



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

Report on:

The Impact of the Closure Policy on Agricultural Exports in the Gaza Strip



Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

Consultative Status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations
Affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists - Geneva
Member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) - Paris
Member of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network – Copenhagen
Member of the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) - Stockholm
Member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights – Cairo



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

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The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is an independent non-profit legal agency based in Gaza city. The Centre was established in April 1995 by a group of Palestinian lawyers and human rights activists in order to protect human rights and promote the rule of law in accordance with international standards, create and develop democratic institutions and an active civil society in Palestine in accordance with internationally accepted standards and practices and support all efforts aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights according to international law.

The Centre enjoys Consultative Status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. It was granted three international prominent awards for its efforts in the field of human rights:

1. The 1996 French Republic Award on Human Rights; and
2. The 2002 Bruno Kreisky Award for Outstanding Achievements in the Area of Human Rights; and
3. The 2003 International Service Human Rights Award (UNAIS).

The Centre has wide relationships with human rights and civil society organizations throughout the world. It is an affiliate of five international and Arab human rights organizations, which are active in the international arena:

International Commission of Jurists

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), headquartered in Geneva, is a non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe and the OAU. Founded in 1952, its task is to defend the rule of law throughout the world and to work towards the full observance of the provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. its membership is composed of sixty eminent jurists who are representatives of the different legal systems of the world.

Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme

The Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) is an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to the world-wide defence of human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Founded in 1922, FIDH has eighty-nine national affiliates in all regions.

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (Euro-Med Network) is a network of human rights organisations and individuals from the Middle East, North Africa and the European Union, established in 1997. The overall objective of the Network is to contribute to the protection of the human rights principles embodied in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995.

International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC)

The International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) is one of the most important international legal bodies. It is specialized in legal and judicial training. It includes more than 30 members of distinguished legal organizations throughout the world, including American Bar Association; Arab Lawyers Union; and Bar Council of England and Wales.

The Arab Organization for Human Rights

It is an NGO founded in 1983. It calls for respect and promotion of human and people rights and fundamental freedoms in the Arab World for all individuals on its land in accordance with international human rights instruments. The Organization signed an agreement with Egypt in May 2000, according to which its headquarter was moved from Limassol in Cyprus to Cairo.



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is an independent non-profit non-governmental organisation dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic principles in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

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Introduction:

Since mid-June 2007, Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) imposed a total closure policy including tightening its stranglehold on the economy of the Gaza Strip as well as the imposition of severe restrictions on Gaza's imports and exports. The policy of bulldozing farms and the destruction of agricultural property adopted by IOF has skewed the agricultural sector. A sector unable to develop due to the excessive destruction of agricultural land and establishments, irrigating networks, water pumps, water wells, agricultural stores, greenhouses and livestock.

IOF have imposed severe restrictions on the import needs of the agricultural sector including raw materials and agricultural equipment. They have also imposed a near total ban on agricultural products for export. These measures have resulted in the deterioration of the agricultural sector and thousands of Palestinian farmers have been denied their right to work freely. These policies form part of the collective punishment imposed on the civilian population and constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war. It has affected various aspects of Palestinian life and resulted in major deterioration at the different levels of Palestinian farmers' lives in the Gaza Strip who are experiencing high rates of unemployment and poverty.

This report observes the impact of the total closure policy that has been imposed by IOF on the agricultural sector in Gaza since mid-June 2007. It addresses the impact of this policy on the various aspects of the agricultural sector, especially the losses experienced as a result of the suspension of the exportation of agricultural products to external markets during the agricultural season (from November 2010 to April 2011). The following is a summary of the report:

- Bulldozing of Palestinian agricultural land conducted by IOF has resulted in serious damage and has inflicted heavy material losses on Palestinian farmers in the Gaza Strip.
- The area of cultivated land has been reduced by 7.5 percent due to bulldozing cultivated areas in the Gaza Strip.
- Since the beginning of the second Intifada, approximately 48,051 dunum of cultivated land has been bulldozed, and 2,358 water wells have been completely or partially damaged. IOF also destroyed 392 agricultural water pools, 1,262 greenhouses and 76,585 square meters on which agricultural shelters, establishments and water wells were erected.
- During the present agricultural seasons, IOF prevented Palestinian farmers in the Gaza Strip from exporting their products to external markets in the West Bank, Jordan and Israel.
- The continued closure imposed on the Gaza Strip and the closure of commercial border crossings have resulted in a reduction of the percentage of agricultural products exported from the Gaza Strip to external markets. IOF have imposed a complete ban on the exportation of Gaza's agricultural products with the exception of limited quantities of flowers, strawberries, bell pepper and cherry tomatoes which were exported to European markets.
- During the current season, IOF allowed the exportation of 287 truckloads¹ of agricultural products including 82 truckloads of flowers, 384 truckloads of strawberries, three truckloads of bell pepper and another three truckloads of cherry tomatoes.

