



OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

Gaza Closure - Status Report. April 25, 2003.

A full closure was imposed on the Gaza Strip from April 15, 2003 to coincide with the start of the Jewish Passover holiday and the perceived threat of attacks by Palestinian militants.

All border crossings into Israel were closed for Palestinians from the early morning of April 16 although internationals still enjoy free passage. The Karni crossing had already been closed since April 15 due to a grenade attack by a Palestinian militant which killed two and injured three Israeli civilians.

As of April 25, the *external* closure has been imposed for between 10 and 11 consecutive days:

- **Karni** crossing - 11 days.
- **Sofa** crossing which is the main entry/exit point for agricultural products has been closed for 10 days. No goods are passing including humanitarian items such as wheat, flour, rice, lentils and sugar provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to more than 70% of the population in Gaza.
- **Rafah** border crossing from southern Gaza into Egypt has been closed for Palestinians under 35 years since March 15, 2003; more than 3000 people under the age of 35 are currently awaiting permission to cross for educational and medical reasons; on average some 15 patient transportations are made every day into Egypt with regular delays of 5 hours including searches of the ambulances. Currently, only 250 Palestinians over the age of 35 receive permission to cross into Egypt daily.
- **Erez** border crossing has been closed for 10 days thus denying some 10,000 Palestinian workers the ability to access their work place inside Israel.
- **Erez** industrial zone has been closed for 10 days affecting 3500 workers.
- All anchorages in Gaza were suspended between April 16 and 23. As of Wednesday, April 23 the anchorages were restored in Gaza City and Deir El Balah with ships authorised to sail up to the 6 nautical mile limit.

The humanitarian consequences of the lack of 9 day's income must be considered severe in a region where more than 53% of the total work force is unemployed and the income dependency rate is 18 persons. The 13,500 persons that are currently being denied access to their place of work are the prime source of income for a total of 243,000 individuals. (*World Bank*)

The daily economic loss due to the external closure is estimated to be approximately NIS 8 million for trade and NIS 2 million forfeited in labourer's salaries.

A tight **internal** closure was imposed within Gaza from April 16 to 21, 2003 effectively denying all movement between the southern and central areas of the Strip into Gaza City:

- **Abu Houli** checkpoint linking the southern Gaza governorates of Rafah and Khan Younis to Gaza City and the north was closed by a sand barrier.
- The **Beach Road** linking Gaza City and the central sector refugee camps of Deir El Balah, Brej, Nusseirat and Maghazi was closed with Israeli forces periodically firing at civilians who tried to bypass the closure by walking down the beach.

After 5 days of total closure, the road and checkpoint re-opened periodically from April 21 for time periods deemed to be very short and insufficient. Opening and closing times were not clearly announced with the IDF frequently deploying tanks on the Beach Road thus once again, denying access to the civilian population. Normal movement only resumed on April 24 nine days after the initial imposition of the closure.

The closure effectively divided Gaza into three so severely hampering the flow of humanitarian assistance in terms of both services and personnel. Gaza is 50 km in length with people not necessarily residing in the same governorate or locality as where they work. For the UN this had implications in that more than 700 national staff was unable to reach their duty stations for the period of the closure. Similarly, inhabitants living in the southern and central areas of Gaza were unable to reach Shifa Hospital in Gaza City thus denying secondary care health provision to some 50% of Gaza's population. No alternative solution to guarantee free and unlimited humanitarian access was offered or put in place by the IDF.

Members of the Gaza Operational Coordination Group including WFP, UNRWA, Medecins Sans Frontiers and Medecins du Monde have been in liason with the United Nations Special Coordinators Office (UNSCO) to request that the issue of the lack of humanitarian access during such periods of enforced closure are raised with the Task Force on Project Implementation (TFPI).