

# OCHA occupied Palestinian territory

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## humanitarian UPDATE

1 JUNE – 13 JUNE 2003



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### Overview

Despite a certain political progress on the roadmap, the 1-13 June period saw no reduction in the violence. Two summits took place, between President Bush and Arab partners in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt on 3 June and between Bush and Prime Ministers Sharon and Abbas in Aqaba, Jordan on 4 June.

A series of events in the Gaza Strip led to a violent second week in June, which saw 6 air strikes against identified Palestinians militants and resulted in the death of 23 people. Of these killed, the majority were civilian bystanders.

Accusations again surfaced in Gaza that the Israeli Air Force allowed people to converge around the scene of the missile attacks before discharging an additional missile into crowded areas, thus inflicting maximum casualties. Regardless of the accusations, there appears to be a blatant disregard by the Israeli Government to the inevitable civilian deaths that result from air to ground missiles being fired into densely populated areas.

On 8 June, Palestinian militants in a combined attack involving Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Brigade (Fatah) killed four soldiers at the Erez checkpoint while an Israeli soldier died near the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Returning fire, soldiers killed the five gunmen (three in Gaza and two in Hebron). In the 10 June assassination attempt on Abdel Aziz Rantissi, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) killed a woman and her child. In a second strike, three civilians from the same family were killed when a missile hit

their house. The following day, Hamas claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb in Jerusalem that killed 16 plus the bomber. The IAF launched missile strikes into Gaza City to assassinate Hamas militants and killed two militants and six civilians. IAF missiles fired in two separate 12 June strikes killed an additional nine civilians.

Israel destroyed 13 homes in Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of home demolition victims – representing the 6,283 people made homeless during this intifada – began a sit-in in the office of the Palestinian Governor of Rafah in order to demand compensation and/or housing. The IDF also destroyed the Hebron home of the Jerusalem suicide bomber.

On 12 June the Israeli army announced it was launching an offensive to “completely wipe out” Hamas using “whatever means necessary,” while Hamas released a statement calling for an “earthquake-like response” to the Rantissi assassination attempt and encouraging foreigners to leave Israel for their own safety. In the northern West Bank (Tulkarem), the IDF killed two Islamic Jihad men who were reportedly resisting arrest.

## **Gaza**

### **Erez**

In the wake of the attack at Erez in the early hours of Sunday 8 June, a tight external closure was re-imposed on Gaza affecting Erez crossing into Israel, Rafah to the south and the commercial crossing points of Karni and Sufa on the east of the Gaza Strip. International humanitarian workers continue to experience problems entering and leaving Gaza.

### **Since the Aqaba summit**

- **4 June:** US-Jordanian-Israeli summit in Aqaba
- **8 June:** Four IDF soldiers killed at Erez crossing
- **10 June:** Israeli attempt to kill Hamas leader Rantissi; Israeli strike in Jabalya, Gaza kills 3
- **11 June:** Suicide attack on Jerusalem bus kills 16; Israeli missile strike in Shajaia kills 8 and 2 in Zeitoun, Gaza city
- **12 June:** 7 Palestinians killed in IAF attacks in Sheikh Radwan, Gaza city and 5 in the West Bank (Jenin, Tulkarem, Hebron)

After the attack, Erez crossing was completely sealed with no passage allowed for any persons including diplomatic passport holders. One day later, free passage was possible with no delays being encountered. Over the period of 10-11 June the situation became problematic again, with the re-emergence of the arbitrary instructions with regard to access at Erez and inconsistent IDF rules and decision-making that characterised the first half of May.

On 11 June, delays of up to 6 hours were being reported by ICRC and UN staff seeking to leave Gaza with most individuals eventually giving up and returning to Gaza city. Some International NGOs were simply refused exit being told that only diplomats could pass. On the same day two British Members of Parliament were allowed to exit Erez within 20 minutes while three British advisers to the group had to wait for over 4.5 hours before being allowed to proceed.

On 12 June, the DCL at Erez confirmed that only diplomatic passport holders could leave. However, by early afternoon this had once again changed with non-diplomatic passport holders being able to exit. The amount of time spent at Erez waiting to cross again varied from 25 minutes to 4 hours.

As with the experience from May, such inconsistent directives make planning impossible and severely inhibits the ability of humanitarian agencies to provide their mandated services.

