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February Overview

Table of Contents

West Bank, including East Jerusalem	2
Protection	2
Access	6
Gaza Strip	6
Protection	6
The blockade on Gaza continues	7
Health	10
Shelter	10
Child Protection	11
Funding	12

During the month of February, the Palestinian civilian population faced the most significant threat of displacement and dispossession of recent months. Actions by various Israeli institutions, including the army, Civil Administration, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli High Court of Justice, impacted the homes, livelihoods and future of over 1,500 Palestinians in East Jerusalem, many of them children. Southeast of Bethlehem city, more than 1,700 dunams of land were designated "state land" for the planned expansion of the Efrat settlement. This comes in addition to land in the governorate that has already been requisitioned for Barrier construction, settlement roads and new settlement housing units. These actions contribute to the precarious future of Bethlehem and its surrounding villages, which are progressively losing access to land due to the expansion of settlements and Barrier construction in this area.

In its July 2004 Advisory Opinion, the International Court of Justice concluded that the Barrier route in the West Bank is illegal and that Israel should cease construction and dismantle the parts already constructed. However, Israel continues to seize and level land for Barrier construction. Palestinian villagers who protest these Israeli actions are subject to IDF harassment. This month there were numerous IDF searches and raids conducted in the middle of the night on residents of these villages, some resulting in violent clashes.

The ceasefire in Gaza remains fragile. Casualty figures among Palestinians in Gaza during February are close to those recorded during the two months that preceded the launching of the Israeli offensive on 27 December. The insecurity experienced by the Gazan population was heightened by internal violence, reports of mistreatment and mishandling of weapons, resulting in the killing of seven Palestinians and the injury of 19 others. An estimated 65 Qassams and mortars were fired from Gaza into Israel this month. While no Israeli fatalities or injuries were reported, some Israeli property sustained damage.

Three Palestinian children were killed during February in Israeli-Palestinian violence, two of them in the Gaza Strip and one in the West Bank. An additional 31 Palestinian children were injured, 20 in the West Bank, mainly in demonstrations, and 11 in the Gaza Strip.

The month of February recorded important developments in internal movement and access within the West Bank. Most of these developments contribute to the easing of Palestinian movement in specific areas, particularly for vehicles, but preserve and entrench existing Israeli restrictions and mechanisms of control for the benefit of Israeli settlements. It is becoming apparent that the checkpoint and obstacles, which Israeli authorities justified from the beginning of the second Intifada (September 2000) as a temporary military response to violent confrontations and attacks on Israeli civilians, is evolving into a more permanent system of control that is steadily reducing the space available for Palestinian growth and movement for the benefit of the increasing Israeli settler population.

The blockade of the Gaza Strip continues. Access into the Gaza Strip remained nearly the same this month - a daily average of 127 truckloads. While this amount is much higher compared to the pre-war figures (November- 30 truckloads, December- 23 truckloads), it is well below imports in May 2007 (475), one month before the Hamas take-over. As a result, the level of imports remains insufficient to meet market needs; over 80% of the truckloads in February carried food stuffs. Other major essential supplies, such as construction materials, spare parts for water and wastewater infrastructures, industrial inputs and livestock have not entered. There was no significant improvement in access of patients to treatment abroad during the month of February. Out of 324 permit applications submitted during the month, only 183 (56.5%) were approved in a timely manner. One truckload of flowers was exported in February- the first time a Gazan product has been allowed out since January 2008.

Access into Gaza improved for international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) and NGO staff through Erez Crossing, compared to January, however access of Palestinian staff with West Bank or Israeli ID cards continues to be prohibited in most cases. Flour mills and bakeries were able to operate almost at full capacity due to increased wheat grain and cooking gas imports. One out of the six mills, which was destroyed during military operations, remains non operational. Access to water and electricity has improved.

Yet, none of these developments are sustainable without unimpeded access and an increase in quantity and types of imports. The Gaza Power Plant reported that there are more than 100 procurement orders of spare parts and consumables, which have been waiting for months for clearance to enter Gaza. The continued shortage of these spare parts prevents some repair work from taking place and keeps the functioning of the GPP at a fragile level. In response to the access constraints and interferences experienced by humanitarian agencies and their projects, the oPt Humanitarian Country Team has prepared a joint framework of principles to guide the provision of humanitarian assistance to Gaza ("Framework for the Provision of Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza").

Finally, the Gaza Flash Appeal for \$613 million has received approximately 26% of its requested funds, mainly directed towards food security and shelter projects. In early February, the PA and UNDP signed an agreement which provides \$50 million to fund cash assistance, within the framework of the Gaza Early Recovery Support Programme. By the end of February, 4,100 families had received a combined amount of NIS 38 million. By the middle of March, the compensation for all the 10,000 surveyed cases, totalling 80m NIS, is expected to be concluded. The Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) approved three emergency projects for Gaza during February, worth a total of \$489,736 - two for psycho- social activities and one to provide food assistance.

West Bank, including East Jerusalem

Protection

East Jerusalem: demolitions, displacement and increasing isolation

In February, the Israeli authorities implemented a number of measures in East Jerusalem resulting in the displacement of Palestinian residents and the further isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

Demolitions and displacement: The demolition of Palestinian-owned structures by the Israeli authorities continued during the month at an accelerated pace. While two structures were demolished in East Jerusalem in January 2009, eight structures, including seven residential structures, were demolished in February.¹ Demolitions were carried out in Ras Khamees, Wadi al Joz, 'Isawiya, At Tur, Beit Hanina and Sheikh Jarrah. Thirty Palestinians, including 15 children, were displaced as a result.

