



## PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS WEEKLY REPORT

30 March to 12 April 2011

### LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- On 13 April, Kerem Shalom, the single operating crossing for the transfer of goods to and from Gaza, was opened, allowing for the resumption of imports and very limited exports (one truckload).

## Gaza Strip

### Significant escalation in hostilities in Gaza and southern Israel

The reporting period witnessed the greatest escalation in violence in Gaza and southern Israel since the end of the "Cast Lead" offensive in January 2009. Hostilities were concentrated in the three day period between 7 and 9 April, resulting in approximately 80 percent of fatalities and 90 percent of the injuries of the reporting period. Overall, 23 Palestinians, including ten civilians, were killed and 65 Palestinians, including 46 civilians, and two Israeli civilians, were injured. Two of the Palestinian fatalities, 15 of the Palestinian injuries and one of the Israeli injuries were children.

On the afternoon of 7 March, armed Palestinians launched an anti-tank missile at an Israeli school bus traveling on a road in the vicinity of the border with Gaza, injuring two Israelis, including a 16-year-old boy, who remains in critical condition. Following this attack, the Israeli army began a series of airstrikes, tank-shelling and live ammunition fire at numerous targets throughout the Gaza Strip, that continued intermittently during that and the following two days. As a result, 18 Palestinians, including at least nine civilians, were killed, and 59 others were injured.

In one incident of note that occurred on 8 April, Israeli troops positioned at the border east of Khan Younis fired several tank shells towards a built-up area in 'Abasan village, one of which hit a house, killing a 41-year-old woman and her 19 year-old daughter, and causing shrapnel injuries to two other daughters (aged 15 and 18); according to the Israeli military, the shooting targeted militants that were firing mortars from that area. At least 20 houses sustained damage as a result of Israeli air strikes and tank shelling during the three-day-long escalation. Additionally, a water reservoir feeding Gaza city eastern neighborhoods was hit by a tank shell, resulting in a three-day suspension of water supply to approximately 30,000 residents.

In parallel to the Israeli attacks, Palestinian factions intensified their rocket and mortar firing towards communities and towns in southern Israel, as well as against Israeli troops inside Gaza and military bases along the border. Although in the evening of 7 March Hamas announced a unilateral ceasefire on behalf of all militant factions in the Gaza Strip, following a short interruption, intense rocket and mortar fire resumed the following morning. This included tens of Grad-type rockets fired at more distant Israeli cities like Be'er Sheva and Ashkelon. Excluding the initial attack on the school bus, despite its high intensity, Palestinian fire resulted in limited property damage.

## **Movement of goods through the crossings ground to a halt**

On 5 April, the Israeli authorities closed the Kerem Shalom crossing, citing “continuing rocket fire and the accumulation of concrete security threats against IDF soldiers who operate the crossing”; it remained closed for rest of the reporting period. This measure brought the transfer of goods to and from Gaza through the crossings with Israel to a complete halt. Since the imposition of the blockade in 2007, Israel has gradually closed all the other crossings for goods (the last alternative facility closed in March 2011), leaving Gaza’s population increasingly vulnerable if an outbreak of hostilities prompts the closure of the sole remaining crossing. Overall, during the period prior to recent closure, a total of 1,478 truckloads of goods had entered Gaza, 25 percent below the weekly average of truckloads since the beginning of 2011.

The immediate concerns generated by this closure are the increasing shortages of wheat and cooking gas, as well as the suspension of exports. Wheat reserves, which have been affected in recent months by the insufficient capacity of the crossings, came under additional pressure. In the first few days of April, only 37 truckloads of wheat grain entered Gaza, bringing the reserve level to less than nine days of stock by the end of the reporting period, compared to the usual three to four weeks normally held. The shortfall in wheat, as well as the lower prices of flour produced elsewhere, have led agencies providing food assistance in Gaza to import part of their flour requirements, instead of purchasing it locally.

Between 3 and 5 April, 404 tonnes of cooking gas entered Gaza through Kerem Shalom, comprising 34 percent of the weekly needs of cooking gas, 1,200 tonnes. According to the Gas Stations Owners Association, all 28 cooking gas stations in the Gaza Strip have been closed since 6 April, due to insufficient supplies. The amount of cooking gas that entered Gaza in March was 40 percent less than the actual needs. Although limited quantities of cooking gas are entering Gaza through the tunnels (approximately 200 gas cylinders per day), this remains far below Gaza’s needs, which, according to the Gas Stations Owners Association, stands at approximately 15,000 to 20,000 cylinders a day.

Regarding exports, between 27 March and 5 April, four truckloads of cut-flowers were allowed to exit via Kerem Shalom. However, after Kerem shut down on 5 April, approximately 1.5 million cut-flowers/stems designated for exports to European markets were stuck in Gaza, of which, over half have spoiled; the direct loss is estimated at approximately USD 110,000.

## **Tunnel smuggling continued despite airstrikes**

Tens of the airstrikes conducted during the escalation in hostilities targeted tunnels under the Gaza - Egypt border, resulting in severe damage to a number of them. On 8 April, a fuel storage tank caught fire when Israeli airplanes targeted the tunnels area. However, according to PalTrade, despite the airstrikes, the transfer of goods (mainly construction materials, fuel and flour) continued, albeit at a lower level.

According to fuel station owners, fuels (other than cooking gas) are still coming in through the tunnels in sufficient quantities, including diesel for the Gaza Power Plant. All Gaza fuel stations are operating almost normally and no increase in fuel prices was reported.

