



OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS
occupied Palestinian territory

The Gaza Strip: Access Report February 2005

Overview

On 8 February, Palestinian and Israeli leaders declared a truce to end four years of violence between the two sides. Since their meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, the internal and external access restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities affecting the Gaza Strip's population of 1.4 million have become less prohibitive. However, in spite of positive developments, problems still persist in particular with internal movement restrictions.

On 19 February, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced it would continue to ease restrictions for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. There would be an increase in the number of workers entering Israel and Erez industrial zone, and age restrictions imposed on Palestinian males exiting the Gaza Strip via the Rafah crossing would be lifted.

The 19 February announcement followed moves earlier in the month.

- 7 February: Karni Terminal reopened for the passage of agricultural goods and humanitarian aid.
- 9 February: Erez crossing and Erez industrial zone opened for workers. Also on 9 February, Abu Houli checkpoint became operational 24 hours a day for vehicular traffic. Prior to this, the opening hours had been from 7am until 6pm.

Erez crossing and industrial estate

Key dates

- 31 August 2004: Erez crossing was closed for almost three months following the discovery of explosives on a Palestinian worker trying to cross into Israel.
- 28 November 2004: A limited number of merchants and workers were able to re-enter Israel and the industrial zone.
- 14 January: The crossing was again closed following an attack by Palestinian militants in Karni that killed six Israelis (see below).
- 13 February: The crossing reopened and there has been a steady and sustained increase in the number of workers entering Israel and Erez industrial zone.

Worker movement

The first day Erez crossing reopened on 13 February, **207** workers entered **Israel** and a further **300** entered the **industrial zone**. In addition, 75 merchants were able to enter Israel.

Between 27 February and 1 March more than **1,000** workers and merchants went to **Israel** each day and nearly **500** workers entered the **industrial zone**.

Karni Terminal

Key dates

- 14 January: Karni Terminal was closed following an attack in the area that killed six Israelis.
- During the closure, the IDF facilitated the passage of 74 truckloads of humanitarian supplies via Sufa Terminal in the southern Gaza Strip. This took place between 23 January and 3 February.
- 7 February: Karni Terminal reopened. Increased security measures introduced on the Palestinian side of the terminal have led to significant delays in the processing of cargoes.

Truckloads of containers are now waiting at Erez crossing because of vehicle congestion at Karni Terminal.

Imports and exports

In spite of delays, the number of containers processed during February steadily increased for both imports and exports. During the first five working days after the reopening of Karni Terminal, **439** containers **entered** the Gaza Strip while **57 left**; during the last five days of February, **652** containers **arrived** in the Gaza Strip and **138 units left**. The increase in both the quantity of containers arriving and departing the Gaza Strip creates a **more favourable import-export ratio** for the local Palestinian economy.

Humanitarian supplies

Following the suicide attack at Ashdod port on 14 March 2004 that killed 10 Israelis, the movement of container traffic in and out of the Gaza Strip became extremely difficult. By January 2005, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees had more than 900 loaded containers waiting at Ashdod and 350 empty ones stuck inside the Gaza Strip. In the last 10 days, a temporary agreement has been reached with the Israelis that will allow **20 full containers to enter the Gaza Strip daily** Sunday through Thursday via Sufa, and **40 empty containers will leave the Gaza Strip daily** Monday through Thursday via Karni Terminal.

Rafah crossing

Key dates

- 12 December 2004: Rafah crossing closed following the deaths of five Israeli soldiers during an attack by Palestinian militants.
- 21 January: The crossing reopened for arrivals from Egypt.
- 1 February: People were allowed to leave the Gaza Strip; departure was not possible for Palestinian males aged 16 to 35. This group, comprising more than 30% Of the total Gaza Strip population, had been prevented from leaving the Gaza Strip since 17 April 2004, with all but a very few exceptions.
- 20 February: Palestinian males aged 16 to 35 were allowed to leave the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian movement

In February, the number of people leaving the Gaza Strip has **steadily decreased**. In a 19 February announcement, the IDF acknowledged that security precautions have increased with the lifting of age restrictions. During the first half of February, up to **450** passengers were **departing daily**, this figure has now **dropped to approximately 250**.

Palestinian officials at the Rafah crossing said on 1 March that a backlog of patients is developing. There has always been a need to refer patients requiring specialist treatment to health facilities outside of the Gaza Strip. Officials reported that any patient arriving on Tuesday, 1 March would be unlikely to depart from the Gaza Strip before Sunday 6 March, unless they were in a critical condition. Ambulances have not been able to transfer patients from the Palestinian side of the border for the last three months. People with serious health concerns have traveled in service taxis with other passengers.

Abu Houli junction

While there is now 24 hour movement through Abu Houli junction linking the southern Gaza Strip with the rest of the Gaza Strip, restrictions still exist.

Key dates

- 17 June 2004: Since this date, no private vehicles have been able to cross the junction. All travel is in service taxis or commercial trucks, people are also not able to cross the junction on foot.

Palestinian movement

Movement of traffic through Abu Houli is not two-way and **delays occur**. As Traffic moves from north to south across the junction, vehicles on the southern side wait for 20 to 30 minutes; the process is then reversed as the traffic from the south gets priority and vehicles on the northern side then have to wait.

Palestinian enclaves

Al Mawasi

Situated within the Gush Katif Israeli settlement block in the southern Gaza Strip are approximately 5,000 Palestinians living in Al Mawasi. **Movement** into the enclave has been and **remains tightly controlled** by the IDF – in spite of the recent easing of restrictions. Entry and exit at Al Mawasi is only possible on foot via Tufah checkpoint in the west of Khan Younis camp. The checkpoint opens twice daily from approximately 8am to 1pm, and 2:30pm to 5pm. All Al Mawasi ID holders between 16 and 35 years of age still require prior coordination with the IDF to pass through the checkpoint.

Siafa

In the northern Israeli settlement block there are approximately 190 Palestinians living in Siafa. **Movement** into the enclave **remains tightly controlled** by the IDF. The opening hours in and out of the Siafa enclave are 7:30am and 2pm. The IDF controlled entry-exit gate is not open for a fixed time and closes again once people who have been waiting are allowed to pass. The limited number of hours has created persistent problems for school children who need to access nearby schools. Since 13 February, the IDF has permitted Palestinians aged 30 and older to pass in and out of the area on foot without prior coordination. Both males and females aged 16 to 29 require 48 hours prior coordination.

Al Ma'ani

There is a third enclave Al Ma'ani, where around 180 Palestinians live, inside the Kfar Darom settlement. The situation here has not been as acute as in Al Mawasi and Siafa as the entry-exit gate generally opens four times daily. However, life inside the enclave remains problematic.

Fishing

The Palestinian Department of Fisheries reported an **increase in the distance of the fishing zone** available to Palestinian fishermen. Since the election of Mahmoud Abbas, the Israelis are now permitting fishing up to 10 nautical miles from the Gaza Strip coast compared to 6 nautical miles previously. Fishing is still not permitted over most of the Al Mawasi coastline as has been the case since October 2003.

04 March 2005

The Gaza Strip

