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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
occupied Palestinian territory

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

10 - 16 March 2010

Latest Developments since Tuesday, 16 March

18 March: A rocket launched by Palestinian factions in Gaza killed a foreign worker in the town of Ashkelon in southern Israel.

West Bank

Violent clashes result in more than 200 Palestinian injuries

In one of the most violent weeks recorded in the West Bank in the past few years, 221 Palestinians and 17 members of the Israeli security forces were wounded in several demonstrations and clashes, the large majority of which took place in East Jerusalem and its vicinity. This week's number of Palestinian injuries is the highest recorded in a week since OCHA began recording casualties in 2005. None of the clashes, however, resulted in fatalities.

The main confrontations occurred on 16 March, beginning in the Old City of East Jerusalem and extending later to nearby neighborhoods and localities. As a result, a total of 166 Palestinians, including at least 13 women and ten children, and, according to Israeli media sources, 15 Israeli policemen were wounded. Approximately one quarter of the Palestinian injuries were inflicted by rubber-coated metal bullets fired by the police, including at least eight people severely injured in their face, one of whom lost an eye. The rest of the Palestinian injuries were caused either by physical assault or tear gas and stun grenade firing. Six women were injured when Israeli forces forcibly broke into their houses in the Old City. Approximately 60 Palestinians were arrested during the confrontations. Additionally, on 15 and 16 March, Palestinian institutions declared a partial commercial strike in East Jerusalem protesting several days of restrictions imposed by Israeli forces on the entry of Palestinians into the Old City and Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

In an already tense environment, the demonstrations and clashes coincided with the opening of a synagogue in the Old City the previous day, which prompted calls from some Palestinian political leaders to protect Al Aqsa mosque. This week's events follow increasing tension and confrontations over the previous two weeks (see previous Protection of Civilians weekly reports for details). Tensions have been enhanced by recent decisions and statements by Israeli authorities regarding demolition of Palestinian homes and further Israeli settlement expansion in East Jerusalem, including approval for the construction of 1,600 settlement units announced during the week.

Also on 16 March, Palestinians clashed with Israeli forces in other West Bank sites and localities, including the 'Atara partial checkpoint in northern Ramallah, and various towns and villages in Ramallah, Hebron, and Bethlehem, resulting in the injury of 23 Palestinians, two Israeli settlers (see also settler section) and two Israeli soldiers.

Israeli forces injured another 32 Palestinians in confrontations that took place during the rest of the week, including 20 during the weekly protest against the expansion of Hallamish settlement in the Ramallah area, and four during anti-Barrier protests in Beit Jala (Bethlehem) and Bil'in (Ramallah). During the week, the Israeli military distributed orders declaring the villages of Bil'in and Ni'lin as closed military areas on Fridays, from 8 am till 8 pm, for a period of six months, from mid-February until mid-August. The orders place any non-residents entering the area without permission from the Israeli military commander of the area at-risk of arrest.

Overall this week, Israeli forces conducted 90 search operations inside Palestinian towns and villages, slightly below the 2010 weekly average of 112; as in previous weeks, the majority of this week's operations took place in the northern West Bank (46).

Israeli settler-related incidents

This week there were six settler-related incidents resulting in either injuries or damage of Palestinian property, compared to a weekly average of three incidents since the beginning of 2010. Five additional incidents affected Israeli settlers.

Palestinian injuries included a man who was wounded when a group of settlers threw stones at houses and vehicles in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem; at least ten vehicles, including a UN car, were damaged during the incident. The incident triggered clashes between Palestinians and settlers; the Israeli police came to the scene after the settlers left the area. In a separate incident, two Palestinians were injured when physically assaulted by settlers while working their land near Jit village (Qalqiliya).

Five settlers sustained their injuries this week when hit by stones or Molotov cocktails, thrown by Palestinians, while driving near West Bank villages in the areas of Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nablus. Following the latter incident in Nablus, Israeli forces imposed a curfew for six hours on the village of Huwwara. Additional incidents involving stone throwing at both Palestinian and Israeli vehicles were reported throughout the week, resulting in no injuries.