¹The strawberry exportation season begins mid-November annually concluding late February of the following year. The flower exportation season also begins mid-November each year but concludes late April of the following year.

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- The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) observed a reduction in the quantity of agricultural products permitted for exportation during the reporting period compared to the number exported before tightening the siege of the Gaza Strip mid-June 2007.
- As a result of the continued closure, Palestinian farmers in the Gaza Strip have endured severe material losses. They have been unable to export all their products to external markets and were forced to reduce the area of land cultivated for export crops.
- When IOF allowed the exportation of agricultural products, they intentionally hindered the exportation process by prolonging the issuing of permits required for the movement of export crops via commercial crossings. This degraded the quality of exported items.
- IOF have imposed a ban on the importation of numerous agricultural material including; phosphate, NPK 202020 fertilizer which is a compound fertilizer used after the cultivation of land and potassium nitrate used for the preparation of land prior to the cultivation of crops.

Background on the Agricultural Sector in the Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip measures 365 square kilometers. Cultivated land represents 20.6 percent of the total area of the Gaza Strip where the cultivation of citrus trees, vegetables and fruits thrive. There are approximately 59,828 dunums where cultivated for fruit trees, 46,231 dunums cultivated for vegetables and 54,150 dunums cultivated for field crops. Agricultural land is distributed to the different governorates of the Gaza Strip as follows²:

1. Northern Gaza Strip: 18.9 percent of the total cultivated area.
2. Gaza: 15.6 percent of the total cultivated area.
3. Central Gaza Strip: 25.1 percent of the total cultivated area.
4. Khan Younis: 22.4 percent of the total cultivated area.
5. Rafah: 20.9 percent of the total cultivated area.

Statistics show that the production of irrigated farms in the Gaza Strip registered 3,986.4 tons/km².³ Agricultural activity is one the Gaza Strip's most important activities. The agricultural sector plays a major role in the national economy by employing a labour force, providing foreign currency and numerous raw materials to other economic sectors. Agricultural exports contribute to a significant portion of external commerce and the agricultural sector.

² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agriculture Census, April 2010-April 2011.

³ For more detail, please see Strategy of Sustainable Agricultural Development For 2010 through 2020, Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, January 2010.

The Destruction of the Agricultural Sector

Bulldozing of Palestinian agricultural land implemented by IOF has resulted in serious damage and inflicted heavy material losses on Palestinian farmers in the Gaza Strip, affecting their enjoyment of their economic and social rights as well as their civil and political rights⁴. Bulldozing activity is aimed at reducing the cultivated lands by 7.5 percent.

Bulldozing activity targets land cultivated for olive trees, citrus trees, vegetables and other crops. According to PCHR's documentation, since the second intifada on 28 September 2001, IOF have carried out excessive bulldozing and demolition that targeted approximately 48,051 dunum of cultivated land, 2,358 water wells, 392 agricultural water pools, 1,262 greenhouses and 76,585 square meters on which agricultural shelters; establishments and water wells were erected.

Bulldozing activity carried out during the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009 was the most excessive ever. It targeted 6,855 dunums of cultivated lands including 2,957 dunums (43.2 percent) in Gaza's governorate, 2,930 dunums (30.6 percent) in northern Gaza Strip, 975 dunums (14.2 percent) in central Gaza Strip, 484 dunums (7.4 percent), 311 dunums (5.4 percent) in Rafah. In addition, IOF tanks and bulldozers destroyed approximately 875 irrigation networks distributed as follows: 495 networks (56.6 percent) in northern Gaza Strip, 332 networks (37.4 percent) in Gaza, 13 networks (1.5 percent) in central Gaza Strip, 27 networks (3 percent) in Khan Younis and 8 networks (less than 1 percent) in Rafah. IOF also destroyed 206 greenhouses, 151 water wells and 40 agricultural pools⁵.