## **Electricity shortages increase**

Three electricity feeding lines coming from Israel, and one electricity feeding line coming from Egypt, were indirectly damaged as a result of the hostilities. The Egyptian line and one of the Israeli lines have been so far repaired, leaving the other two feeding lines, which are located on the Israeli

side of the perimeter fence separating the Gaza Strip from Israel, damaged. An additional feeding line from Israel went subsequently out of order due to a technical malfunctioning. Several coordination attempts are currently underway to have the Israeli electricity company fix the lines.

Approximately 60 percent (120 megawatts) of the electricity supplied at present to the population of Gaza, for all purposes, is purchased from Israel, and some eight percent (17 megawatts) is purchased from Egypt. The remaining 32 percent is produced locally by the Gaza Power Plant. Since the beginning of 2011, the latter has operated relying exclusively on fuel transferred from Egypt through the tunnels.

As a result of the power lines being damaged, the overall shortage of electricity in the Gaza Strip is estimated at about 38 percent. The worst affected areas, middle Gaza and Khan Younis, are experiencing daily outages of 12 hours, while in other areas they reach six-eight hours per day.

The decrease in electricity supply has forced some water wells in Rafah and Khan Younis, used for domestic water supply, to rely more intensively on electric generators, therefore increasing their expenses for fuel. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) has requested urgent additional funds to cover these additional costs.

## West Bank

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### Military activity affecting civilians

During the two-week reporting period, Israeli forces injured 20 Palestinians, including three children, in the West Bank, a significant decrease compared to the previous two-week period (47). Ten Israeli activists were also injured by Israeli forces during the period.

Eight of the injuries occurred in weekly demonstrations in Bil'in and Ni'lin held in protests against the Barrier, and in An Nabi Salih village against the expansion of the Hallamish settlement and the take-over of Palestinian land. On another demonstration held on 2 April in Beit Ummar village (Hebron), protesting the closure of the main entrance to the village, ten Israeli activists were physically assaulted and injured.

In another Barrier-related incident that took place on 1 April, a 13-year-old Palestinian child was shot and injured in his leg with three live bullets by the Israeli Border Police in Qatanna village (Jerusalem district). According to the boy's father, the boy was grazing his sheep with his 12-year-old brother about 70 meters from the Barrier, when the Israeli Border Police, patrolling along the Barrier, arrived and fired at them, allegedly without reason or warning. Incidents involving stone throwing by Palestinian children and live ammunition fired by Israeli Border Police in the vicinity of the Barrier have been frequently reported in this village in recent months.

Five additional Palestinians were injured by Israeli forces during search operations in various areas. One of these injuries occurred during an operation in 'Azzun village (Qalqiliya), in which Israeli forces detained a 44-year-old man in his house, took him to a adjacent site and severely beat him; the man sustained contusions and was admitted to hospital for treatment.

Also during this period, in the late evening of 5 April, the Israeli army entered Nablus city to accompany a group of Israeli settlers visiting Joseph's tomb. Following stone-throwing by Palestinians in the area next to the Balata Refugee Camp, Israeli soldiers broke into a nearby school and converted it into a military outpost, from which they fired sound grenades at stone-throwers; no injuries were reported. The soldiers left the school a few hours later.

## Significant decrease in settler-related incidents

Israeli-settler violence, which had increased significantly following the killing of five-members of an Israeli family in the settlement of Itamar (Nablus) on 11 March, decreased during the reporting period. Overall, OCHA recorded a total of 12 incidents leading to Palestinian casualties (five injuries) or property damage (seven incidents), compared to 32 such incidents during the previous two weeks.

Four of the five Palestinian injuries occurred as a result of stone-throwing by Israeli settlers in separate incidents in the village of 'Asira al Qibliya (Nablus) and on roads in the Nablus and Ramallah districts. One Israeli settler was also injured by Palestinian stone throwing. Another Palestinian was injured on 2 April after being physically assaulted by a group of Israeli settlers, while plowing his land near the settlement of Bracha (Nablus); the farmer accessed this area after coordinating his entry with the Israeli military, as requested by the latter.

The two most significant incidents leading to property damage occurred in the vicinity of the villages of Kafr ad Dik (Salfit) and Madama (Nablus). In the first, according to the village council, Israeli settlers from the 'Ale Zahav settlement uprooted 54 olive trees belonging to three families, and began construction works in the area. In the second, Israeli settlers, reportedly from Yitzhar settlement, vandalized and covered with rocks the opening of a water spring used by the villagers as a supplementary source for domestic consumption, and damaged a pipeline connected to it. The remainder of the incidents resulting in property damage included the stoning of vehicles (three incidents), the throwing of a Molotov cocktail into a Palestinian shop in the Old City of Hebron, and the setting fire to a Palestinian vehicle in the village of Urif (Nablus).

## Area C demolitions continue

During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities demolished, due to the lack of building permits, a total of 16 structures in Area C in three separate incidents, all of which occurred on 7 April, affecting a total of 151 people.

Four of the demolished structures were located in the Bedouin community of Khirbet Samra in the northern Jordan Valley and included three animal shelters and one kitchen. An additional five structures were demolished in the village of Al 'Aqaba, located in the same area, along with a 1,000 meter stretch of an asphalted road and 900 meters of agricultural walls.

Another six uninhabited residential structures were demolished in the Ein ad Duyuk al Foqa community in the Jericho district, where an Israeli military jeep reportedly tied two ropes to structures and dragged them to the ground.

Israeli forces also demolished two water cisterns in the Khamat al Fahma community (Bethlehem) for lack of building permit. The cisterns were built five months ago with the support of an international organization; two families consisting of 37 persons including 14 children, were affected as a result.