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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
occupied Palestinian territory

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

6 - 12 January 2010

West Bank

This week, Israeli forces injured 21 Palestinians throughout the West Bank. This figure is slightly above the weekly average of 17 Palestinian injuries during 2009.

Seven of this week's injuries, including two boys, occurred during one incident in which, Israeli forces physically assaulted a group of Palestinians grazing their sheep in the vicinity of the Havot Maon settlement outpost near Twani village (Hebron); two of the seven suffered from inhalation of tear gas shot by the soldiers after other residents gathered at the scene. Another eleven injuries occurred as a result of clashes with Israeli forces during a peaceful protest against the expansion of Hallamish settlement in the Ramallah area (eight injuries) and in weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations in Bil'in (two), Ramallah governorate, and Al Ma'sara (one), Bethlehem governorate.

The remaining three injuries were sustained in three separate incidents at flying (ad hoc) checkpoints in the southern West Bank, including a man and a 17-year-old boy who were shot with live ammunition; the former was shot after allegedly refusing to stop and the latter after allegedly throwing a Molotov cocktail at a checkpoint. Flying checkpoints are usually more disruptive than permanent checkpoints, as they are unpredictable and checking procedures at them are sometimes more time-consuming. This week, 95 such checkpoints were deployed by Israeli forces throughout the West Bank, compared to a weekly average of 65 during 2009.

On four separate occasions during the week, Palestinians threw stones at Israeli forces at Qalandiya checkpoint, the main entrance through the Barrier into East Jerusalem from the north. While no injuries were reported, one of the incidents triggered the closure of the checkpoint for ten hours (from 8 pm until 6 am).

Israeli forces conducted 100 search operations inside Palestinian villages, the majority of which took place in the northern West Bank (69), the same as the weekly average during 2009. In one of the operations, the Israeli army raided Ramallah City center (in Area A, under Palestinian security responsibility) and searched an apartment inhabited by internationals, arresting a Czech national, allegedly after her visa had expired; the woman was later deported.

Significant decline in settler-related incidents

This week, there was a significant decline in the number of settler-related incidents affecting Palestinians (six), compared to the previous week (11), resulting in one injury. A further ten incidents affecting settlers were recorded during the week, leading to the injury of one settler.

On 6 January, a group of settlers from Gil'ad Farm outpost (Nablus) physically assaulted and injured a 70-year-old man while working on his farm in the proximity of the outpost. In another incident, settlers harassed a group of Palestinian farmers while they were working on their land in Abu Rish Valley (Hebron), causing the farmers to leave their land; this week, Israeli forces declared the valley a closed military zone. Also this week, settlers from Hallamish settlement (Ramallah) uprooted approximately 200 olive trees, located near the settlement, belonging to farmers from An Nabi Saleh and Deir Nidham villages (Ramallah). This incident occurred in the wake of the aforementioned demonstration that took place earlier against the expansion of the settlement, during which settlers stoned Palestinian demonstrators, while Israeli troops present on the spot did nothing to protect the Palestinians from the settler stoning.

Lack of adequate law enforcement against violent Israeli settlers continues to be of concern. The Israeli media reported that the Israeli police decided to close the main investigation file on an attack perpetrated by Israeli settlers in September 2008, due to the "lack of evidence". In this incident, which followed the stabbing of an Israeli child in the settlement of Yitzhar by a Palestinian, dozens of settlers marched into the nearby village of 'Asira Al Qibliya (Nablus), setting fire to houses, breaking windows, cutting water pipes and vandalizing home gardens. The former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert referred to the attack as a 'pogrom'.

Also this week, there were ten separate incidents involving Palestinians throwing stones towards Israeli vehicles driving on West Bank roads near Palestinian villages in the Ramallah, Nablus and Hebron areas, one of which led to the injury of an Israeli girl. Vehicles were damaged in six of the incidents.

