



PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

16-22 December 2009

West Bank

Military activities affecting civilians: no Palestinian casualties

For the first time since the beginning of 2009, this week, Israeli military and security activities throughout the West Bank ended with no Palestinian casualties. The weekly average of Palestinian injuries in these circumstances since the beginning of the year stands at 17. This week, Israeli forces conducted 99 search operations inside Palestinian villages, the majority of which took place in the northern West Bank (69), compared to a weekly average of around 100 operations since the beginning of the year.

Three of this week's search and arrest operations were carried out at night in the villages of Ni'lin and Bil'in (Ramallah), following the weekly anti-Barrier demonstrations. Following one of these operations in Ni'lin, residents clashed with the army, which subsequently established a "flying checkpoint" at the entrance of the village that disrupted movement of villagers in the early morning hours. Raids and arrests in these villages have intensified in recent months, targeting the houses of participants in anti-barrier demonstrations.

Media reports indicate that the Palestinians stepped up its measures against Hamas figures and members in the West Bank; on 21-22 December, the security forces of Palestinian Authority (PA) arrested 15 Palestinians allegedly affiliated to Hamas throughout the West Bank. On 21 December, PA security forces also opened fire towards a car carrying a figure affiliated with the Palestinian faction of Hizb Al Tahreer in Hebron City and then arrested him.

Tension in Sheikh Jarrah continues

Four Palestinians, including two boys, and four Israeli settlers were injured this week in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem in three separate incidents involving stone-throwing and physical clashes between settlers and local residents. The clashes took place in the context of recurring attempts by settler organizations to take over additional Palestinian property in this area. A group of Israeli settlers took over an uninhabited part of a Palestinian house on 1 December and a Palestinian family of four persons was forced to leave their home following an eviction order issued by the Israeli authorities. Prior to this, in early

August 2009, 53 Palestinians were forcibly evicted in similar circumstances.

Also this week, more than 200 Israeli and international activists marched from West Jerusalem to Sheikh Jarrah protesting the evictions of Palestinian residents of the neighborhood. Israeli security forces tried to prevent the demonstration from taking place and arrested 27 of them.

Settler-related incidents continue

An additional 22 settler-related incidents were reported throughout the West Bank, almost twice the weekly average since the beginning of 2009 (eight). Of these, seven affected Palestinians, resulting in the injury of one boy, while the other 15 incidents affected Israeli settlers, resulting in injury to four settlers.

In one of the incidents, an 8 year-old Palestinian boy from Hebron City sustained multiple injuries when he fell while escaping from settlers from an outpost near Giv'at Ha Kharsina settlement. Two additional incidents, which involved clashes between settlers and Palestinians, occurred reportedly in the context of dispute over land ownership in the vicinity of the Shilo (Nablus) and Mitzpe Asael (Hebron) settlements, resulting in injury to one settler.

Protests by settlers against the 10-month freeze on new residential construction in West Bank settlements (excluding East Jerusalem) continued during the week. In this context, settlers from the settlements of Kedumim (Qalqiliya) and Eli (Nablus) threw stones at Palestinian vehicles driving on Road 55 and 60, resulting in no injuries or damage. In addition, settlers from Talmon and Dolev settlements (Ramallah) clashed with Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) representative to prevent them from handing out construction freeze orders; at least six settlers were detained by the Israeli police and one settlement security official was dismissed for participating in protest activities.

Also this week, there were 11 separate stone-throwing incidents and one cocktail Molotov throwing by Palestinians towards settler vehicles driving on West Bank roads, which resulted in light injury to three settlers.

New Beit Iba permanently-staffed checkpoint becomes “partial”

The Beit Iba checkpoint, which controls Palestinian traffic along the main access route into Nablus City from the west, ceased to be staffed by Israeli forces on a permanent basis, while most of its infrastructure remained in place. The checkpoint was first erected at the western entrance of the city in 2001. This measure eases access for Palestinians from Nablus City into the western side.

In the southern West Bank, access for three teachers and 40 students from different hamlets of Massafer Yatta area (Hebron) to their newly-established Al Fakhiet school was disrupted when Israeli forces confiscated a vehicle used to transport them.

Gaza Strip

No direct-conflict casualties

During the reporting period, there were no Palestinian casualties reported in the context of Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Since the end of the “Cast Lead” offensive on 18 January 2009, a total of 89 Palestinians and one Israeli have been killed and another 154 Palestinians and seven Israelis injured in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza and southern Israel.

In six separate incidents reported over this week, Israeli naval forces opened fire at Palestinian fishing boats along Gaza’s coast, forcing them to return to shore; no injuries or damage to boats were reported. In one of these incidents, the targeted boat entered Egyptian territorial waters while attempting to escape, following which the Egyptian naval force confiscated the boat and arrested three fishermen, who were subsequently released in the same day. Also, on three separate occasions, Israeli forces launched an incursion a few hundred metres within Gaza and withdrew after conducting land-leveling operations.