Another four incidents during the week resulted in damage to Palestinian agricultural property. In one of these, settlers from the settlement of Yitzhar vandalized a grove belonging to the villages of 'Urif and Einabus (Nablus), damaging 50 almond and fig trees; in a separate incident, settlers from Bat Ayin (Bethlehem) set fire to a number of olive trees in the nearby Abu Rish Valley in the village of Safa; in the remaining two incidents, according to Palestinian sources, settlers vandalized 17 olive trees belonging to Qaryut village, near the settlement of Eli, and set fire to a minibus belonging to Burin village.

Update on demolitions and demolition orders

On 14 March, the Israeli authorities demolished four fruit and vegetable stands near Bardala village in Area C of the Jordan Valley and damaged the goods, due to the lack of construction permits. These demolitions affected the livelihoods of four families. Also this week, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) distributed stop work orders against five under-construction residences in Wadi an Nis area (Bethlehem), due to the lack of permits. Thus far in 2010, OCHA has recorded the demolition of 57 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and another three (self-demolitions) in East Jerusalem, including residences, animal pens and fruit and vegetable stands.

Access updates

A general closure on the West Bank was imposed between 12 and 16 March by the Israeli authorities, who justified it as a security measure in light of clashes that occurred in East Jerusalem last week. As a result, Palestinians with valid permits were prevented from entering Israel and East Jerusalem, except medical cases and Palestinian employees of international NGOs and UN agencies. In addition, the Israeli authorities continued to restrict access to Al Aqsa Mosque compound for men under the age of 50 as of the end reporting period; women were prohibited from entering the compound. Heavy deployment of Israeli forces and flying checkpoints in areas leading to the Old City of Jerusalem were also reported during the clashes.

Also this week, the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled that the village of Sheikh Sa'ed, located outside the Israeli-declared boundary of Jerusalem but historically linked to the Jabl Mukabar neighborhood of East Jerusalem, would remain on eastern ("West Bank") side of the Barrier. However, the Court ordered that the Barrier checkpoint next to the village be open 24 hours a day to allow access to East Jerusalem for Palestinians holding Israeli IDs or special permits.

At 'Attil Barrier gate in Tulkarm, the Israeli army forced 21 farmers, returning from their land in the closed area between the Barrier and the Green Line, to take off all their clothes during checking. One of the farmers refused to comply and called the Palestinian DCL (District Coordination Liaison Office), who contacted its Israeli counterpart and the strip searching was stopped.

Also this week, Israeli forces closed a road gate, located on the main road connecting Tulkarm and Jenin governorates, while settlers from the nearby settlement of Hermesh marched from Reikhan checkpoint (Jenin) to the settlement; the gate was closed for 11 hours.

Gaza Strip

No direct-conflict casualties for the second week in a row; Israeli airstrikes destroy a factory

For the second consecutive week, there were no Palestinian casualties recorded in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Gaza Strip. Since the beginning of 2010, Israeli forces have killed ten Palestinians and injured 19 others in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's airstrikes on Gaza, however, continued during the week; on 11 March, Israeli airstrikes bombed and destroyed a plastic factory in Al Qarara area, east of Khan Younis, and further airstrikes were launched against tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border. Since the beginning of 2010, three Palestinians were killed and three others injured during air strike operation involving the bombing of tunnels.

On two different occasions during the week, Israeli tanks and bulldozers entered a few hundred metres into the so called "buffer" zone inside the Gaza Strip and withdrew after conducting land leveling operations. In one of these incidents, on 12 March, tanks penetrated east of Bureij refugee camp, accompanied by heavy shooting at a nearby civilian area; no injuries or damages to houses were reported. On 11 March, the Popular Committee Against the Israeli Wall held its weekly demonstration against the access restrictions enforced by Israeli forces in the area of the "buffer" zone. Israel troops opened warning fire at the demonstrators; no injuries were reported. The "buffer" zone, which was originally declared by the Israeli authorities following Israel's "disengagement" in

2005, was officially expanded from 150m to 300m in May 2009, though access restrictions are enforced, at times, up to 1 km from the border.

Palestinian armed factions have continued to fire a limited number of rudimentary rockets towards southern Israel, including military bases, resulting in no injuries or damage to property during the week; one rocket reportedly landed in an open area in southern Israel, but did not result in casualties or damage to property (also see latest development).