This destruction negatively impacted the local labour force and thousands of workers who were employed in the agricultural sector were unable to work. It should be noted that the agricultural sector provides permanent and temporary job opportunities to more than 40,000 persons and provides food and a livelihood for approximately 25 percent of the Gaza Strip's population.

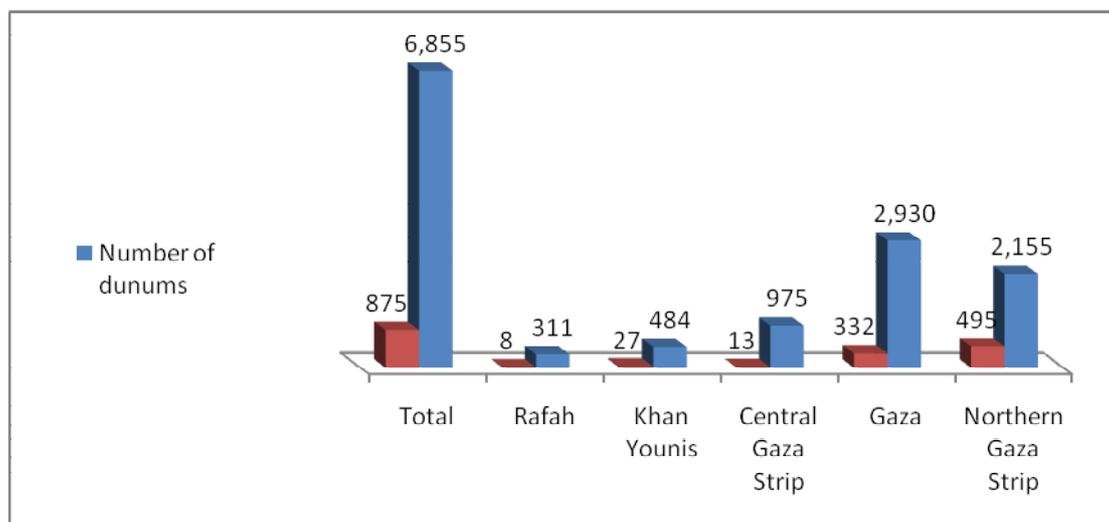
Table I illustrates the number of agricultural dunums and irrigation networks that were bulldozed during the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip

Governorate	Number of dunums	Networks	Miscellaneous
Northern Gaza Strip	2,155	495	206 greenhouses 151 water wells 40 water pools
Gaza	2,930	332	
Central Gaza Strip	975	13	
Khan Younis	484	27	
Rafah	311	8	
Total	6,855	875	

⁴ IOF justify bulldozing of agricultural lands by saying that Palestinians carry out "sabotage" directed at the Israeli army. In locations where IOF are subjected to resistance, they invade the area and level land for allegedly opening the area for security reasons. Although resistance has been reduced, IOF continue to undertake excessive bulldozing and demolition activity. In many cases, IOF undertake such activity during periods of calm.

⁵ For more detail, please see "Targeted Civilians," a report on the comprehensive offensive implemented by IOF on the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, PCHR, 2009.

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Impact of the closure of crossings on agricultural exports

On 2 March 2011, Israeli authorities totally closed al-Mentar "Karni" crossing which is the biggest crossing in the Gaza Strip in terms of its capacity to absorb exports and imports. Over the past three years, Israeli occupation authorities have worked to make Karm Abu Salem crossing (not suitable for commercial purposes) Gaza's sole commercial crossing. At the beginning of 2010, Israeli occupation authorities closed Nahal Oz crossing designated for the supply of fuel and cooking gas to Gaza. The supply of fuel was moved to Karm Abu Salem crossing. Also totally closed was Sofa crossing southeast of Khan Younis. Humanitarian aid and food items previously delivered through the crossing were moved to Karm Abu Salem crossing. A reduction in the quantity of Gaza's exports is attributed to the continued siege and the closure of commercial crossings. IOF imposed a total ban on the exportation of agricultural products, with the exception of limited quantities of flowers, strawberries, bell pepper and cherry tomatoes during the 2010/2011 season⁶.

