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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

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New Developments since 7 April

On 8 April 2009, clashes erupted when approximately 200 Israeli settlers (some armed) from Bat Ayin settlement, west of Bethlehem city, approached the Palestinian village of Safa. Reports indicate that Israeli troops and Israeli settlers opened fire towards Palestinians participating in an exchange of stone-throwing with Israeli settlers. Eleven Palestinians were injured with live ammunition, including one seriously, and four with rubber-coated metal bullets. At least 23 cases of asphyxiation due to tear gas were reported among Palestinians and were treated in the field. Israeli troops managed to separate the two groups and re-occupied a vacant house previously used as an observation post. Presently, the situation is calm and access to and from the village faces no obstacle. The Israeli army remains posted in the house.

West Bank

On 2 April, an unknown Palestinian man entered the Israeli settlement of Bat Ayin, west of Bethlehem city and killed a 13-year-old child and wounded a seven-year-old child. The assailant reportedly fled to the nearby Palestinian village of Safa. The Israeli army then entered the village, which has an approximate population of 350, imposed a nine-hour curfew and ordered all males 16 years and older to gather for interrogation. Six arrests were made. Israeli troops closed all entry points and prevented residents from leaving the village until 6 April, when Israeli troops withdrew. Troops returned the same day after settlers from Bat Ayin opened fire at a distance. No injuries were reported. Other access restrictions were reported in the area, including multiple flying checkpoints and the closure of the gate to the nearby town of Beit Ummar for three consecutive days.

Overall, Israeli security forces killed one Palestinian and injured 35 others (including 15 children) during the week. On 7 April, in East Jerusalem, Israeli forces in the vicinity of a house demolition in Sur Bahir (see below) shot and killed a 20-year-old Palestinian male who, according to the Israeli security forces, had attempted to run them down. Three members of the Israeli security forces were lightly wounded. Incidents in which Palestinians were injured during the week included: during anti-Barrier demonstrations (8); settler violence incidents (9); at flying checkpoints (4); following stone-throwing at military jeeps (4

children); during search and arrest operations (5) and other incidents (5).

Passover holiday: access for West Bank Palestinians to East Jerusalem prohibited

The Israeli army imposed a general closure on the West Bank, due to the Jewish holiday of Passover, to last from 12am on 7 April through midnight on 18 April. All Palestinians with permits, with a few exceptions, are barred from entering East Jerusalem and Israel during the Jewish holiday.

IDF constructs road to connect settlements

The Israeli army began construction of a 2.2 kilometre road connecting the settlements of Betar illit and Ge'vaot (Bethlehem) on land requisitioned in January 2009.

Increase in IDF searches and arrests

The Israeli army conducted 145 search operations throughout the West Bank, up from 107 during the previous week and 40% more than the 2008 weekly average; Israeli forces arrested 121 Palestinians during the week, 44% more than the average number of weekly arrests during 2008. During the week, Israeli soldiers accompanied by dogs carried out midnight raids of two homes in the Jordan Valley. Israeli troops used explosives to enter the homes. In one of the incidents, dogs attacked three people, who were treated for their injuries.

Over the past three weeks, the Israeli army distributed orders during search campaigns to

more than 20 young men in five locales in the Tulkarm district, ordering them to report to Israeli intelligence. The same pattern has been observed recently during search operations in Qalqiliya, Salfit and Jenin districts.

Settler violence

Settler violence was reported in the Nablus, Jerusalem and Hebron districts. Most of the incidents were from the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron City (H2). Following last week's announcement concerning the upcoming opening of the Kiryat Arba road to limited Palestinian traffic, H2 settlers carried out a series of attacks against Palestinian properties, including damaging at least seven vehicles and throwing stones at Palestinian houses. Several incidents of violence by settlers from Ma'on settlement in south Hebron were also reported during the week. Of particular concern was the reported beating of three children (ages 10, 14 and 16) by six masked settlers from Ma'on settlement. Before the beating, the children had been grazing sheep near the entrance of the settlement and had been ordered to stop by Israeli soldiers, who briefly detained them at a nearby bus stop. When soldiers left the area, the settler attack on the children took place.

East Jerusalem demolitions continue; second "deterrent" demolition carried out

During the week, the Israeli authorities demolished three structures, including two residential structures, one of which was uninhabited. The inhabited structure was located in Sur Bahir neighbourhood and was the family home of a Palestinian who killed three Israelis with a bulldozer in West Jerusalem in July 2008 and who was killed in the incident. Ten people, including five children, all refugees, were displaced. In March, the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) rejected a petition objecting to the demolition of the house on the grounds that the demolition would serve as a means of "deterrence". This followed a similar ruling by the HCJ in January 2009.

