



## OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

P.O. Box 38712, East Jerusalem, Phone: (+972) 2-582 9962 / 582 5853, Fax: (+972) 2-582 5841 ochaopt@un.org, www.ochaopt.org

**Protection of Civilians Weekly Report No. 272****6 August – 12 August 2008****Decrease in military activities affecting civilians**

During the reporting period there was a significant decrease in military activities affecting civilians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory resulting in fewer civilian casualties compared to previous weeks. In the West Bank, 26 unarmed civilians were injured by the Israeli security forces, while no casualties were reported from the Gaza Strip and southern Israel in direct conflict related incidents.

Twenty two unarmed civilians (including eight children) were shot with metal-coated rubber bullets during the ongoing anti-Barrier protests in Ni'lin and Bil'in villages (Ramallah). At Bil'in, demonstrators were sprayed by the IDF with weak sewage water mixed with animal manure and chemicals, causing vomiting among demonstrators.

This week, 83 IDF search operations were reported in the West Bank, compared to 79 during the previous week. For the second consecutive week there was a small decrease in the number of people arrested by the IDF (67 vs. 70 in the previous week).

This is the second consecutive week since the 19 June truce with no reported casualties in the Gaza Strip. However, according to Israeli media reports, three homemade rockets were fired by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip into Israel, landing in open land within Sderot area. In a separate incident, on 11 August, Israeli patrol boats opened fire, targeting Palestinian fishing boats west of Rafah and forcing them to return to shore.

**More fatalities from collapse of tunnels**

Five Palestinians were killed this week due to the collapse of two tunnels across the border between Gaza and Egypt. Also, on 7 August, Egyptian security forces destroyed 20 tunnels and seized large quantities of fuel and other commercial goods. The tunnel seizures resulted in clashes between Egyptian security forces and smugglers, leaving two unknown individuals killed and four others injured inside Egyptian territory. Since the closing of Gaza's borders in June 2007, tunnels have increasingly been used to smuggle commercial goods into Gaza, alongside arms and explosives. Since the beginning of the year, 22 Palestinians were

killed in these circumstances and another 54 were injured.

This week Rafah crossing partially opened for one day, allowing three Palestinians who had been in Egypt for medical treatment to cross. According to police officers stationed at Rafah crossing, since April 2008, more than 7,000 people have applied for permits to leave Gaza for medical treatment, schooling, trading, and other reasons.

**Continuing fuel shortage in Gaza**

This week, the Hamas de-facto government banned the use of cooking gas to fuel vehicles in the Gaza Strip to help avoid possible shortages of cooking gas during the month of Ramadan. According to the Palestinian Petroleum Department, approximately 8,000 Gaza residents have retrofitted their vehicles to run on cooking gas in the last year. The government had previously banned vehicles from using vegetable oil to power diesel cars due to concerns about toxic fumes. Private vehicle owners appear to be abiding by the ban, but cab drivers still use vegetable oil, because of continuing fuel shortages. The Gaza fuel crisis began when Israel decided to reduce fuel shipments in October 07 after declaring the Hamas government a hostile entity, and in response to the Palestinian mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip.

**Inter-factional tension continues**

Hamas de facto government continued to arrest people and raid institutions allegedly associated with Fatah, albeit on a smaller scale compared to the previous two weeks. Since the explosion on Gaza City on 25 July, attributed by the Hamas authorities to Fatah insurgents, 465 Palestinians have been arrested by security forces affiliated to Hamas, including some high profile Fatah political leaders. Of all detainees, 279 have been released and 186 remain in detention. In addition, 34 out of 204 community-based organisations closed by Hamas authorities following the explosion have been reopened.

On 08 August, an exchange of gunfire took place between security forces affiliated to Hamas and members of the Army of Islam faction in Gaza City, when the former surrounded the houses of members of this faction in order to conduct arrests. No injuries were reported.

An Israeli human rights organization, Hamoked, filed a petition with Israeli High Court of Justice requesting that Israeli authorities allow eight Fatah affiliated individuals, who are currently located in an area adjacent to the border with Israel, to leave Gaza. According to the organization, these individuals fled their homes on 25 July, after security forces affiliated with Hamas entered their neighborhood and allegedly attempted to kill them. The Israeli authorities have agreed to let the eight cross to the West Bank if the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah so requests. The PA in Ramallah has not yet requested their entry.