During the current agricultural season⁷, IOF allowed the export of 287 truckloads of agricultural crops including 82 truckloads carrying 10,482,000 flowers (17.47 percent of Gaza's annual flower production which amounts to approximately 60 million flowers), 384 truckloads carrying 399 tons of strawberries (26.6 percent of Gaza's annual production of strawberries amounting to approximately 1,500 tons). IOF also permitted the export of very limited quantities of bell peppers (three truckloads carrying six tons) and cherry tomatoes (three truckloads carrying seven tons).

⁶ On 5 April 2011, IOF closed Karm Abu Salem for one week allegedly for security reasons and accordingly prevented the exportation of agricultural crops to European markets. On 18 April 2011, IOF closed the crossing again for Jewish holidays.

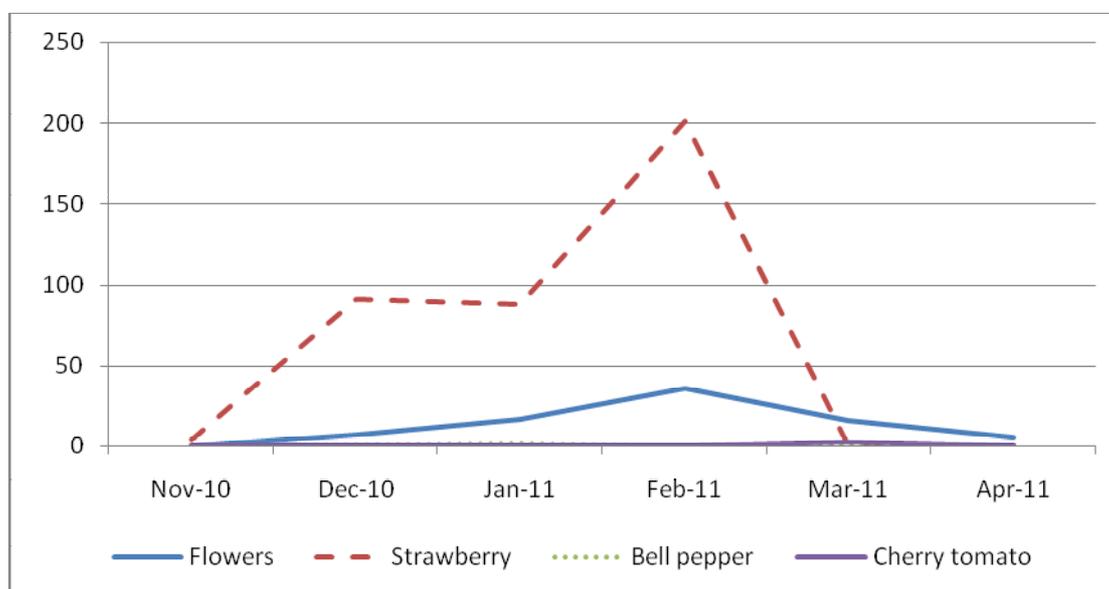
⁷ The strawberry exportation season begins mid-November annually concluding late February of the following year. The flower exportation season also begins mid-November each year but concludes late April of the following year.

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The following table illustrates the quantity of agricultural crops that were permitted for export via Karm Abu Salem Crossing from the beginning of November 2011 until the end of April 2011.

Table II: Quantity of agricultural exports during the current season⁸

Date	Flowers		Strawberries		Vegetables				Number of truckloads
	Flowers	Truckloads	Tons	Truckloads	Bell peppers		Cherry tomatoes		
					Tons	Truckloads	Tons	Truckloads	
November 2010	43,000	0	6	4	0	0	0	0	4
December 2010	996,000	7	171	91	1	1	0	0	99
January 2011	2,762,000	17	168	88	5	2	0	0	107
February 2011	4,054,000	36	54	201	0	0	0	0	52
March 2011	2,152,000	16	0	0	0	0	7	3	19
April 2011	475,000	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	10,482,000	82	399	384	6	3	7	3	287



