

OCHA

occupied Palestinian territory

humanitarian UPDATE

16 JULY – 31 JULY 2003



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INSIDE Overview ? Results of OCHA Checkpoint and Barrier Survey ? IDF Roadblock Removals ? Settlement Expansion in Gaza

Overview:

As part of its commitment under the Road Map plan, the Government of Israel ("GOI") undertook several steps aimed at improving the humanitarian situation and normalizing Palestinian life.

The GOI dismantled several key roadblocks on West Bank roads, transferred over US \$16 million out of the withheld (tax clearance) funds to the PA, reduced its military incursions into Palestinian civilian areas and promised several thousand work permits to West Bank residents. Israel's Defence Minister also ordered a review of the overall roadblock policy in the West Bank.

On the whole, the situation in the oPt was quiet relative to prior months and Israeli security services reported a significant decline in warnings of planned attacks against Israeli civilians.

This update examines the IDF's roadblock removals and highlights a case of settlement expansion in Gaza.

NEWS FLASH

COMING ...

OCHA Wall Monitoring Report with maps and satellite images of the entire northern trajectory of the Wall. Available on Wednesday, August 6, at

www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt

...OCHA SURVEY - 396 CHECKPOINTS AND BARRIERS IN NORTHERN WEST BANK

An OCHA survey (25 July) of the northern West Bank (from Ramallah and north) found a total of 396 IDF checkpoints, roadblocks, dirt mounds and ditches that have restricted movement around the West Bank.¹

These roadblocks are can be broken down into the following categories:

IDF manned checkpoints	48
Gates (not connected to the Wall)	30
Earth mounds	229
Ditches	36
Concrete road blocks	53
Total barriers	396

...IDF REMOVES SIX ROADBLOCKS

... Where are the changes?

On 27 July, the IDF removed **six physical barriers** at important road junctions in three West Bank areas: Ramallah, Hebron, and Bethlehem – the first time some of these roadblocks had been removed since March 2001.²

Despite these measures, movement still remains restricted. Several of the roadblocks were replaced by permanent and/or roaming IDF checkpoints that continue to significantly limit Palestinian access.

Even where the IDF has removed some roadblocks – Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron – the nearby cities and villages still remain virtually surrounded by dozens of other roadblocks, checkpoints and other barriers.

Background: Closure, checkpoints and roadblocks

Shortly before the commencement of the Oslo peace process, in early 1993 the IDF imposed the closure policy by erecting over 40 checkpoints in the oPt that restricted the movement of goods and persons into Israel. It also instituted the individual permit system that required all Palestinians to obtain permits. Getting a permit depended on approval by the Israeli security services. Many Palestinians were denied permits, which led to rising unemployment and damage to the Palestinian economy. And, full closure was often imposed on the oPt – limiting all travel for days or weeks – that nullified the permits and banned all Palestinian residents from entering Israel and Jerusalem.

With the onset of the violence in 2000, the IDF tightened the closure regime further, but also added restrictions on movement **within** the oPt. Many roads were closed with cement blocks, dirt mounds and ditches. It also instituted widespread curfews – the most severe form of closure imposed on the Palestinian civilian population – for prolonged periods of time.

¹ A map of OCHA's findings is available at www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt. Next month, OCHA will complete its survey of checkpoints and barriers in the West Bank south of Jerusalem.

² This was the number verified by OCHA field staff – others may have been removed that were not observed.

The internal closure, by checkpoints and other physical barriers, is the most significant IDF policy that has contributed to the collapse of the Palestinian economy and which has prevented tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching schools, workplaces and hospital emergency facilities.

Although these changes are a step in the right direction, much more will be needed to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and bring a return to normal economic life.

... Ramallah Governorate

Surda

On 27 July, the IDF removed the earth mounds blocking the Surda road. Although this has made travel much easier, IDF roaming checkpoints still frequently appear, checking cars and causing long lines and many delays. Travellers have also been detained by the IDF on this road. On 31 July, the IDF stopped a Palestinian Medical Relief Committees ambulance and detained Dr. Khalid Abu Taha in handcuffs for an hour.

The roadblock on Surda road was first erected on 7 March 2001, when the IDF dug two wide trenches and established a checkpoint on the road. A major route of travel connecting Ramallah city to Bir Zeit University and 40 surrounding villages, the IDF action impacted over 100,000 Palestinians locally. It also prevented access for travel between Ramallah (the de-facto political capital of the oPt) and the rest of the northern West Bank.