Of note, on 17 February 2009, the Jerusalem Regional Committee for Planning and Construction rejected a planning scheme submitted by the residents of the Bustan area of Silwan neighbourhood, located just south of the Old City's walls. Silwan is the site of intensive settler activity, in particular, in the Wadi Hilweh area, to the north of the Bustan area. The Bustan residents' planning scheme was presented as an attempt to counter the Municipality's designation of the area as a green zone, where building is prohibited. The Committee's rejection of the plan paves the way for the execution of pending demolition orders issued in 2005 against approximately 90 houses located in this area, some of which were built before 1967, due to the lack of building permits. If the demolition of these houses is carried out, an estimated 1,300 - 1,500 Palestinians will be displaced. Children make up a significant percentage of the community and they are frequently disproportionately impacted by the displacement of their families.

February's demolition of residential structures comes in the context of a serious housing shortage faced by Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. Only 9,000 out of the 70,000 dunums in East Jerusalem are zoned for Palestinian construction,² and much of this is already built-up. In order to obtain a building permit, Palestinian residents face a complicated, expensive application process.³ Because of difficulties Palestinians face in obtaining building permits from the Israeli authorities,⁴ many Palestinians risk building without one in order to meet their housing needs. In 2008, the Israeli authorities demolished approximately 90 Palestinian-owned structures in East Jerusalem, due to lack of permit.⁵ Approximately 400 Palestinians were displaced as a result.⁶ Thousands of other Palestinians live with the threat of displacement, given that there are hundreds of outstanding demolition orders for Palestinian-owned structures in East Jerusalem.

Also in February, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) carried out a number of demolitions in Area C to the east of East Jerusalem, displacing 21 Palestinians (including 15 children). Roughly half of these were displaced twice during the month as a result of the ICA's repeated demolition of their residential structures. These structures were located in the E 1 area, located between the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem. Plans for settlement construction and related infrastructure in this area are designed to link Ma'ale Adumim directly with Jerusalem. Israeli construction in E 1 will contribute to the difficulties faced by East Jerusalem's Palestinian residents by preventing the natural expansion of the Palestinian population to the east. According to Israeli media reports, Israel has invested some NIS 200 million over the course of the past two years in preparing infrastructure, including roads and a police station, in this area.⁷

The ICA also demolished four structures during the reporting period in the newly declared "seam zone" area near At Tur, along with one structure in a Barrier-adjacent area of Az Zayem (on the "West Bank" side). Seventy-five (75) Palestinians, including 45 children, were affected by the demolition of these structures, which included a gas station, two offices, one warehouse and a parking garage.

Isolating East Jerusalem; dividing communities: On the northern edge of East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities closed the Barrier gate in Dahiyet al Bareed and dismantled the Ar Ram checkpoint. The closure of this gate further separates East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and isolates, on the East Jerusalem side of the Barrier, some 140 West Bank Palestinians, who must now obtain a permit from the Israeli authorities to continue to live in their homes. The Israeli DCL reported in mid-February that it started issuing the permits to 110 of the 140 West Bank ID holders living in the community, rendering the other 30 at risk of displacement. These permits will not enable residents to enter East Jerusalem; they only allow access between their homes and Qalandiya checkpoint to the north which, given increased traffic flows resulting from the gate closure, now takes up to two hours to cross at peak times. On the eastern edge of the city, the Israeli DCL confirmed in February that the "Lazarus" Barrier gate will be closed by the end of March. This gate allows access to East Jerusalem for 30 Palestinian families, who reside within the Israeli-defined municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, but were cut off from the city by the Barrier.

Entire community in Nablus governorate at risk of displacement

During February, six families in the village of Khirbet Tana received demolition orders issued by the Israeli Civil Administration against their dwellings, due to the lack of building permits. Another 25 structures in this village had received similar demolition orders in the course of 2008.

Khirbet Tana is located in Area C of the West Bank, east of Beit Furik town, in an area declared by the Israeli army during the 1970s as a closed military zone. The distribution of the recent orders follows a decision by the Israeli High Court of Justice in January 2009 to reject a petition submitted by the residents, requesting the preparation of an adequate planning scheme for the village that would allow the issuance of building permits.

Khirbet Tana is a herding community with a population of approximately 250, including 170 children. Some of the residents have houses in the neighboring Beit Furik, where they move to during the summer months. The village has currently about 60 structures, the large majority of which are tents, caves and animal barracks. The demolition of the targeted structures will result in the displacement of the entire community, which was already displaced in July 2005, following a wave of demolitions, and later rebuilt with the support of an Israeli NGO.

IDF night raids into villages protesting Barrier construction

A number of incidents occurred during the month that raise concerns regarding the possible harassment of Palestinians, some of them organizing or involved in regular anti-Barrier demonstrations. During the month, a total of 20 incidents involving the entire population of three villages in the western Ramallah governorate were reported: 10 in Beit Liqya, seven in Bil'in, and three in Ni'in. According to reports collected by OCHA, in all of these incidents Israeli troops entered a village at around midnight and immediately began firing sound grenades at houses and cars parked in the street. Some of these incidents led to clashes between soldiers and young villagers, with the latter throwing stones and the soldiers firing tear gas and rubber coated metal bullets. Two of these villages, Bil'in and Ni'in, are the site of weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations, which the residents cite as the reason for the midnight raids.