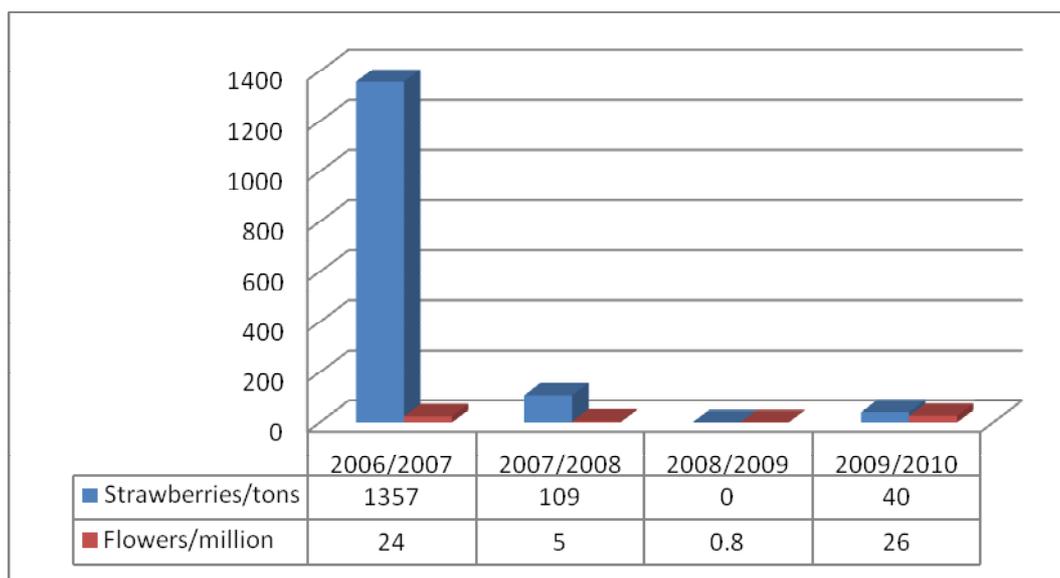
PCHR observed the drop in the quantity of agricultural crops permitted for export during the reporting period compared to the quantity allowed before tightening the siege of the Gaza Strip mid-June 2007.

Table III illustrates the impact of the closure on Gaza's export of strawberries and flowers over the last four seasons

Crop/season	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
Strawberries/tons	1357	109	00	40
Percent	90.46%	7.75%	0.00%	2.60%
Flowers/millions	24	5	0.8	26
Percent	40.0%	8.33%	1.33%	43.33%

⁸ The data shown in the table was made available to the PCHR fieldworker from the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC).

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The table above shows the quantities of strawberries and flowers exported over the last four seasons (2006 to 2010), during the 2006/2007 season, 1,357 tons of strawberries and 24 million flowers were permitted for export. During the 2007/2008 season, 109 tons of strawberries and five million flowers were allowed for export. During the 2008/2009 season, strawberries were not allowed to be exported while 0.8 million flowers were allowed to be exported. During the 2009/2010 season, 40 tons of strawberries and 26 million flowers were permitted for export.

• Flowers

During the current season, IOF prevented Gaza's farmers from exporting their flowers to Jordan, the West Bank and Israel. Palestinian farmers depended on selling their flowers in the European market which is the principal market for flowers⁹. IOF allowed the exportation of 82 truckloads carrying 10,482,000 flowers. Because of the siege on the Gaza Strip, Palestinian farmers have suffered heavy material losses and were unable to export their products to external markets. When IOF allowed the exportation of agricultural products, they intentionally hindered the export process by prolonging the issuing of permits required for the movement of export crops via commercial crossings. This in turn has resulted in decreasing the quality of exported items.

- Case Study: Zakari Hejazi, farmer:

Zakari Hamza Hejazi, 44, is a farmer from Rafah. He provides for a family of seven. He has been working as a farmer for more than 22 years, inheriting this occupation from his father. Hejazi owns 62 dunums in Rafah. He cultivates 54 dunums for flowers and produces 120,000 flowers every season. The remaining eight dunums are allocated to miscellaneous vegetables that he sells locally at markets in Rafah. Currently, Hejazi employs 75 workers, including 25 workers he employs at the beginning of every agricultural season and 50 workers employed for the harvest. Hejazi reported that he was forced to fire 15 employees who worked for him before 2007 because he was unable to export his crops. Some of the workers are paid on hourly basis while others are paid monthly. These workers provide for some 450 persons mainly from the money they get from Hejazi.

⁹ There are four stock markets for flowers in the Netherlands. Flowers are exported from these markets to other European countries.

