



Gaza Closure: Situation Report

18-24 January 2008

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- From 18-21 January, no food, medicine or fuel entered the Gaza Strip
- Power cuts, which were frequent prior to 19 January, were extended in duration to 12 hours per day everywhere in Gaza except Rafah
- The electricity shortage led to at least 40 percent of Gazans being denied access to running water and a breakdown in the sewage system which led to raw sewage being released into the sea at a rate of 30 million liters per day
- Hospitals were forced to rely on emergency generators and reduced their services
- The World Food Programme reported shortages of meat, wheat flour and frozen food in shops. On 23 January, WFP were unable to provide 10,000 of the poorest Gazans with three out of the five foodstuffs they normally receive
- On January 23, more than 100,000 Gazans crossed the border into Egypt after militants blew passages into the steel wall along the border

BACKGROUND

On Friday 18 January, following a surge in conflict between the Israeli army and Palestinian militants affecting civilians on both sides, Israel closed all crossings from Israel into Gaza, cutting it off from all supplies of food, medicine and fuel including humanitarian aid. Erez crossing remained open for Palestinians needing urgent medical treatment and international humanitarian workers. On 22 January, Israel's closure was relaxed but only limited goods were allowed in.

The Gaza Strip is especially vulnerable because it has suffered from years of economic restrictions imposed since the Israeli disengagement in 2005 and increased after Hamas won the 2006 elections. Most recently, Israel put in place new restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza after Hamas seized power in June 2007. These restrictions were further exacerbated at the end of October 2007. Israel holds Hamas responsible for rocket fire from Gaza into Israel.

From 16-22 January, 23 Palestinians were killed and 70 injured as a result of Israeli aircraft fire and military incursions into the Gaza Strip. During the same period, 147 rockets and 82 mortars were fired from Gaza towards Israel, injuring several Israelis, and a sniper attack killed an Ecuadorian national in a kibbutz in Israel.

CROSSINGS

Kerem Shalom, the only goods crossing remaining open since the Israeli lock-down of Gaza in mid-June, was closed from 19-21 January. The Karni conveyor belt, the only part of the crossing that is still operating since mid-June, has also been closed since Friday. Kerem Shalom re-opened on Tuesday for 10 truckloads and on Wednesday for 9 truckloads of humanitarian supplies (compared to an average of 250 truckloads per day prior to mid-June). The IDF indicated on Tuesday that it will not allow any goods for the commercial market.

The Nahal Oz pipeline was open on Tuesday for the supply of 250,000 liters of diesel, 240 tonnes of cooking gas and 765,000 liters of industrial gasoline for Gaza's power plant. On Wednesday, 200,000 liters of industrial gasoline and 120 tonnes of cooking oil entered Gaza. On Thursday, deliveries of 350,000 liters of industrial gasoline, 250,000 liters of diesel, 20,000 liters of petrol and 200 tonnes of cooking gas



were expected. The Gas Station Owners Association of Gaza, which distributes the diesel, has refused to distribute the fuel to gas stations in protest of the low amount that leaves none for private purchase. According to the Coordination Office for Gaza, Israel announced it would let in 2.2 millions litres of industrial fuel this week. This means Israel would have to pump 1.2 million liters on 24 January.

Erez remained open for the urgent medical evacuation of Palestinians and international staff of international organisations and a few items of medical equipment.

ELECTRICITY

The Gaza Strip requires an estimated 240 megawatts of power, of which Israel provides 120 megawatts and Egypt 17 megawatts. On 20 January, the Gaza Power Generating Company (GPGC), which has the capacity to produce 80 megawatts, stopped producing power when its supplies of fuel became too low to continue. During this time, the whole Gaza Strip had no electricity for at least 8 hours per day, except in Rafah which is supplied by Egypt. Many areas suffered cuts of up to 12 hours because of breakdowns in Gaza's aging electricity network.

When fuel supplies resumed on 22 January, the power plant produced 65 megawatts, reducing power cuts to eight hours per day in central Gaza, ten hours every two days in northern Gaza and eight hours every two days in Gaza City. Rafah was largely unaffected.

As of 24 January, GPGC is generating only 45 megawatts in order to ensure operation of the power plant until Sunday morning.

WATER AND SANITATION

The Gaza Strip is relatively flat so electricity is required to move water and sewage. Most people live in multi-story apartments, therefore, electricity is vital for the domestic supply of running water. The frequent power cuts prior to January 19 meant that Gaza's water authority, the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), had to rely on diesel-powered generators. As of 21 January, the CMWU had only enough fuel to pump water from 40 out of its 130 wells, and to pump sewage at 21 out of its 33 pumping stations. At least 40 per cent of Gazans had no running water during this time, while 30 per cent of the population (450,000) still had no water by 23 January.

HEALTH

Between 19-21 January, most hospitals were forced to reduce services to preserve their fuel stocks. Three hospitals (Shifa, Gaza European and Pediatric) ran so low on diesel that they required donations of fuel from UNWRA to remain open.

Between 18-23 January, 79 Palestinians left Gaza via Erez for emergency medical treatment.

FOOD

WFP reports that, in the period from 14 to 20 January, the amount of humanitarian and commercial foods entering the Gaza Strip totaled only 31 per cent of basic food needs. As of 23 January, shops had virtually no fresh meat, wheat flour and grain, and frozen vegetables, fish and meat supplies were running low.

Food aid in Gaza is dispensed by UNRWA to 850,000 refugees and WFP to 300,000 non-refugees. UNRWA has sufficient reserves of food but almost ran out of sacking and bags required to distribute food. WFP has very limited stocks of food for 120,000 of their beneficiaries and on 23 January, 10,000 people were only given a portion of their rations. Food aid provided by UNRWA and WFP only covers around 60-80 per cent of calorific needs. The remainder is provided by the commercial sector.