Palestinian factions have continued to launch rudimentary rockets towards southern Israel and military bases, resulting in no injuries or damage to property. Some of the rockets landed inside the

Gaza Strip, including one fired towards the sea, which exploded prematurely causing a large explosion; no injuries were reported. One alleged Hamas militant was killed and another two sustained wounds when an explosive went off prematurely in central Gaza area.

Three Palestinians die in tunnel collapse

Three Palestinians from the same family were killed in an incident involving the collapse of a tunnel under the Gaza-Egypt border. Another Palestinian was injured in a separate tunnel incident when electrocuted. Though posing high risks on their lives, the population of the Gaza Strip remain forced to use the poorly-constructed tunnels as a substitute for transporting goods, which is otherwise restricted through commercial crossings. Since the end of Israel's "Cast Lead" offensive, reportedly 64 Palestinians have been killed and 120 others were killed in various tunnel-related incidents.

Explosion targets civil society associations

On 21 December, an explosive device was detonated in front of the building housing the offices of two civil society associations in Gaza City (Al al-Bait Society for Heritage and Sharia' Sciences and the National Center of Research and Studies) resulting in the injury of a man and damage to the building. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. This follows incidents during the previous week, in which unknown perpetrators broke into the offices two local and one international NGO, and stole money and computers. These incidents compound the already fragile situation of civil society associations, which are confronted also with direct interference by the Hamas authorities, including the seizure of imports.

Death toll of Influenza A (H1N1) virus reaches 13 in Gaza

During the week, the death toll of Influenza A (H1N1) virus reached 13 since the first incident of the disease on 5 December. As of 21 December, the Hamas Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza and the World Health Organization confirmed another 172 suspected cases of H1N1 in the Gaza Strip, of which 40 were diagnosed with the virus and currently receive treatment and 132 have recovered. The MoH reported that while 3,600 Tamiflu doses for treating the virus are available, it is waiting to receive H1N1 vaccination from its counterpart in Ramallah.

Concerns over "trapped" students in Gaza at risk of losing their academic year continue

A demonstration aimed at raising awareness of the situation of students enrolled in universities abroad and unable to leave Gaza, took place in Gaza City on 22 December. Of the 668 Gaza students enrolled in universities abroad, who were waiting to leave Gaza, only 82 succeeded to cross the Rafah Crossing when it opened for the last time on 10 December, all of whom were admitted to Egyptian universities. The ability of students in Gaza to pursue their education abroad is largely restricted since the imposition of the blockade in June 2007. Exit via Israel is subject to strict criteria, including having a scholarship with a 'recognized' university (although no such list has been produced by the Israeli authorities) and escort by a diplomat from the country that awarded the scholarship from the Erez Crossing, across Israel and the West Bank, until the student reaches the border crossing between Israel and Jordan.

Fuel supply Update

The Nahal Oz fuel pipelines have continued to operate on only one out of five scheduled days, while fuel pipelines located at the Kerem Shalom Crossing operated on four days. Indications suggest that Israel intends to shut down Nahal Oz crossing entirely in the near future and the direct all fuel imports to the Kerem Shalom crossing.

The amount of cooking gas that entered during the reporting period declined by 14 percent compared to the previous week (605 compared to 700 tonnes), and constituted approximately 43 percent of weekly needs, as estimated by the Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA). As a result of continuing shortages of cooking gas, a gas rationing scheme is being implemented throughout the Gaza Strip, with quantities of gas available at the Palestinian General Petroleum Corporation (PPC) being distributed to bakeries and hospitals and other essential public service facilities as a priority.

Approximately 2.2 million litres of industrial gas entered Gaza this week, constituting approximately 70 percent of the weekly amount of fuel needed to operate the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) at full capacity. According to the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO), scheduled rolling blackouts continue to affect the majority of the population, up to 32 hours a week. Over 40,000 people remain without electricity, as networks, which sustained severe damage during the “Cast Lead” offensive, have not yet been repaired, due to restrictions on the entry of needed supplies.

No Israeli petrol or diesel entered the Gaza Strip this week. Egyptian petrol and diesel, which is transferred through the tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border, remain available on the open market, with nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 100,000 litres of petrol transferred into Gaza per day.

Weekly average of imported truckloads remain below needs

A total of 549.5 truckloads of goods entered Gaza this week, more than twice the weekly average of truckloads that entered during December 2008 (215 truckloads), when the blockade intensified dramatically. However, this week’s figure made up only one-fifth of the 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 - 88 percent. The remaining 12 percent included non-edible consumables, medical and agricultural supplies and stationery. One truckload of 72,000 cut-flower carnations left Gaza this week; this is the second exported truckload from Gaza since 27 April 2009.

Entry of other major essential goods including materials for reconstruction (cement, steel bars, glass, wood and others), spare parts for water and sanitation projects, other electrical materials, IT equipment and vehicles remain either restricted to limited quantities, or barred from entry entirely.