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Hejazi says that his economic conditions deteriorated because he was unable to export his flowers to the European market this season, although there have been many promises to facilitate the exportation of flowers. He added that he managed to export only 2.8 million flowers out of 6.5 million flowers that he produced this season. Hejazi stated that he has been unable to fulfill his financial obligations and that he owes merchants. He would normally fulfill such obligations after selling his flowers. He explained that he was unable to export the majority of flowers - he used a portion as fodder for his animals and the local market absorbed only 10 percent at very low rates.

Hejazi suffered heavy losses as a result. He says that he and other farmers continue to endure hardship despite hearing yearly promises to facilitate the exportation of their products to European markets. He said he wondered about the reason for the stranglehold on Palestinian farmers' livelihood by preventing them from exporting their products. He said that the closure of Karm Abu Salem prevented farmers like himself from exporting their flowers to external markets. It forced them to reduce the area of land cultivated for flowers as they could not bear the heavy costs associated with it especially in view of the deterioration of economic and social conditions in the Gaza Strip.

• Strawberries

Strawberries are mainly cultivated in the northern Gaza Strip. Approximately 1,500 workers are directly employed in strawberry farms while there are approximately another 500 workers who are indirectly employed through its transportation, marketing and packaging. These farmers provide for approximately 500 families in the Gaza Strip.

Because strawberry cultivation requires special attention and care, its costs are relatively high. The cost of one dunum cultivated for strawberries reaches about \$ 3,473.

PARC contributes to 33 percent of the cost of production input and UNRWA contributes to the provision of workers (one worker per dunum) while farmers provide the rest of requirements. During the current season, the costs of 350 dunums of strawberries were covered by external funds while the costs of another 600 dunums were covered by farmers themselves¹⁰.

Farmers of the Gaza Strip depended on Europe as its main market to sell their strawberries. IOF allowed the exportation of 384 truckloads carrying 399 tons of strawberries during the current season. Approximately 250 tons of strawberries from the Gaza Strip were supposed to be marketed in the West Bank but IOF did not allow it to be exported instead selling strawberries from Israel.

Engineer Jamil Ramadan al-Bu's, agricultural extensionist at the Cash Crops project run by PARC, told PCHR's fieldworker the following:¹¹

"Before tightening the siege on the Gaza Strip and the closure of commercial crossing, approximately 2,500 dunums were cultivated for strawberries in Beit Lahia. Due to the siege and farmers' inability to export their products to European markets, the area of land cultivated for strawberries has decreased to 953 dunums as farmers are trying to avoid further losses and to maintain reasonable rates in the local market. During the current season, farmers suffered heavy losses estimated at 500,000 NIS."

¹⁰ An interview with Mr. Mohammed Zwayed, Marketing Officer, 'Enforcing and Developing Agricultural Crops in the Gaza Strip' project, PARC, on 31 March 2011.

¹¹ An interview with engineer Jamil Ramadan al-Bu', agricultural extensionist in the Cash Crop Project run by PARC, on 6 April 2011.

- Case Study: Jamil Abu Hmeida:

Due to the siege and closure policy of crossings in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian farmers in the Gaza strip have been forced to sell their products in local markets at very low rates. Many agricultural activities were suspended including abandoning land in fear of incurring further losses. Hundreds of families in the Gaza Strip inherited their occupation in farming land with strawberries. Farms are passed on from fathers to their children and then to grandchildren who inherit agricultural expertise from generation to generation. The closure not only results in the destruction of the agricultural sector, it also erodes the lifestyle of hundreds of Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip.

Jamil Abu Hmeida, 53, is a farmer from Beit Lahia. He provides for his family which comprises five members. He owns nine dunums and cultivates them with strawberries. He employs 14 workers, including six of his relatives. Every season, from mid-October to mid-February, these workers provide for approximately 70 people.

Abu Hmeida said that during the current season, he suffered losses of approximately 70,000 NIS because he was unable to export his strawberries to European markets due to the repeated closure of Karm Abu Salem crossing. He said he managed to export only five tons out of the 13 tons of strawberry produced from his farm. During last season,

Abu Hmeida produced 14 tons of strawberries and was forced to sell his product in local markets at very low prices which are less than 50 percent of price in external markets. Abu Hmeida explained that he was unable to export his product in 2009 to European markets which was not the case prior to 2007. He said that he was disappointed because he only exported five tons of his strawberry production throughout three seasons adding that he suffered heavy material losses because he was forced to sell his product on the local market at very low prices. One ton of strawberries is sold at approximately 10,000 NIS in European markets while at the beginning of the strawberry season, when quantities are still limited, one ton of strawberries is sold at 5,000 NIS. The price drops to 2,500 NIS when the quantities increase as a result of the inability to export strawberries to European markets.