Another two incidents involving apparent harassment of Palestinians by Israeli troops were reported in the Bethlehem governorate in Al Ma'asara village, also the site of regular anti-Barrier demonstrations. In these cases, Israeli soldiers reportedly twice raided at around midnight the house of the organizers of the weekly demonstrations. Troops ordered the organizers and their family members out of the house and threatened some of the men with further raids if they continued with the demonstrations. No injuries or damage were reported.

Regular anti-Barrier demonstrations continued throughout the month, alongside these incidents. In the course of these demonstrations, 32 Palestinians, including nine children, were injured by Israeli security forces and several others suffered from asphyxia following tear gas inhalation.

Increased land confiscation for Israeli settlement expansion threatens Bethlehem

Recent Israeli government and settler actions in the Bethlehem district threaten to sever the urban area of the governorate from its rural hinterland. These actions reduce further the available agricultural land and opportunities for cultivation for the nine Palestinian communities (22,000 residents) located west of Bethlehem in the Israeli Gush Etzion settlement bloc. These communities are already vulnerable since they are located west of the approved route of the Barrier which, once completed, is likely to reduce access to services in Bethlehem unavailable in their villages i.e. markets, health services, and higher education in Bethlehem city.

- In February, the Israeli Civil Administration announced that approximately 1,700 dunams of land near the village of Artas were to be designated Israeli-controlled 'state land', following the rejection of appeals by eight local Palestinian landowners. Over the years, the Government of Israel has designated large tracts of the West Bank as 'state land' and allocated it for the construction of Israeli settlements. The land in question lies within the Efrat settlement municipal boundary, and is intended for the creation of 2,500 new settlement housing units for the new Givat Ha'eytam neighbourhood. A lengthy bureaucratic process may delay this construction. While the currently built-up area of Efrat is located to the west of the Barrier route, the land confiscated and the proposed settlement expansion area lies to the east of the Barrier, raising concerns that the Barrier could be re-routed in order to incorporate it.
- The Israeli human rights organization, B'Tselem, revealed in February Civil Administration plans for further Israeli settlement expansion within the Bethlehem governorate in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc. In the Israeli settlement of Geva'ot, which currently hosts 12 families, initial construction plans are for a new

neighbourhood of 550 apartments, which will eventually lead to a total planned 4,450 apartments. In addition, 2,000 new apartments are planned for Bat 'Ayin, which currently has 120 families.

- On 1 January, the Israeli authorities issued a seizure order to build a new 2.2 kilometre-long security road for the Israeli settlements of Geva'ot and Betar Illit. This road will obstruct Palestinian residents from the village of Nahalin from reaching their land and the main village water well, Ein al-Faras. The Israeli settlement Betar Illit is already one of the largest Israeli settlements in the West Bank. According to the Israeli group Peace Now, there are plans for an additional 790 housing units to be built, which will also adversely affect the neighbouring Palestinian village of Wadi Fukin.
- The Israeli authorities issued another seizure order on 19 February affecting the land of Jaba' in the southwest part of the Bethlehem governorate, where a 400-metre fence will be constructed west of the village. In addition, in February, the IDF issued military orders to the landowners in Jaba' ordering them to remove agricultural growth from their lands on the grounds that these were 'state land'. On 18 February, the IDF removed approximately 300 olive tree saplings from the area.
- A report by Peace Now reveals that the Ministry of Housing and Construction is planning to construct at least 73,000 housing units in the West Bank, of which 15,000 have already been approved. According to Peace Now, these include plans for the expansion of two settlement outposts near Efrat: 395 housing units in Givat Hadagan and 527 units in Givat Hatamar.
- Israeli settlers continue to try to settle the site of a removed IDF military base at Ush Ghurab in Beit Sahour, to the east of Bethlehem city. The Beit Sahour municipality has planned and began construction of a public park on approximately 100 dunams of the site to include sports facilities, a climbing tower and a cafeteria.

Map: Shrinking space in Bethlehem



Access

West Bank access developments:

The month of February recorded important developments in the field of internal movement and access within the West Bank. Most of these developments contribute to the easing of Palestinian movement in specific areas, particularly for vehicles, but preserve and entrench existing Israeli restrictions and mechanisms of control for the benefit of Israeli settlements. It is becoming apparent that the checkpoint and obstacles, which Israeli authorities justified from the beginning of the second Intifada (September 2000) as a temporary military response to violent confrontations and attacks on Israeli civilians, is evolving into a more permanent system of control that is steadily reducing the space available for Palestinian growth and movement for the benefit of the increasing Israeli settler population.