Palestinian community displaced following mass demolition

On 10 January, Israeli forces demolished the homes of 100 Palestinians, including 34 children, in the community of Khirbet Tana (Nablus) in the Jordan Valley. The demolitions included 16 residential structures, the village school, 12 animal pens, two kitchens and a restroom. In addition, the community itself was forced to self-demolish three residential tents. The affected population is currently staying in tents that they erected on the

site. They have received emergency assistance, but will require further assistance to meet basic needs, including alternative schooling for the children. Khirbet Tana is a community of herders and farmers living for several decades in the area, which since the late 1980s has been designated by the Israeli army as a “closed military zone” for military training (“firing zone”). Almost the entire community was previously displaced in July 2005 as a result of demolitions, however residents rebuilt their houses. The previous week, another community in the same area (Livjim, east of Tal Al Khashabeh) received eviction orders against three structures, placing 29 persons, including 23 children, at risk of displacement. Over 80 percent of the Area C demolitions in 2009 occurred in areas declared firing zones. Many of these areas, which amount to some 18 percent of the West Bank have been “closed” for a number of years, though numerous residents report that they have never seen the Israeli military training in their vicinity¹. Many of the communities residing in these areas have been there before 1967 and the declaration of the areas as closed. They are some of the poorest communities in the West Bank, relying on small scale agriculture and herding for their livelihoods

Gaza Strip

Serious escalation in violence: seven Palestinians killed and three injured in several airstrikes

This week was the deadliest one recorded in the Gaza Strip since the week following the 18 January 2009 ceasefire that ended Israel’s “Cast Lead” offensive. In a series of airstrikes carried out during the week, Israeli forces killed seven Palestinians, including three civilians. These attacks came in response to an increase in the number of mortar shells and rockets fired by Palestinian factions from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel; no injuries or property damage were reported. Since the ceasefire, a total of 84 Palestinians, including at least 27 civilians, and one Israeli (a soldier) have been killed and another 160 Palestinians and seven Israelis have been injured in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza and southern Israel².

On 8 January, Israeli air forces targeted and bombed tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border, killing three Palestinians, including a 15-year-old boy, and wounding another two. Another Palestinian sustained injuries in a separate airstrike incident on tunnels. In two other incidents, on 6 and 10 January, Israeli aircrafts targeted and killed four Palestinian militants, three of whom were killed in one airstrike. Five additional airstrikes, resulting in no casualties, were carried during the week. Also this week, on four separate occasions, Israeli forces penetrated a few hundred meters into Gaza and conducted land-leveling operations.

On 7 January, the Israeli airforce dropped leaflets into areas next to the border fence, warning residents to keep a distance of at least 300 metres from the border with Israel and avoid cooperating with “smugglers” in the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border. The access ban to the “buffer zone” was extended to 300 meters, up from 150 metres previously, in May 2009; in practice, Israeli forces have occasionally opened “warning” fire at people as far as 1,000 meters from the border. A parallel ban is applied to sea areas beyond three nautical miles from the coast, though often this distance is less in practice. This week, in nine separate incidents, Israeli naval forces opened “warning” fire at Palestinian fishing boats along Gaza’s coast, forcing them to return to shore.

Also this week, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) reported that on 6 and 9 January, unknown persons detonated bombs in a pharmacy and two coffee shops in Gaza City; no injuries were sustained, but damages to property were reported.

Two Palestinians die in tunnel collapse

During the reporting period, two Palestinians died in two separate incidents involving the collapse of a tunnel under the Gaza-Egypt border while they were working inside it. Despite the high risks— at least 70 people have died and 123 others have been injured in the tunnels since the end of the “Cast Lead” offensive—the population of the Gaza Strip depends on these precariously built tunnels to access goods otherwise unavailable due to the Israeli-imposed blockade. Media reports about Egyptian works being carried out along the border with Gaza and aimed at shutting down tunnels’ activities have triggered concerns over a possible decline in the supply of goods to Gaza as well as protest among the population (see below).

Clashes at the Gaza-Egypt border

On 6 January, hundreds of Palestinians demonstrators, protesting Egypt’s delay in allowing an aid convoy (“Viva Palestina”) into Gaza, as well as the Egyptian plans to build what is being referred to in the media as “an underground steel wall”, clashed with Egyptian forces at the Gaza-Egypt border. As a result, an Egyptian soldier was shot dead and 13 Palestinians sustained injuries, including six who sustained gunshot wounds. Eventually, the convoy entered on the same day, carrying food and medical supplies. However, in response to the clashes, Egypt introduced a new mechanism, through which future aid convoys into Gaza are coordinated with the Egyptian Red Crescent only.

Thousands left Gaza through Rafah crossing

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Interior in Gaza, the opening of the Rafah Crossing at the end of the previous week continued for a total of four days, from 3 to 6 January, exceptionally allowing approximately 4,071 people, including hundreds of patients and their companions, to leave the Gaza Strip. Among those who were able to cross were some 481 students who are admitted to universities abroad; this leaves 319 students in a similar situation still waiting to exit Gaza. Rafah Crossing has been officially closed since June 2007 and opens on sporadic occasions for the exit of humanitarian cases with permits; prior to the closure, an average 650 people crossed per day each way during the first six months of 2006.

