egypt. According to the embassy, on 16 and 17 March, some 90 people were allowed to return to Gaza via Cairo.

Gaza Crossings

Between 27 February and 12 March, a total of 1,013 truckloads of goods, 50 percent of which were food items, entered Gaza. The two week average (507 truckloads) is well below the weekly average for the rest of 2011 (945 truckloads), mainly due to a strike by Palestinian truck drivers in Gaza, who were protesting the Israeli Government's decision to permanently close the conveyer belt at Karni crossing.

On 9 March, the Israeli authorities reopened the Sufa crossing on an exceptional basis. 72000 tonnes of aggregate will be transferred into Gaza by UNRWA in the coming period for use by humanitarian actors. So far UNRWA received approval for 43 reconstruction projects requiring restricted construction materials, which are worth approximately 11 percent of the cost of UNRWA's recovery and reconstruction plan for Gaza"

Exports from Gaza remain limited to specific authorized agricultural crops. This week, overall, a total of six truckloads exited Gaza through Kerem Shalom, including five truckloads of cut-flowers (860,000 stems) and one truckload of cherry tomatoes (2.5 tonnes). From 28 November 2010 through 5 March 2011, a total of 266 truckloads have been allowed out of Gaza, including 210 truckloads (407 tonnes) of strawberries, 52 truckloads (8,288,000 stems) of cut-flowers, and four truckloads of vegetables.

Shortages and limited stock of wheat flour continue

The total closure of the conveyer belt at the Karni crossing on 1 March, and subsequent shifting of operations to the Kerem Shalom crossing, has compounded existing shortages of wheat grains in the Gaza Strip. This is because the conveyor belt at Kerem Shalom crossing is still not ready to operate and handle the wheat grains transfer. The last shipments of wheat grain (2,535 tonnes) entered Gaza was on 28 Feb through Karni crossing.

As of 15 March, wheat stocks were sufficient for only five days, well below the usual 30 days of reserves held. The decline of wheat continues to affect delivery of food assistance to over one million beneficiaries of UNRWA and WFP, which usually purchase flour from local mills. The dependency of the poorest population on food assistance has increased in recent months due to a sharp increase in global market prices of wheat flour (in Gaza the price of wheat has increased by some 50 percent since August 2010).

Rallies and demonstrations in support of national unity across the oPt

Throughout the oPt, tens of thousands of Palestinians took to the streets on 15 March, calling for the end of the division between Hamas and Fatah. The protests took place in the cities of Ramallah, Gaza, Khan Younis, Beit Hanoun, Bethlehem, Tulkarm, Jenin, and Nablus.

In Ramallah, in the evening, physical confrontations broke out between pro-Fateh protestors and undercover police on the one hand, and other protestors on the other. As a result, at least five people were injured, and two of them were transferred to hospital. At least four protestors were also arrested. In Gaza, in late afternoon, clashes took place when the Gaza security forces forcibly dispersed the demonstrators, and protestors tents were flattened; approximately 50 protestors were injured and a few were reportedly detained. Human rights centers indicated that excessive force was also used by security forces against some members of the press who were present.