- **Opening of key junctions in Hebron governorate:** during February, the Israeli army removed six obstacles allowing Palestinians from various communities to directly access Road 60, the main north-south traffic artery in the area. The most significant among the removed obstacles is an earth mound at the main junction leading from the town of Bani Nai'm (16,000 residents) to Road 60. These removals follow the opening of three key junctions during 2008, which improved access to and from Hebron City, the main economic and service hub in the area. Although significant, this improvement can be easily reversed, as the infrastructure at these junctions was in fact further entrenched rather than removed: the rudimentary earth mounds were replaced with more permanent road gates.
- **Enav checkpoint expansion and entrenchment:** Towards the end of the month, the Israeli military began the land leveling and the uprooting of trees required for the addition of new lanes to the 'Enav' checkpoint, which controls all West Bank traffic in and out of Tulkarm governorate. Similar expansion works were carried out during 2008 at the 'Wadi Nar' checkpoint, which controls all Palestinian traffic between southern and central West Bank, and the 'Huwwara' checkpoint, located on the main route from Nablus City southwards. Similarly to the installation of road gates, these expansions are likely to improve the flow of traffic at these checkpoints while further entrenching Israeli control over Palestinian movement.
- **Palestinian citizens of Israel allowed access to Nablus City- but long waits continue:** since the beginning of the month, Palestinian citizens of Israel are allowed to access Nablus City with their vehicles during weekends. This step continues a trend of restriction relaxation in and out of Nablus City, observed since December 2008, which included the revocation of some of the permit requirements for residents over 50 and the extension of the opening hours of some checkpoints. The impact of these steps, however, appears to be limited due to the strict inspection procedures applied by the Israeli army at the checkpoints around Nablus (none of which was removed), which result in prolonged delays and discourage Palestinians from visiting the city.
- **Entrenching the road bans for Palestinians:** The Israeli military began leveling land and uprooting trees next to Ni'lin village in the northwestern area of Ramallah governorate, for construction of a road to connect the village with Ni'lin checkpoint. This new road is part of a series of steps undertaken to enable the future separation between Israeli and Palestinian traffic. Another step is the construction of a tunnel under Road 446. According to the Israeli DCL, upon the

tunnel's completion, Palestinians will no longer be allowed to use Road 446, which will be rendered exclusively for Israeli use. In the course of 2008, three other such "Fabric of Life" roads were opened in the Ramallah governorate, connecting areas separated due to the ban on the use of Road 443 and the construction of the Barrier. The Israeli built "fabric of life" roads, estimated to cost, along with Barrier gates, over 2 billion shekels, currently entails 40 tunnels under banned or restricted main roads, and 39 kilometers of repaved agricultural roads. While transportation contiguity between various West Bank locales is maintained, Palestinian territorial continuity is undermined.

Gaza Strip

Protection

Cease-fire remains fragile- Palestinian casualty rates returning to pre-war numbers

Almost daily violent incidents by the Israel military and Palestinian armed factions in February are undermining the fragile 18 January cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. The basic sense of physical security felt by the civilian population is increasingly deteriorating.

Throughout the month, the Israeli army conducted a range of military operations, including: 37 air strikes, targeting mainly tunnels under the border with Egypt as well as armed militants; various incidents involving opening fire at Palestinians approaching, or present in the proximity of the border fence with Israel; opening fire at fishermen sailing beyond the Israeli-imposed limit of three miles from the shore; and a few ground incursions

of short duration. In the course of these operations, seven Palestinian were killed, including two children (13 and 17 years old) and five alleged members of armed factions; another two Palestinians, including one unarmed civilian and one militant, were wounded and later died of those wounds; 24 others, including 17 unarmed civilians, were injured.

Overall, casualty figures among Palestinians during February are close to those recorded during the two months that preceded the launching of the Israeli offensive on 27 December; there were 15 fatalities and 24 injuries in November 2008 and ten fatalities and four injuries in the first three weeks of December. However, casualty figures remain below those recorded in the months prior to the "calm" agreement brokered by Egypt, which entered into force on 19 June 2008 (in May 2008 there were 41 fatalities and 107 injuries).

The sense of security among the civilian population in southern Israel was undermined as a result of Palestinian firing. During February, Palestinian factions reportedly fired an estimated 65 rockets and mortars towards Israel, some of which landed within civilian built up areas. While no Israeli fatalities or injuries were reported as a result of these attacks, some Israeli property sustained damage.

Human rights abuses and reckless handling of weapons

The insecurity experienced by the Gazan population was heightened by internal violence and reports of mistreatment and mishandling of weapons, resulting in the killing of seven Palestinian and the injury of 19 others.

According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) in Gaza, four of these fatalities came as a result of severe mistreatment by Hamas security forces and masked gunmen. PCHR demanded immediate investigations into the deaths.

Incidents involving mishandling of weapons included the killing of a woman by a stray bullet, allegedly fired during a military training exercise next to her house, and the injury of five people following the explosion of a hand grenade dropped by an armed militant (killed in this incident) near a bonfire. Another Palestinian man was killed in February, and five others were injured, including a child, when an explosive device was detonated by an unknown perpetrator at a coffee shop in Gaza city.

The blockade on the Gaza Strip continues

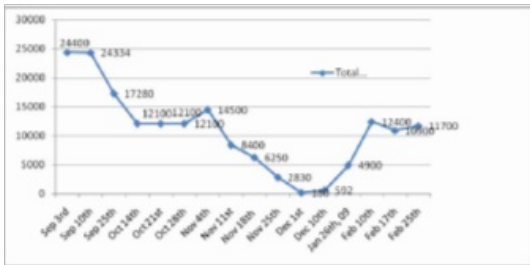
Entry of goods into Gaza

During February, nearly the same amount of imported truckloads as in January entered the Gaza Strip (3,044 compared to 3,053), constituting a daily average of 127 truckloads. This average represents more than a four and five-fold increase compared to the parallel figures during December and November 2008 respectively (a daily average of 30 and 23 truckloads), in which the blockade intensified. However, February figures remain well below imports in May 2007 (475), one month before the Hamas take-over. Of the total truckloads, around 16 carrying medical and other relief supplies have entered through the Rafah Crossing. The first export - one truckload of cut flowers (nearly 50,000 flowers) was allowed out of Gaza on 12 February through the Kerem Shalom Crossing- the first time since 18 January 2008.

