

HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN

MONTHLY REPORT

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Overview

In mid-September, confrontations erupted between Palestinian protestors and Israeli police in the Al Aqsa Mosque (Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount), in the Old City of East Jerusalem. The clashes are ongoing, and as of this writing have resulted in dozens of Palestinian injuries, as well as damage to the mosque, and led to wider demonstrations throughout the city. The UN Security Council expressed grave concern over escalating tensions and called for "the exercise of restraint, refraining from provocative actions and rhetoric, and upholding unchanged the historic status quo at the Haram Al-Sharif."¹ Past UN resolutions have declared Israel's unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem unlawful.²

The Palestinian protests, which had built up for several weeks, took place in the context of access restrictions on the entry of Muslims to the site, alongside increasing number of visits by Israeli groups, including senior Israeli officials and prominent right-wing figures. These visits are viewed by Palestinians as part of an Israeli plan to change the status quo regarding the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount. This intent has been denied by the Israeli authorities.

The Israeli authorities viewed Palestinian protests within the Compound as aggression against Jewish worshippers particularly during the current Jewish high holidays. After an Israeli man was killed in a stone-throwing incident in East Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said his government would change open-fire orders and increase minimum sentences for such offenses, as well as imposing heavy fines on the parents of minors who commit these offenses.

Tensions in East Jerusalem have also been recently exacerbated by settlement expansion in Palestinian neighborhoods. As highlighted in this Humanitarian Bulletin, on 26 August and 1 September, Israeli settlers, under police escort, moved into two residential buildings, reportedly sold by the Palestinian owners, in the heart of the Silwan neighborhood.

August also witnessed the highest number of Palestinian structures demolished by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) in a single month in five years: 145 structures in 37 communities. Over 200 people were displaced, with six Bedouin communities in Jerusalem periphery accounting for close to seventy per cent of those displaced. These communities are among 46 communities identified as at heightened risk of forcible transfer due to a "relocation" plan advanced by the Israeli authorities.

On a positive note, the volume of construction materials entering Gaza significantly increased; overall, more than 10,000 truckloads of goods entered into the Gaza Strip via the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing, the highest number ever recorded through this crossing. This increase can be largely attributed to an increase in the number of truckloads of construction materials that entered Gaza through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, which doubled compared to the monthly average since the beginning of 2015.

This development is tempered by an increase in the number of restricted items defined by the Israeli authorities as "dual" civilian/military-use items, which are prohibited from being imported into Gaza without special authorization. The range of items on the list is far broader than what is internationally recognized as "dual use" items and includes items such as basic construction materials, medical equipment, materials needed for emergency preparedness and response to emergencies by first responders such as the Palestinian Civil Defence, etc. In his monthly briefing to the Security Council, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process warned that "restrictions on imports of goods defined as having a "dual use" continue to impede humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction efforts."³

Endnotes

¹ UNSC, Press Statement on Situation in Jerusalem, SC/12052-PA/L/2196, 17 SEPTEMBER 2015

² Inter alia, resolutions 252, 267, 456, 476 & 478.

³ Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East, 15 September 2015, <http://www.unsco.org/Documents/Statements/MSCB/2008/Security/20Council%20Briefing%20-%2015%20September%202015.pdf>