Internal security incidents continue; one killed and six injured

The internal security situation inside Gaza continues to deteriorate. This week, one Palestinian was killed and another five injured in a family dispute, northeast of Rafah. Also, a Palestinian faction member was wounded, east of Beit Lahia, during internal armed clashes. In a separate incident, unknown persons detonated a bomb near a police station in Gaza City, resulting in no injuries, but partial damage to the fence of the station. Also during the week, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) reported that a Palestinian was kidnapped and tortured by unknown gunmen near his house in Gaza City.

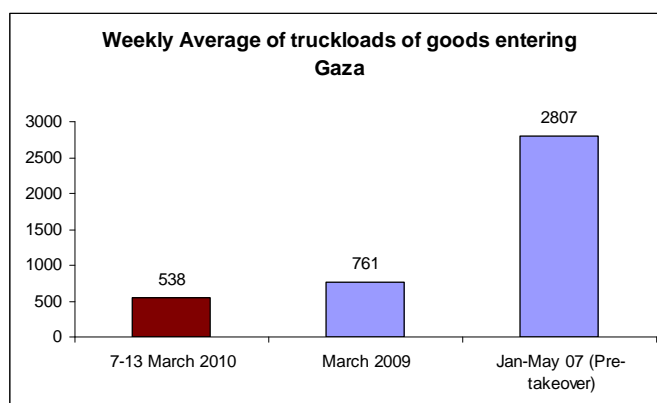
Rafah Crossing exceptionally opened: over 5,000 exit Gaza

The Rafah border crossing with Egypt, which has been officially closed since June 2007, was exceptionally opened on five consecutive days between 1 and 5 March. Information, made available this week only, indicates that during the period of opening the crossing, a total of 5,280 Palestinians left the Gaza Strip and another 819 were allowed to return. Access via the crossing was limited to humanitarian cases, including patients and their accompaniers, and other Palestinians, including students enrolled in universities abroad, businessmen and holders of visas to other countries. In addition, 580 Palestinians who submitted their names to the local authorities were denied exit by the Egyptian authorities. Rafah Crossing opens only sporadically; prior to the blockade, during the first six months of 2006, an average of 650 people crossed per day each way. In spite of the occasional openings, the uncertain and unpredictable time and length of the openings, along with vague criteria and overcrowding, create difficulties for Palestinian travelers passing through Rafah Crossing.

Limited exports and glass imports continue

This week, nine truckloads of cut flowers left Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing. Since 10 December 2009, following a period of seven months of no exports, 96 truckloads have exited Gaza, including 63 truckloads of cut flowers (over ten million stems) and 33 truckloads of strawberries (52 tonnes), exports of which stopped on 10 February. The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC) has indicated that 30 million cut flowers are expected to be

exported during this season (ending on 20 May 2010). Glass imports continued during the week; since 29 December 2009, a total of 127 truckloads carrying over 80,000 sheets of glass were imported.



Shortage of industrial fuel continue, resulting in long rolling blackouts

Imports of industrial fuel needed to operate the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) have declined again for the sixth consecutive week. This week, approximately 1.2 million liters were transferred into Gaza, compared to a weekly average of 1.5 million liters since late December 2009 and 2.2 million litres prior. This week's imports of fuel represented 39 percent of the 3.15 million litres, needed to operate the GPP at full capacity. As a result, the majority of the population in Gaza experienced power cuts of 8-12 hours per day.

Also this week, the electricity deficit in the Khan Younis governorate reached up to 60 percent, when one of the electrical lines, fed by the Israeli Electricity Company, experienced technical difficulties. This power deficit, which lasted for three days (between 13 and 16 March), triggered long blackouts that reached up to 12-16 hours per day within the governorate.

Cooking gas shortfalls continue

In contrast to declining imports of industrial fuel, cooking gas imports continue to increase. This week, a total of 890 tonnes of cooking gas entered Gaza, compared to 843 tonnes last week. This amount, however, constitutes only 64 percent of the weekly needs of gas, as estimated by the Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA). As a result, the cooking gas rationing scheme introduced in November 2009 remains in place. The GSOA also indicated that at least 2,000 tonnes of cooking gas and an uninterrupted transfer of 200-250 tonnes each day have to be made in order to overcome the ongoing shortfall.