At first only pedestrians were initially allowed to cross. But subsequently the roadblock-checkpoint went through a number of changes. The trenches were filled in and concrete blocks were put in their place. Dirt mounds fortified with rocks were then built and barbed wire was placed across the road.

Sometimes one lane of vehicles was allowed to pass but on other days this was limited to ambulances and commercial trucks. Then, from 17 October 2001 through 27 July 2003, Surda was closed completely for vehicular traffic.

Ein Arik

On 27 July, the IDF removed the earth mounds on the Betunia - Ein Arik road. This roadblock on the western edge of Ramallah, had isolated the Governorate's western villages from the main urban area of Ramallah.

In principle this move has re-connected these villages with the Ramallah-EI- Bireh urban area. But, the impact of the IDF action is also limited. There are still a large number of other roadblocks (6) and other unmanned barriers that hinder the movement of persons and goods between rural communities west of Ramallah.

One kilometre northwest of Ein Arik, in Deir Ibzi'a, the IDF has set up a roaming checkpoint checking all cars and causing serious delays. Should these additional

barriers be removed, the full beneficial impact of the Ein Arik roadblock removal may be felt.

...Bethlehem Hebron Governorates:

Beit Jala, DCO

For the first time in over a year, the IDF opened up Bethlehem vehicular traffic to the West Bank.³ It moved several roadblocks on the road beside the DCO in Beit Jala (northern Bethlehem) enabling West Bank traffic to flow to and from Bethlehem – particularly for Bethlehem commercial traffic, which has until this point been virtually immobilized.

However, the IDF still restricts movement along this route. An IDF manned checkpoint has been installed and all cars and trucks are thoroughly checked causing long delays and queues of trucks spanning the residential area of Beit Jala.

Adding to the delay is the fact that the IDF has opened only one lane for the two-way traffic and maintains the crossing for only 12 hours a day. All cars from Jerusalem are denied entry.

Beit Sahour

The IDF also re-opened the eastern entrance to Beit Sahour connecting to the Wadi al-Nar road and some of the district's eastern villages.

The Wadi al-Nar road bypasses Jerusalem and is used by Palestinians to travel between the southern and northern West Bank areas. Along this road, the IDF removed the unmanned roadblock and replaced it by another checkpoint one kilometre north that has an iron gate and a sniper tower.

Until now, only Palestinian vehicles with special permits issued by the IDF Coordination Office (DCO) can use this road to travel north towards Ramallah (via Ma'ale Adumim settlement). Public transport is allowed to cross the checkpoint without permits.

Nokdim/Herodion checkpoint

On 27 July, the IDF also opened the Nokdim checkpoint/Herodion (south-east Bethlehem) checkpoint for public transportation. While the passage of privately owned cars is subject to permits, licensed public transport no longer requires IDF clearances. Palestinians can now travel from Bethlehem to Hebron using a number of secondary and tertiary roads but are still unable to use the main route 60 road.

³ Over the past two years, the Gilo checkpoint (Bethlehem – Jerusalem) has been open mainly for foreigners and for Israelis wishing to visit Rachel's tomb. Palestinian residents of Bethlehem need a permit to use this checkpoint. When Israelis enter the checkpoint to pray at Rachel's Tomb, all movement is temporarily halted.

...Hebron area

On 27 July, the IDF removed the roadblock at the junction of Route 60 and the road to Sa'ir and replaced it with a manned checkpoint.

...SETTLEMENT EXPANSION IN GAZA

Although under the Road map settlement activity should be frozen, the Israeli Government announced a tender to build 22 new houses in the Neve Dekalim settlement between Khan Younis and Rafah. Each house has lease options for up to 200 years.

In addition, in early July, Israeli forces began expanding the buffer zone around the Morag settlement road. This road links Morag settlement to the coastal bypass road, which runs into the main Gush Katif settlement bloc. (see attached map).⁴

Field visits by OCHA staff on 23 July and 30 July showed an increase in the width of this buffer zone over the course of one week, with Israeli bulldozers overseen by one tank further expanding the zone on 27 July, according to local families.

Observing the settlement from the edge of the zone, there is now a swathe of land around the original security fence that stretches up to 300 meters in width, comprising the road, the new security fence and the buffer zone.

Other than this settlement activity, since the announcement of the "hudna", Palestinians in Gaza have been able to move more freely than any time since September 2001. Periodic shootings and incursions have occurred throughout central and southern Gaza but no deaths were reported, though a number of houses were damaged by gunfire.

⁴ As witnessed by OCHA field staff, land area according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR).