Gaza Strip

Cease-fire remains fragile

The Israeli military killed two Palestinian militants during armed clashes east of

Jabaliya in northern Gaza. Since the implementation of unilateral ceasefires on 18 January 2009, a total of 16 Palestinians, including six unarmed civilians, have been killed. No Palestinian or Israeli injuries were reported from either Israeli air strikes or Palestinian rocket-fire during the week. Two Palestinians were arrested while attempting to infiltrate Israel via the border fence southeast of Bureij Camp.

Referral abroad of patients halted

Following the take-over of the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) on 22 March by the Hamas authorities in Gaza, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Ramallah has stopped the approval and funding of applications processed by RAD. Without this approval, the Israeli and Egyptian authorities do not allow patients to leave Gaza through the Erez and Rafah crossings. This situation has exacerbated an already difficult situation for chronically ill patients from Gaza and has halted completely the processing of new referral documents, putting the lives of chronically-ill patients at risk. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that since 22 March, a total of 450 patients have applied to the RAD, of whom 20 are in need of immediate medical intervention and 167 are classified as urgent. According to WHO, since 22 March, at least two patients have died while waiting for their referral approval. Over 70 patients exited Erez during the week, following coordination with human rights organizations. Some of these cases received financial approval prior 22 March or were financially supported by human rights organisation

Military court in Gaza sentences four Palestinians to death - in absentia

According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, a military court in Gaza sentenced four Palestinians to death on 7 April. The four Palestinians were convicted of murdering a lecturer at the Islamic University in July 2006 during armed inter-factional clashes. Three other Palestinians were sentenced in the same case to life imprisonment with hard labor. Only one of the seven convicted is currently detained by the Hamas Authorities. The others escaped prison on 28 December 2008, when Israel targeted Gaza's Central Prison during Operation "Cast Lead." These

sentences bring the total number of death sentences issued by the military court in Gaza in 2009 to seven.

Israeli bans on access to agricultural land near the border and fishing zones continue

During the reporting period, Israeli forces continued to open fire on Palestinian farmers and fishermen. Several houses sustained damage when Israeli forces opened fire on farmers east of Al Maghazi Camp, forcing them to leave their land. In addition, Israeli patrol boats opened fire on six occasions towards Palestinian fishermen enforcing the limitation of the fishing zone to three nautical miles. According to Al Mezan human rights centre, on 6 April, Israeli patrol boats opened fire on a fleet of Palestinian fishing boats carrying 60 fishermen. During the incident, Israeli patrol boats detained ten fishermen, including two children, and confiscated their boats. The fishermen were released the next day. No injuries were reported.

Blockade continues with minor improvements

Gaza imports remain restricted and largely limited to food items, while goods such as construction materials, spare parts for public infrastructure and industrial inputs remained barred. Despite ongoing restrictions, minor improvements in the entry of other goods were noted during the reporting period. Three truckloads of pipes for the private sector as well as beehives entered, the first time since October 2008. Also, 17% more cooking gas entered between 29 March and 04 April, compared to the weekly average of the previous two weeks (1,286 tonnes, compared to 1,095 tonnes). This week's amount, however, constitutes only 74% of the needed weekly amount estimated by the Palestinian Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA). According to GSOA, around 100,000 litres of diesel and 70,000 litres of benzene entered Gaza each day via the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border. Both have been restricted from entering Gaza through the Israeli-controlled crossings since 2 November 2008.

Also during the week, 50 million NIS were allowed entry to cover salaries for over 65,000 PA staff. According to the Bank of Palestine in Gaza, this amount represents only 20% of the needed monthly salaries. As a result, employees were unable to withdraw their full salaries. In addition, between 29 March and 4 April, two truckloads of cut flowers were exported through Kerem Shalom Crossing. Since 12 February 2009, a total of 11 truckloads carrying 499,000 flowers have been exported.

150,000 still without electricity

The Gaza Power Plant (GPP) continues to function at around 69% of its full capacity (55 MWs out of 80MWs) mainly due to the lack of spare parts and limitations on fuel. This created an almost 23% electricity deficit throughout the Gaza Strip, resulting in intermittent power cuts of two to five hours per day, affecting 90% of Gaza population. The remaining 10% of the population (150,000) remain without any electricity due to lack of necessary materials needed to fix damage sustained to the electricity network during Israel's recent military offensive. On 7 April, two truckloads of electrical transformers and cables were allowed entry into Gaza, the first such shipment since 3 March 2009.

35,000 without access to piped water

Around 135,000 Palestinians in Gaza continue to be affected by lack of water due to damage sustained to water networks during the recent Israeli military offensive: 35,000 have no access to piped water, while around 100,000 receive water only every 2-3 days. Access to water will remain difficult unless necessary spare parts for repairing network damage are allowed to enter Gaza. The wastewater flooding on 27 March, caused by the collapse of a wall at one wastewater disposal lagoon in North Gaza has been temporarily contained, allowing the resumption of operations at the affected lagoon.