### **Beit Hanoun**

As a result of extensive military incursions into Beit Hanoun over the last month, movement in and out of Gaza City has become extremely difficult for both residents and international organisations. The main road in Gaza (Salah Addin street) has been destroyed by tanks and bulldozers and travel is only possible in 4WD. Additionally, vehicles with Palestinian number plates are not permitted to pass in front of the tanks, which maintain a permanent presence at the Beit Hanoun intersection. This creates major logistical problems for International NGOs, the majority of which rely on Palestinian plated vehicles to move within Gaza.

The lives of the residents of Beit Hanoun have been severely disrupted in the last month, not least due to the damage to infrastructure caused by the movement of Israeli tanks, bulldozers and APCs. The Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG) reported earlier this week that the sewage network in Izbet, north-west of Beit Hanoun, has been destroyed. Sewage is running in the streets and has seeped into the water network through damaged pipes.

### **West Bank**

During May and June it has become increasingly difficult for UN and NGO staff to obtain access through IDF checkpoints in the Nablus governorate without being subjected to harassment by IDF soldiers. The liaison structure and promises made by the IDF to the UN in the aftermath of the killing of Ian Hook does not seem to have produced any significant improvement on the ground. The deteriorating attitude of the IDF soldiers vis-à-vis NGO staff at checkpoints in the Nablus Governorate is a cause of grave concern.

Several incidents have been reported over the last months, including staff members being threatened with machine guns and verbal and physical harassment. It would appear that the IDF has decided that UN staff are to be subjected to more thorough security checks than NGOs. The most serious incidents took place at the following checkpoints:

- Huwwara checkpoint (UN staff threatened with guns; access denials)
- Beit Iba checkpoint (access denials)
- Shave Shamron checkpoint (UN staff threatened at gunpoint and forced to step out of the car and sit on the ground; access denials; car searches).

Palestinian NGOs try to avoid Shave Shamron checkpoint altogether, given the difficulties they face at the checkpoint. The only alternative is to cross by the dirt roads that are often patrolled by the IDF and are considered to be extremely dangerous to use.

### **Closures**

The first two weeks of June saw a notable reinforcement of the closure regime. Though removed by the Municipality of Nablus, the IDF re-instated earth mounds on the main road in front of the Governor's building (Muqataa). Reinforcement of earth mounds has led to the destruction of major water pipelines (see below).

On 3 June, the IDF entered Nablus and Balata refugee camp with several tanks and armoured vehicles. The IDF has erected new earth mounds, sealing all entrances to the Balata camp off. According to the PRCS Nablus, there are 48 injured - 21 by live ammunition, 22 by rubber coated bullets, 4 by shrapnel.

### Water

Six meters of the pipeline between Al Badhan (Nablus North) well and the villages of Asira A-Shamalia and Tallouza were damaged by an IDF bulldozer. The Municipality of Nablus engineers were unable to access the location as the main road (the only access) is closed by ten earth mounds. The villagers managed to mend the pipelines temporarily.

Water pipelines located at Nablus city east, adjacent to Balata camp, were destroyed by the IDF while enforcing the new closure regime on Balata camp. Nablus Municipality repaired the damage.

The main pipeline between Al Badhan well (North of Nablus) and Nablus City was damaged when the IDF constructed a new earth mound at the location. The IDF denied Nablus municipality vehicular access in order to carry out repairs. The Municipality nevertheless managed to repair the damage by transporting tools and equipment on the backs of female mules.

### Statistics for 1 to 13 June

<b>Total number of deaths</b>	Palestinian Israeli	46 (4 under the age of 18 and one 1-year old) 23
<b>Total number of injuries</b>	Palestinian Israeli	294 105
<b>Incidences involving PRCS ambulances</b>	Denial of access	11 (in Gaza, 1 ambulance was denied access at Abu Houli and delayed for 11.5 hrs)
	Delays	21
	Attack/Abuse	3 (1 ambulance had its windows smashed and driver beaten by IDF soldiers at Balata Camp)
	Shooting	1
<b>Home Demolitions</b>	West Bank and Gaza	22 totally destroyed (10 in WB, 12 in Gaza) 10 partially destroyed
<b>Destruction of agricultural land</b>		On 11 June, settlers set wheat and barley fields at Burin (West of Nablus) on fire. The fire ruined the fields, but was put out by local population before reaching olive groves. 25 acres destroyed in Beit Hanoun and Khan Younis.