Despite the influx of goods into Gaza, the overall level of imports remains insufficient to meet market needs. Over 80% of the truckloads carried food stuffs. Other major essential supplies such as construction materials, spare parts for water and wastewater infrastructures, industrial inputs and livestock have continued to be barred from entering Gaza. Moreover, the approval needed for the import of other goods, including some food items (chickpeas and macaroni), recreational kits, stationery, and veterinary drugs was denied or delayed by the Israeli authorities in several cases during the month, in an apparently arbitrary fashion.

The grain conveyer belt at Karni Crossing was opened on 16 days during February, allowing the entry of wheat grain and animal feed into Gaza. The entry of increasing amounts of wheat grain has enabled five out of six mills in Gaza to continue functioning during February, after being forced to shut down during parts of December and January. One mill located in North Gaza, which sustained damages during military operations, has remained non operational. The level of wheat flour stock, however, recorded in the last week of February (11,700 metric tonnes) was well below its level of September 2008 (24,400 mt).

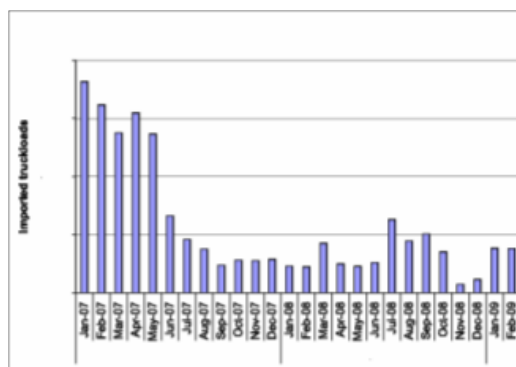
Chart1: Weekly total wheat flour stocks at Gaza mills from September 2008 to February 2009



Nahal Oz fuel pipeline was open on 18 days in February compared to 11 days in the previous month, allowing an increase in the amounts of cooking gas and industrial fuel entering Gaza. While the supply of cooking gas is still far below market needs - 1,665 tonnes out of an estimated demand of 7,500 tonnes a month - the increase has enabled almost all bread bakeries throughout Gaza to continue operating throughout February. Commercial benzene and diesel have continued to be denied entry since 2 November 2008, with the exception of 391,300 litres for UNRWA operations. (For further details on industrial fuel, see Electricity section below)

Many tunnels under the Rafah-Egypt border have remained operational throughout February under precarious conditions. Seven Palestinians were killed and nine others injured in tunnels-related incidents during the month. Five deaths and three injuries resulted from the collapse of one tunnel on 21 February and six were injured when the Israeli Air Force targeted and bombarded tunnels (37 air strikes throughout February). According to field reports, tunnel activities significantly declined during February, and, accordingly, many Egyptian-produced commodities were less available in the local market. Tunnels, however, remain an important economic lifeline for Gaza's population, supplying the market with goods restricted from entering Gaza through the Israeli-controlled crossings.

Chart 2: Total monthly imports entering through Gaza commercial crossings



Movement of people in and out of Gaza

Erez Crossing was opened on 23 days during February, allowing a total of 1,978 people to cross out of Gaza only, compared to 1,120 people during January.⁸ The majority of those who crossed were diplomats and international humanitarian staff (730) and Palestinian patients and their companions (505) with valid permits to cross Erez for treatment in Israeli and West Bank hospitals (for further details see Health section). In addition, 370 Palestinians carrying permits were allowed to cross Erez to visit family in Israel, the West Bank and Jordan. No Palestinian trader or Businessman Card holder could cross Erez during the month.

Rafah Crossing was exceptionally opened on 15 days during February to allow mainly urgent medical cases to cross in both directions. A total of 2,662 Palestinians, including 590 patients, were allowed to enter Egypt and

1,855 others were able to return back to Gaza. The daily average of people that crossed into Egypt (95) and of those who entered Gaza (66) forms only 3.1% and 23% respectively of the parallel May 2007 figures (3,100 and 292).

Access for NGOs staff

While precise overall figures are not yet available, according to individual reports gathered by OCHA, during February there has been a marked increase in access of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and NGOs staff to Gaza through the Erez Crossing, compared to January. Applications for permits were submitted during the month directly to the CLA (Israeli Civil Liaison Administration). OCHA has assisted organisations not receiving a reply for over five days after submitting the application. In February, OCHA followed-up 52 access requests on behalf of 17 INGO/NGO staff, including 23 applications waiting reply for over five weeks. As of the end of February, 31 of these applications were approved. Access of Palestinian staff with West Bank or Israeli ID cards to Gaza continues to be prohibited in most cases.

Despite improvement, large areas still affected by lack of water and electricity supply

Access to water improved progressively during February. The total number of people affected by water supply constraints through the end of the month is 150,000, down from 450,000 affected people in January during the ground operation of "Cast Lead". Of the 150,000 people, 50,000 remain without water supply and the remainder receive water only every 5-6 days. The population currently affected is concentrated in North Gaza (Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahya and Jabaliya), Az Zeitoun area in Gaza City, and eastern areas of Khan Younis. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMMU) estimates that the problems in water supply to these areas will continue until spare parts and repair materials are allowed entry into Gaza.

The amount of industrial fuel imported from Israel and used exclusively for the operation of the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) increased significantly during February compared to the previous three months: approximately 8.3 million, compared to 3.8 million in January, 2.8 in December and 2.2 in November. Yet, this amount is below the monthly average of 11 million imported during the previous four months, during the "calm" agreement brokered by Egypt (July-October 2008) and the 14 million needed to operate the GPP at full capacity. The GPP reported that it is increasingly difficult to run power generating turbines while not being able to ensure the import and supply of needed technical items and fuel on a regular basis.

