



Situation Report: The Gaza Strip

7 June 2006

Overview

Karni Crossing (used for goods entering and exiting the Gaza Strip) opened today for imports only and has been open for noticeably longer periods during May compared to previous months. Erez crossing has now been closed for nearly three months for Gazan workers and traders for entry into Israel and UN staff members are still facing problems commuting in and out of the Gaza Strip.

The security situation in the Gaza Strip is creating humanitarian concerns as internal clashes continue daily between Hamas and Fatah supporters. IDF artillery shelling is also continuing in response to the launching of home made rockets by Palestinian militants towards Israel.

Karni Crossing

Karni Crossing was open throughout the month of May on every working day for imported goods.¹ From 22 May, it was also open for exported goods, representing a daily average of 21 truckloads for the latter part of the month. Although the crossing was closed on occasions for an hour or two at a time due to Israeli security concerns, this is an improvement compared to what was seen during the first part of the year when extended closures culminated at times in bread shortages and rationing throughout the Gaza Strip.

Imports at Karni crossing

The daily average for imported truckloads in May was 248. Basic food stock levels that depleted between January and April are now being replenished throughout the Gaza Strip. While the concern over food shortages is no longer imminent in the Gaza Strip, prolonged opening periods have to be sustained on a long term basis.

Exports at Karni crossing

Karni failed to open for exports today for the second successive day. This is in contrast to the recent experience when there was movement across Karni in both directions between 22 May and 5 June.²

Prior to this, Karni had been closed for exported goods since 26 April. The movement of exports is minimal when compared to the number of truckloads of imports. The daily average for exported truckloads in May was nine.

Trends

As of 7 June, Karni Crossing has been closed for 60 days in 2006 (43% of the year). The crossing has been subject to periodic closure by the Israeli authorities since January 2006 on the grounds of security concerns including an attempted car bomb attack by Palestinian militants that was intercepted by Palestinian security services on 26 April. The extent of the closure so far is unprecedented when compared to a closure of 18% of the year in 2005 and 19% in 2004.

The Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) that was reached on 15 November 2005 called for the number of exported daily truckloads to be processed through Karni crossing to reach 150 by 31 December 2005, rising to 400 daily by the end of 2006.

The sustained disproportionate balance between imports and exports has resulted in large revenue losses since January 2006. Recent figures from the Palestine Economic Development Company (PEDC) show that between 1 January and 11 May, more than 12,700 metric tonnes (MT) of produce had been harvested in the greenhouses. Of this, only 1,600 MT has been exported. Total losses incurred by the PEDC now exceed US\$ 9.5 million.

Internal Violence

The security situation in the Gaza Strip is extremely tenuous with daily fighting between Hamas and Fatah supporters. Clashes are taking place throughout the Gaza Strip including on 6 June, when Hamas supporters attacked the Preventive Security Forces (PSF) headquarters in the Tal al Hawa district of Gaza city with rocket propelled grenades. Six members of the PSF required hospital treatment. Heavy fighting between the factions on 4 June led to four deaths including a pregnant woman caught in the cross fire.

As a result, 15 Palestinians have been killed and more than 130 injured. Most of the internal fighting has taken place since 8 May.³

External Violence

IDF artillery shelling continues in particular into the north and northeastern areas of the Gaza Strip. Four homemade Palestinian rockets were fired early morning on 6 June, lightly injuring one Israeli in nearby Sderot. The IDF have fired more than 5,700 shells into the Gaza Strip since end of March.

The IAF has also continued with targeted air-to-ground missile attacks with two members of the Popular Resistance Committee killed on 5 June in Jabaliya camp and four injured, including two passersby.

Limited land leveling incursions by Israeli tanks and bulldozers are now taking place on an almost daily basis extending 200-300 metres inside the Gaza Strip while IDF undercover units have operated on two occasions in north western Gaza Strip in the last week.

As of 6 June, 82 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces fire, including 13 children since the start of the year. More than 160 Palestinians have been injured.

Erez Crossing

Palestinian movement

Erez crossing has now been closed since 12 March for the movement of daily workers and traders crossing from the Gaza Strip into Israel. There is no indication when it will reopen.

During the first week of March, up to 4000 workers were crossing daily into Israel. Combined with the lack of export revenue and the non payment of most PA salaries, the continuing closure at Erez contributes to the daily contraction of the Gaza Strip economy.

Humanitarian Access

UN staff members are still encountering significant difficulties from the Israeli authorities when trying to leave the Gaza Strip via Erez crossing. National staff has been unable to leave the Gaza Strip on official business since 23 February as they are being required to cross the latter part of the crossing on foot. Non diplomatic UN international staff has been unable to leave the Gaza Strip in their vehicles since 7 May as the Israeli authorities insists on searching vehicles without the driver being present. Such a practice contradicts the 1946 Conventions of Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

Only senior UN staff with diplomatic status can therefore cross, and has been required to act as a taxi to shuttle non diplomatic staff in and out of the Gaza Strip.

These restrictions are enforced by the Israelis at a time when the international community is looking at UN agencies for increased resources and operations in response to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Rafah Crossing

Rafah passenger terminal continues to operate under the supervision of the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) with hundreds of passengers crossing daily between the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. As of 31 May, a daily average of 656 passengers has left the Gaza Strip and 678 have arrived.

¹ Karni was closed on 3 May due to the Israeli National Day.

² Karni was closed during the Shavuot holiday 2 June.

³ The first major clash occurred on 22 April at the Islamic University.