Death toll of Influenza A (H1N1) virus reaches 19 in Gaza

During the reporting period, the death toll of Influenza A (H1N1) virus reached 19 since the outbreak of the disease in the Gaza Strip on 5 December 2009. As of 12 January, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza and the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed another 213 suspected cases of H1N1 in the Gaza Strip, of which 40 are currently receiving treatment and 173 have recovered. WHO indicated that the MoH in Gaza received 50,000 H1N1 vaccines from its counterpart in Ramallah (38,000) and from Saudi Arabia (12,000) and another 3,000 were received by UNRWA.

Weekly average of imported truckloads remains below needs

During the reporting period, a total of 418 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, a 27 percent decline compared to the number of truckloads that entered during the last week (572). The reason behind this decline was mainly the closure of Kerem Shalom Crossing on one day (7 January), after a number of projectiles, reportedly launched by Palestinian armed groups, landed in its vicinity; Kerem Shalom is the only crossing that remains operational, except for the Karni conveyor belt, after Israel’s closure of Nahal Oz at the beginning of 2010. This week’s figure constitutes only 15 percent of the parallel weekly average during the first five months of 2007 (2,807 truckloads), before the Hamas takeover.

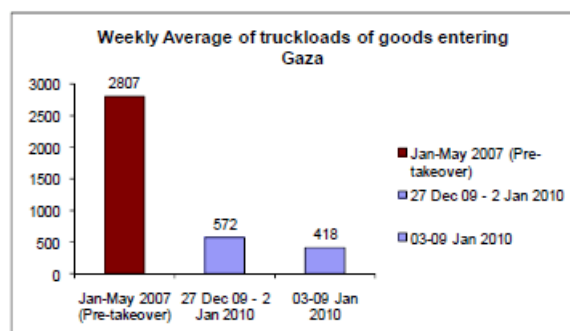
Similar to previous weeks, food and hygiene items made up the majority of imported goods – 340.5 truckloads or 81 percent of total imports. The remaining 19 percent included a limited number of truckloads carrying agricultural materials, medical supplies, non-edible consumables, electric appliances gravel for the Wastewater Treatment Plant in northern Gaza and glass. To date, Gaza received 20 truckloads of glass, after Israel lifted, on 29 December, the ban on glass, which has been in place since the imposition of the blockade in June 2007. Entry of other major essential goods including materials for reconstruction including cement, spare parts for water and sanitation projects, other electrical materials, IT equipment and vehicles remain either restricted to limited quantities, or barred from entry.

Limited shipments of cut-flower carnations and strawberries exited Gaza during the reporting period: a total of nine truckloads carrying 241,000

cut flower carnations (two) and 11.5 tonnes of strawberry (seven) were allowed out of Gaza. From 10 December 2009 until 9 January 2010, 15 truckloads of cut flowers (eight) and strawberry (seven) exports have exited Gaza.

Fuel Update (3 - 9 January 2010)

The fuel pipelines located at the Kerem Shalom Crossing operated for four days during the reporting period, while the Nahal Oz Crossing has been officially closed since the beginning of the year. There was an approximate decline of around 25 percent in the overall amounts of cooking gas that entered during the reporting period (424 tonnes), compared to the previous week (564 tonnes). This also constituted less than one-third of the weekly needs, as estimated by the Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA). As a result of continuing shortages of cooking gas, a gas rationing scheme throughout the Gaza Strip has been implemented since the beginning of November 2009, in which quantities of gas available at the Palestinian General Petroleum Corporation (PPC) is being distributed to bakeries and hospitals as a priority.



Imports of industrial fuel to operate the Gaza Power Plant that entered this week were five times the amount that entered last week (2.01 million litres vs. .4 million litres); almost the same amount of industrial fuel specified by the Israeli authorities to enter Gaza each week. No commercial petrol or diesel entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom. Egyptian petrol and diesel, which is transferred through the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border, remains available on the open market, with nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 100,000 litres of petrol transferred into Gaza per day

¹ Various other restrictions on Palestinian construction and presence apply in the rest of Area C in the West Bank. See OCHA, Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in Area C of the West Bank, December 2009.

² The cumulative figure of Palestinians fatalities since 18 January 2009, was mistakenly reported in previous issues of the Weekly Briefing Notes, as it included several people who were found dead after the ceasefire while their killing occurred before that date.