During February, the GPP was forced to continue operating at about 80% of its full capacity (65MW out of 80MW), creating an almost 20% electricity deficit throughout the Gaza Strip. According to the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO), 90% of the Gaza population experiences intermittent power cuts, resulting from scheduled power cuts of approximately four hours per day in Rafah and five hours in the rest of the Gaza Strip. The remaining 10% of the Gaza population, located in East Jabaliya, West Beit Lahya and south-east Gaza City, has remained without electricity from the onset of military operations due to damages sustained by the electricity network. The GPP reported that there are more than 100 procurement orders of spare parts and consumables, with an estimated value of \$3 million, which have been waiting for clearance to enter Gaza for months. The continued shortage of these spare parts prevents some repair works from taking place and keeps the functioning of the GPP at a fragile level.

Framework for the Provision of Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza

In response to the access constraints and interferences experienced by humanitarian agencies, the oPt Humanitarian Country Team has prepared a joint framework of principles to guide the provision of humanitarian assistance to Gaza ("Framework for the Provision of Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza"). This Framework clarifies the minimum requirements to ensure an operating environment conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance. The document, which is based on the four core principles - humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence - has been shared with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to ensure practical implementation.

Livelihoods further eroded as a result of war damages

The extent of the damage Israel's 22-day military operation has had on the Gaza economy became increasingly clear in February, following the publication of new preliminary damage assessments.

According to an assessment issued by the Private Sector Coordination Council (PSCC), approximately 700 private sector establishments were either totally destroyed or sustained damages worth \$140 million.⁹ Of these establishments, 268 (38%) were totally destroyed, resulting in \$99 million in losses, and 432 (62%) were damaged, causing losses worth approximately \$40 million. Around 40% of the affected establishments (297) were industrial - small and medium size mainly in the manufactured food, textile and garment, furniture and plastic sectors - while the remaining 60% were in the area of commerce, contracting, tourism and fuel establishments.

Damages and Losses of Private Sector Establishments

Type of damage	No. of damaged establishments	% of overall affected establishments	Damage value in US\$	% of damage
Damaged	432	62%	40	29%
Totally destroyed	268	38%	99	71%

Total	700	100%	139	100%
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The widespread destruction of industrial and commercial property, along with the ban on the entry of construction materials, has pushed the prospect of recovery within the private sector further away; the sector had already been decimated prior to the military operation as a result of Israel's 18-month-long blockade. As of February 2009, only 258 private sector establishments, employing 1,878 workers, were partially functioning, at an estimated average of 20-30% of their full capacity. This is around a 90% decrease compared to the 2,400 active establishments, employing over 65,000 people, recorded in 2006.

An additional damage assessment, undertaken by agricultural actors (UNDP, FAO and Ministry of Agriculture), estimated the direct losses to the agricultural sector at \$180 million, including losses related to plant and animal production and agricultural infrastructure.¹⁰ Many agricultural farms dedicated to poultry and egg production sustained significant damage. The fishing sector sustained total estimated direct and indirect losses of \$2.2 million, due to destruction of fishing boats and related materials.¹¹

The situation in the agricultural sector is further compounded by access restrictions imposed by the Israeli military. This includes access of farmers to lands located within 150 to 500 metres of the Gaza-Israel border (the so-called "buffer zone"), as well as to access of fishermen to fishing areas further than three nautical miles from the shore.¹² The scope of destruction and damage of agricultural property, coupled with the access restrictions, have rendered the livelihoods of 14,000 farmers, herders and fishermen at risk of collapse.

The functioning of the economy continues to be severely affected by the restriction on the entry of cash into Gaza. In particular, this hinders the ability of 65,700 PA employees to regularly withdraw their salaries from banks. According to the International Monetary Fund, this affects the livelihoods of approximately half a million Gazans.¹³

The factors above are expected to contribute to further increases in the unemployment and poverty rates in Gaza. The former is estimated at 48.8% in the fourth quarter of 2008, prior to the military operation, compared to 35.3% in the parallel period of 2007; the latter reached 80% by the end of 2007. Food insecurity, estimated at 56% in the first quarter of 2008, has increased by an estimated 20% in the aftermath of the military operation.

Health

Despite the resumption of services, the health sector is still coping with the impact of "Operation Cast Lead"

Throughout February, most health facilities in Gaza were operational and had resumed regular function. Immunization and other public health programmes had also fully resumed. UNICEF supported a vitamin A and Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) campaign for children, covering approximately 120,000 students. Furthermore, due to the large volume of medical supplies that entered Gaza in the course of the armed conflict and in its aftermath, full stocks of drugs were in place in most hospital facilities during the month, while distribution to Primary Health Care (PHC) centers from the central drug store was carried out during the last two weeks. A more detailed assessment of current gaps in medical equipment is still required.

By contrast, there was no significant improvement in access of patients to treatment abroad during the month of February. Despite the Israeli District Coordination Liaison (DCL) office continuing to process patients with referral documents, of the 324 permit applications submitted during the month, only 183 (56.5%) had their permits granted in a timely manner; 109 (33.6%) had their applications delayed; 9 (2.8%) had their application denied and another 23 (7.1 %) were interviewed by the Israel Security Agency (formerly GSS or General Security Service) and are still awaiting an exit permit. According to the Palestinian Liaison Officer at Erez, only 258 patients exited during February.

