



Gaza Strip Situation Report

23 March 2006

Supplies of wheat, flour, vegetable oil and fresh fruit are now entering the Gaza Strip following the partial reopening of Karni crossing on 20 March. In addition, Kerem Shalom crossing on the Gaza-Israel-Egyptian border is now open for limited amounts of humanitarian assistance originating from Egypt and as of mid-day 23 March six trucks laden with flour had entered Gaza.

Some bakeries are now baking bread again after most were closed over the weekend. The few bakeries that remained open experienced long queues outside, and rationing had been introduced.

Current shortages of basic essential supplies have arisen because Karni crossing (al Muntar) – the commercial crossing for imported and exported goods from Israel – **has been partially open for only eight days since 22 February**. It was previously shut between 15 January and 4 February meaning only very limited amounts of replacement stocks have been able to enter the Gaza Strip for over two months now.

As of 23 March, Karni crossing has been closed 46 days in 2006 or 56% of the year.¹ In comparison, Karni was closed for a total of 18% of the year of 2005 and 19% of the year in 2004. Without a period of prolonged and uninterrupted opening at Karni, shortages and rationing of basic food commodities will remain of constant concern to the 1.3 million Gazan population.



Photo by: OCHA oPt, 22 March 2006

Import of wheat flour at Karni crossing.

Figure 1: Daily consumption needs/imported quantity of basic food supplies

	Daily consumption need (MT) ²	Quantity Imported (MT)				# of Days with coverage (based on two import days)
		21 March	22 March	23 March	Total	
Wheat Flour	450	852	629	n/a	1,481 +	3 days
Sugar	111	580	823	n/a	1,403 +	12 days
Rice	72	55	88	n/a	143 +	2 days
Cooking oil	44	172	141	n/a	313 +	7 days

Karni

Karni crossing officially reopened for less than one hour on Monday, 20 March with eight truckloads entering Gaza from Israel. The IDF announced in the afternoon that it was shut prematurely on security grounds.

In spite of this warning the crossing reopened on Tuesday, 21 March and 187 trucks brought in essential supplies. On 22 March, 221 truckloads entered while on 23 March, 176 truckloads had entered Gaza by 2pm of which 136 were food supplies. Only five of the 34 passage ways present at Karni are currently operating.

Products entering Gaza in the last four days have included wheat, flour, diapers, rice, vegetable oil, dairy produce, cattle and certain types of fresh fruit. UNRWA has brought in 90 containers since the reopening of Karni.

No exports have been permitted to leave in the last four days which continues to have a detrimental affect on the local Palestinian economy. The inability to export local agricultural produce at the height of the harvesting season has led to hundreds of tonnes of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and strawberries going to waste. The Palestine Economic Development Company (PED) operating the greenhouses in the former settlement areas estimates that the total amount of crops donated/destroyed due to the closures at Karni equals approximately 973 tonnes, with about a value of \$ 5.2 million.

Total export losses for both agricultural and non perishable items are estimated at \$ 500,000/day or more than \$ 23 million in 2006.

Israeli producers are similarly voicing concern over the impact the Karni closure has had on their business citing losses at NIS 15 million per day.

Kerem Shalom

While Kerem Shalom has been declared open by the Israeli authorities since Tuesday, 21 March for the receipt of humanitarian supplies from Egypt, only two trucks laden with flour (around 50 tonnes) arrived into the Gaza Strip on 22 March. As of mid-day on 23 March a further six trucks of humanitarian assistance had crossed from Egypt into Kerem Shalom and of this number, four had continued down a three kilometre stretch of the former Israeli-controlled Philadelphi corridor and entered the Gaza Strip by a road to the east of Rafah passenger terminal.

Palestinian officials at the Rafah passenger crossing informed that delays had occurred on Tuesday as the humanitarian assistance that had arrived in Egypt had not been palletised which is a requirement by the Israelis for all produce entering Kerem Shalom. Consequently on Wednesday night the Egyptians ensured that the flour on the 12 waiting trucks had been pre-palletised in order to speed up the process of delivery to the Gazan population. All pallets arriving on trucks from Egypt are downloaded in Kerem Shalom and the trucks then return across the border after which Palestinian trucks upload the supplies and continue into Gaza.

Concerns remain at the capacity of Kerem Shalom to deal with the large quantities and volumes of relief supplies expected at the border. Palestinian officials at the Rafah passenger crossing states that on the basis of this morning's experience it will take approximately 45 minutes to turn around each truck load in terms of it arriving in Kerem Shalom from the Egyptian border to being downloaded and then continuing onwards to Gaza. On this basis and assuming an eight hour working day it is unlikely that more than 15 truckloads will cross daily. Israeli authorities however estimate that closer to 50 truckloads will cross daily.

Approximately 250 trucks loaded with 5,000 tonnes of flour, 500 tonnes of rice and 960 tonnes of sugar from Egypt are currently en route to Kerem Shalom of which 50 are now waiting at the Egyptian border. Kerem Shalom is expected to be open between 8am and 2pm on Friday to continue processing the aid supplies.