In the West Bank, Palestinian security forces conducted eight searches and arrested 16 individuals. On 8 August, Palestinian Security Forces closed the Islamic Association in the town of Adh Dhahiriya, the Islamic Cultural Center in the village of Tafuh, the Beit Ula Charitable Society in the town of Beit Ula, and the Orphan Society in the town of Beit Ummar. The closures are intended for the period of one year, and were implemented due to institutions' alleged affiliation with Hamas. PA security forces also raided and confiscated computer equipment of two print shops in the H1 area of the City of Hebron and arrested three Palestinians for alleged links with Hamas. On August 12th, 2008 the Palestinian Preventative Security raided the offices of *Jamiyyat Al A'amal Al Khayria* in Al Haras neighborhood in the H1 area of the city of Hebron. All files and computers were confiscated. The director was summoned to the headquarters of the Preventative Security for three consecutive days for questioning.

### **Increasing settler violence in Hebron City and Jerusalem**

Israeli settlers from the settlements of Al Rajabi House and Kiryat Arba continued their attacks on Palestinians and their property in the neighbouring Wadi Al Hussein sections of the H2 area in Hebron City. A total of five civilians – three Palestinians and two foreigners, including two UNRWA staff and one child, were physically assaulted and injured. On 7 August large quantities of trash were placed at the entrance of Al Ras Mosque located next to Al Rajabi House settlement. In addition, Israeli settlers from Giv'at Ha'avot settlement (next to Kiryat Arba) attacked five nearby Palestinian houses with rocks and bottles. On 11 August a group of settlers from Al Rajabi House settlement unsuccessfully attempted to set fire to Al Ras Mosque.

On 06, 07, and 12 August, a group of armed Israeli settlers arrived at the Shu'fat Refugee Camp in East Jerusalem and attempted to

establish an illegal outpost, claiming ownership of property inside the camp. The IDF prevented them from entering the camp and thirteen settlers were arrested. In a separate incident, on 09 August, a group of Israeli settlers attempted to take over a Palestinian house in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Beit Safafa. The house is located on a 12 dunum plot of land owned by a Palestinian family from Jerusalem. Palestinian residents of the area subsequently entered the vacant house and cleared it of the settlers' belongings.

### **Access Restrictions in the West Bank**

On 7 August, the IDF partially opened a gate blocking access into Hebron City from Road 35 for commercial trucks. The gate is scheduled to be open on daily basis between 5 to 7 AM and again between 9 AM and 1 PM. This partial opening would allow easier access from Hebron City to the Tarqumiya Terminal, thereby reducing travel time of commercial trucks from 45 minutes to 20 minutes.

In addition, on 9 August, the IDF opened Shave Shomeron checkpoint for all traffic movement—between 6:00 - 18:00 everyday. The opening of the checkpoint eases access between the Jenin district and the central and southern parts of the West Bank. This checkpoint was closed on 15 August 2005 for all traffic, including ambulances, UN staff and humanitarian organizations.

Long delays and queues continued on major access roads to Qalqiliya City (Qalqiliya DCO), Nablus City (Huwvara and Beit Iba), the northern West Bank (Tappuah), the northern Jordan Valley (Tayasir and Hamra), Jerusalem (Qalandiya, Rafat and Jaba'), Ramallah (Jaba'), and the central and southern West Bank (Jericho DCO). In addition, a total of 88 flying checkpoints were reported this week, 34% more than the previous week. The highest numbers of these checkpoints were seen in Hebron, Qalqiliya and Salfit governorates, respectively.

#### **Protection of Civilians Weekly Briefing Notes – New Format**

*Following the change in the format of this report since 9 July 2008, please be informed that detailed information on casualties, house demolitions, settler incidents, curfew, flying checkpoints, search and arrest operations, rockets, mortars and airstrikes, which appeared in the previous format, will be gradually made available in a searchable format on OCHA's website as of 15 August 2008.*