Three assessments examining health-related issues in the Gaza Strip were published or carried out during February. On 16 February, WHO disseminated the final report on the initial health needs assessment conducted in the Gaza Strip.¹⁴ The report identifies the main challenges stemming from the combined impact of the recent armed conflict and the continuing blockade on Gaza, which include, inter alia:

- Complications and permanent disability for those traumatically injured due to a lack of appropriate follow-up;
- Complications in patients with chronic diseases, whose treatment was interrupted/delayed;
- Long term mental health problems as a result of trauma and on-going insecurity;
- Diarrhea outbreaks from water-born and food-born diseases; and
- Slow deterioration of health and nutritional status, particularly among women and children, due to a decline in socio-economic and security conditions and in the quality of health care.

A separate assessment of Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (EmONC) was carried out by UNFPA in the period between 14 and 24 February. This assessment, yet to be published, follows an initial UNFPA rapid assessment of reproductive health services during the 22 days of the armed conflict, where an increase in miscarriages and neonatal deaths was identified. Preliminary findings of the latest assessment indicate the need to bridge gaps in linkages between referral health facilities and PHC-level clinics through strengthening communication and enhancing management information system.

On 26 February, UNRWA released the third issue of the Epidemiological Bulletin for the Gaza Strip for the period 9-15 February 2009. Over 80% of the population registered with UNRWA in Gaza (869,000), which has used UNRWA health services in 2008, was monitored for this reporting period. Among the main developments reported are a progressive increase in the total number of consultations and a declining trend in acute watery diarrhea.

Shelter

Cash assistance programs targeting the displaced were launched

UNRWA Emergency Shelters, which during the armed conflict provided accommodation to approximately 51,000 displaced people, emptied through the end of the month, except for 25 people staying in one shelter. During their stay, shelter inhabitants were provided with water, hot meals, mattresses and blankets. On leaving the shelters, families were offered NIS 600 to cover the rental fee for one month, while their eligibility for further assistance, by UNRWA (refugees) or UNDP (non-refugees), was assessed. While the assessments were underway, a number of organizations assisted the displaced with material for minor temporary repairs (e.g. plastic sheets), as well as non-food items such as blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets and hygiene kits.

In early February, the PA and UNDP signed an agreement which provides \$50 million to fund cash assistance, within the framework of the Gaza Early Recovery Support Programme. The initial phase of this programme entails the distribution of \$20.3 million over a period of three months, while the remainder will be distributed pending further damage assessments. On 10 February, UNDP announced that 10,000 assessed non-refugee families were found eligible and would receive cash assistance for the repair and reconstruction of each home. The amount of each individual allotment was determined on the basis of the extent of damage for each home, whereby families with fully destroyed homes are entitled to \$5,000, those with homes that have sustained severe damage \$3,000, and those with less severe damage will be compensated according to the amount of damage. By the end of February, 4,100 families had received a combined amount of NIS 38 million. By the middle of March, the compensation for all the 10,000 surveyed cases, totalling 80m NIS, should be concluded.

UNRWA conducted a similar assessment among refugee families. The assessment of families, whose homes were totally destroyed or damaged beyond repair, was complete by the end of the month and amounted to 2,350 families. Each of these families will receive \$5,000. The assessment of refugees with homes that can be repaired, amounting to approximately 10,500 families, is about 85% complete. UNRWA will start the cash distribution when cash is physically available inside the Gaza Strip.

Child Protection concerns throughout the oPt

Child casualties

A total of three Palestinian children were killed during February in Israeli-Palestinian violence, two of them in the Gaza Strip and one in the West Bank. An additional 31 Palestinian children were injured, 20 in the West Bank and 11 in the Gaza Strip. Incidents included the killing of a 13-year-old Palestinian boy when Israeli troops opened fire from the border east of Jabaliya in the Gaza Strip, and the killing of a 14-year-old boy while participating in a demonstration in Hebron. The Israeli human

rights group B'Tselem submitted a file to the Judge Advocate General (JAG) demanding a criminal investigation into the killing of the boy in Hebron. B'Tselem also wrote to the JAG after investigating the issue of soldiers and border policeman once again using the Ruger 22-caliber rifle – this time against demonstrators in the West Bank. The rifle was banned in 2001 by the former JAG following a number of incidents in which minors were killed in Gaza.¹⁵

Education system in Gaza under strain

Infrastructure damage, blockade restrictions and the continuing effects of the education sector strike (which began 24 August 2008) are negatively affecting the quality of children's education. While attendance is reportedly consistent at 98 percent for both UNRWA and government schools, there are shortages of classrooms, textbook paper, piped water and construction materials necessary for repairing damaged school infrastructure. Indicative of these constraints is the fact that over 4,500 students

from six severely damaged government schools were required to temporarily relocate to alternative schools and some 60 percent of UNRWA school students were learning without the necessary textbooks by the end of the month.

Disposal of explosive ordnance ongoing

With the assistance of the Mines Advisory Group a total of 37 PA schools and 4 UNRWA schools have been cleared of unexploded ordnance (UXO). On 9 February, teams also removed and destroyed white phosphorus wedges discovered by pupils in a school in Tal El Hawa, Gaza. A number of agencies have launched awareness campaigns aimed at alerting children to the dangers of handling UXO.

Contaminated water poses health threat to children

Approximately 28,000 children in the Gaza Strip have no access to piped water; an additional 56,000 children have access to water only every seven to ten days. Recent water tests indicate that piped water in Gaza is not reliably safe for human consumption: 45 out of 248 water samples tested during the month were found to be contaminated, primarily in the North Gaza and Gaza districts.¹⁶ Despite a decrease in the number of cases of watery diarrhoea among children reported by UNRWA (see Health section), concern regarding children under three years of age is still high.