Photo by OCHA 23 March.

Humanitarian supplies enters the Gaza Strip at Kerem Shalom crossing.

Capacity concerns are justified at Kerem Shalom when it is compared with the 176 truckloads that were capable of being processed at Karni this morning between 9.20am and 2pm. Karni is not functioning at full capacity.

Figure 2: Imports of basic commodities since 22 February

Date	Flour		Wheat Flour		Sugar	
	Truckloads	Tonnes	Truckloads	Tonnes	Truckloads	Tonnes
9 March	2	56	5	73	9	398
10 March	2	49	0	0	0	0
12 March	2	63	9	221	5	370
20 March	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
21 March	10	312	20	852	12	580
22 March	13	459	10	629	21	823

Figure 3: Imported goods – Daily flow 2006

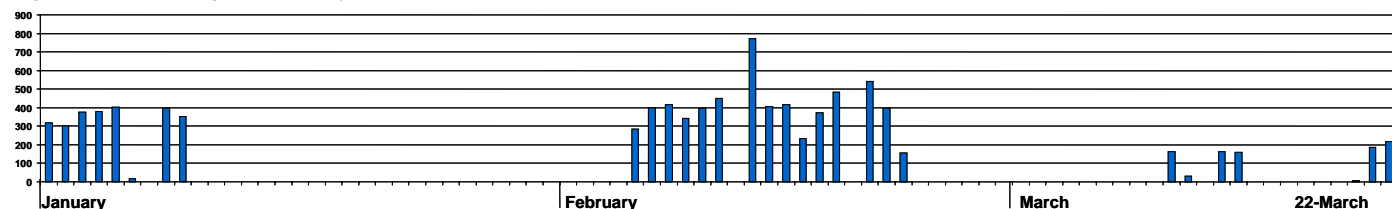


Figure 4: Exported goods – Daily flow 2006

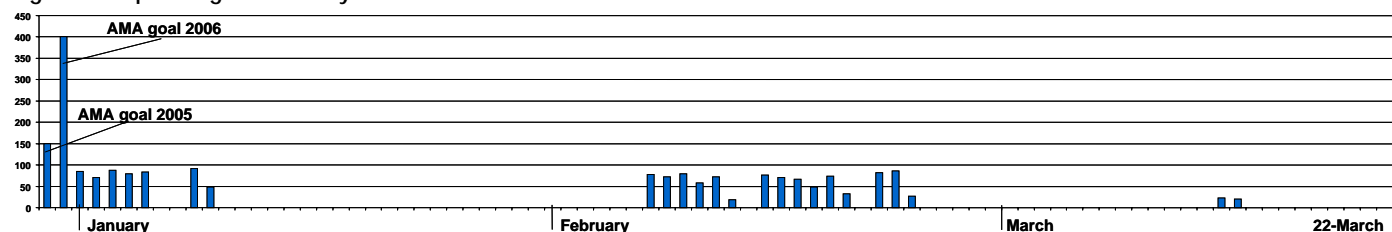


Figure 5: Timeline

5 January:	The IDF requests the Palestinian Authority (PA) to dig a trench west of the Karni crossing to intercept a possible tunnel leading to the crossing. The PA starts this work the same day, digging a 6 metre trench approximately 1km in length.
20 January:	The PA completes the trench. According to the IDF, one tunnel was discovered, while according to the PA, a small hole, possibly the start of a tunnel, connecting to a water pipeline was discovered.
23 January:	The IDF notifies the PA that it has information of another tunnel and requests the PA to dig a deeper trench, this time 10m in depth.
30 January:	Completion by PA of trench. No tunnel located. The IDF requests the PA to dig another trench, 10m in depth, 300m long, 100m northwest of Karni crossing.
31 January:	PA begins third trench.
14 February:	Sufa Crossing closed for security reasons
21 February:	Karni is closed in the evening amid Israeli reports of an explosion in the vicinity of the crossing.
27 February:	The IDF requests the PA to dig a trench, 20m long and 4m deep on a specific location near Karni crossing. The PA complies but no tunnels are found. Digging continues.
1 March:	Israeli Defense Minister Mofaz indicates that Karni will re-open on 2 March. However this did not take place.
9 March:	Karni opens again operating on a partial basis.
14 March:	IDF closes Karni again.
20 March:	Karni crossing opens for imported goods before being closed again less than one hour later. The IDF states security reasons for the sudden closure. Approximately eight truckloads were imported.
21 March:	Karni crossing opens at 11:00am for imported goods



Trench in front of Karni crossing.

Photo by OCHA 22 March.

¹ As of 22 March (not counting 20 March as a closure day despite only operating less than one hour). Also not taken in consideration is that the crossing was only operating for imports on 9, 10, 20, 21 and 22 March. Four of the closure days (10-13 January – ‘Eid al Adha) were due to Palestinian decision making.

² World Food Programme/Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM/ME), 9 March 2006.