Significant increase in child arrests in 2009

As of 28 February 2009, there were 400 Palestinian children being held in Israeli Prison Service facilities. This is a slight increase from January 2009, when 389 children were being detained. Six of these children are being held in administrative detention, without any charge or trial, up from 5 in January. February figures surpass those recorded in any month in 2008, with a peak of 337 recorded in May, as well as in any month since August 2006 (391).

The concern regarding children in detention stems not only from the inherent vulnerability of children, but also from the extent to which child detainees are afforded the right to due process in Israel's Military Court system. Issues of particular concern include: the trial and sentencing of 16 and 17 year olds as adults; restricted access to lawyers, especially during interrogation; the trial of children in military courts; rather than juvenile justice courts; long sentences for misdemeanors, such as stone throwing; and, the harsh treatment children undergo during all stages of arrest, interrogation and detention.

According to a report released in February by the NGO War Child Holland, approximately 6,000 Palestinian children, some as young as 12 years of age, have been arrested by the Israeli authorities since September 2000.

Using international human rights and humanitarian law as the framework, War Child's report argues that Israeli practice vis-à-vis arrested Palestinian children fails to meet international standards and notes a number of ways in which Israel offers better protections to Israeli children in conflict with the law, who are subject to Israel's domestic legal system, than it does to Palestinian children in the West Bank, who are subject to Israeli military orders. The report, also outlines a number of initiatives by civil society and the Palestinian Authority that target arrested and released children, including legal aid, advocacy and rehabilitation programs, among others.

Funding

Funding: CAP, Gaza Flash Appeal and HRF

By the end of February, \$233 million had been pledged towards projects in the revised 2009 Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), which stands at \$875 million for projects in the West Bank as well as the Gaza Flash Appeal. To date, the CAP is 27% funded, however some sectors have received little or no donor support, including Agriculture and Protection, which is of concern. The Gaza Flash Appeal for \$613 million, launched on 2 February, has received approximately 26% of its requested funds, mainly directed towards food security and shelter projects.

The Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) approved three emergency projects for Gaza during February, worth a total of \$489,736 – two for psycho-social activities and one to provide food assistance. The Fund is now depleted until new contributions are processed. Two projects, which fulfilled the HRF criteria, were pending approval until funds become available.

End Notes

1. This includes one structure that was self-demolished by the affected family in order to avoid the demolition fees that the Jerusalem Municipality charges families when it carries out a demolition.
2. Meir Margalit, "No Place Like Home: House Demolitions in East Jerusalem", Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, March 2007, p. 16.
3. For details on this process, see Meir Margalit, "No Place Like Home: House Demolitions in East Jerusalem", Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, March 2007. Also see, B'Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/english/Planning_and_Building/Index.asp
4. Ibid.
5. Figure derived from official figures for the period January – August 2008, combined with demolitions recorded by OCHA during the last quarter of 2008. Official demolition figures were provided to B'Tselem by the Jerusalem Municipality and the Ministry of Interior in September and November 2008, respectively, through the Freedom of Information Act. URL: http://www.btselem.org/english/Planning_and_Building/East_Jerusalem_Statistics.asp.
6. Number of displaced from B'Tselem. See <http://www.btselem.org>.
7. Amos Harel, "Israel plans to build up West Bank corridor on contested land," Ha'aretz, 1 February 2009.
8. Erez Crossing data only reflects those who cross from Gaza to Israel.
9. Palestinian Sector Coordination Council. Gaza Private Sector: Preliminary report on Post War Status and Needs. 25 February 2009. Final complete assessment results will be issued within two weeks from drafting this report.
10. Assessment of impact of Cast Lead Operation: Estimated Direct Losses to Agriculture in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009. Adding \$88.2 million of indirect losses estimated by the Ministry of Agriculture, total losses to agricultural sector reaches \$268.2 million.
11. Abdel Nasser Madi. The effects of the war toward the fisheries in Gaza Strip. January 2009.
12. Movement within the "buffer zone" is prohibited by the Israeli authorities. According to the Oslo Accords, the Palestinians are granted a fish catch area within 20 nautical miles off the Gazan coastline. The Gol agreed under the 2002 Bertini Commitments to a fishing zone of 12 nautical miles. Prior to the recent military offensive, fishermen could reach six nautical miles from the shore. Currently, they are allowed access to only three nautical miles.
13. International Monetary Fund. Macroeconomic and Fiscal Framework for the West Bank and Gaza: third review of progress. 25 February 2009.
14. The full report is available at: http://www.who.int/hac/crises/international/wbgs/gaza_early_health_assessment_16feb09.pdf.
15. For further information see: http://www.btselem.org/english/Firearms/20090301_Use_of_Ruger_rifle_in_demonstrations_prohibit.asp
16. Between 1 and 21 February, the Gaza Ministry of Health's Public Health Lab collected 248 water samples from water wells, water networks and water treatment plants throughout the Gaza Strip.

The following UN Agencies, local and international NGOs and organisations participate in sector working groups and regularly provide information to the Humanitarian Monitor: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), Al Haq, Badil, Save the Children (UK), Defence for Children International – Palestine Section (DCI-PS), Oxfam GB, Palestine Hydrology Group (PHG), ACF-E, AAA, ACFP, ACAD, and members of the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM).