Abu Hmeida explained that farmers in the Gaza Strip import all of their agricultural needs from Israeli markets including nylon sheets, pesticides, carton, boxes, seeds and seedlings whilst they are prevented from exporting their products to Israel and other markets. Israel's agricultural products, including fruits, are imported and marketed in the Gaza Strip. Abu Hmeida said that UNRWA and the World Bank help farmers to cover some of the operating expenses and that Palestinian NGOs working in the area of agricultural development provide farmers with some agricultural needs such as nylon sheets, pesticides, cartons, boxes as well as providing agricultural extensionists. However, Abu Hmeida adds that all of these institutions and organization cannot guarantee the exportation of farmers' products to external markets in Europe and they powerless vis-à-vis the repeated closure of commercial crossings by Israeli occupation authorities.

- Measures taken by Israeli authorities result in decreasing the quality of Palestinian products

Strawberries are harvested, sorted and packaged in sorting stations on strawberry farms. The packaged strawberries are transported to the collecting and cooling stations in Gaza's Agricultural Cooperative and the Cooperative Association of Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. Agronomists from the Ministry of Agriculture check the strawberry packages which are then transported in refrigerator trucks to Karm Abu Salem crossing where the packages are unloaded and subject to inspection by Israel, a measure which

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affects the quality of strawberries. The packages are then transported to collecting centers of Agresco, an Israeli company, which transports the strawberries to international stock markets in the Netherlands and then to other European markets.

- Israeli authorities prevent the importation of agricultural needs to the Gaza Strip

IOF have imposed a ban on the importation of various agricultural material including phosphate, NPK 202020 fertilizer which is a compound fertilizer used after the cultivation of land, and potassium nitrate which is used for the preparation of land prior to cultivation of crops.

Abdul Razzaq Ahmed al-Musallami, a farmer from Beit Lahia, has six dunums for strawberry cultivation. He feels the impact of the ban imposed on the importation of fertilizers, chemicals and gas used to improve the quality of farm. He reported the following:

"I have six dunums for strawberry cultivation. I exported four tons to European markets and marketed the rest to local markets. The ban imposed on the exportation of strawberries to the West Bank and Israeli during the current season has resulted in losses. The ongoing closure has resulted in a ban imposed on the delivery of gas, fertilizers and chemicals which we need to improve the quality of land."

• Bell peppers

Bell peppers are mostly cultivated in the southern Gaza Strip; farmers depend on European markets to sell their production of bell peppers. The current season witnessed a reduction in the quantity of bell peppers allowed for export because Israeli authorities delayed issuing permits for the exportation of bell peppers to mid-December; i.e., 40 days after the beginning of the season. IOF allowed the exportation of only three truckloads carrying on six tons of bell peppers. It should be noted that 30 tons of bell peppers were supposed to be exported to European markets during the current season.

Suheil Shehda Hejazi, 44, a farmer from Rafah told the PCHR fieldworker that:

"I suffered heavy losses of 65 percent (more than \$10,000) during this season as I was not able to export my production of bell peppers. I managed to export only two tons out of 25 tons of bell peppers produced on my farm which measures four dunums. The exportation process started on 20 January 2011 and it was concluded rapidly in February. Significant quantities of my product decayed because they were stored for a long time. The rest was sold in local markets at low prices. Many of the pesticides and fertilizers required on the farm are not available because of the ongoing closure."

• Cherry tomatoes

Israeli authorities allowed the export of cherry tomatoes mid-February and the first truckload of cherry tomatoes was permitted for export on 2 March 2011. Only seven tons of cherry tomatoes were allowed for export in three batches. The export of cherry tomatoes was supposed occur in mid-November. It should be noted that 250 tons of cherry tomatoes were supposed to be exported to European markets during the current season.

Ibrahim Khamis Dheir, 50, a farmer from Rafah, told PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I cultivated two dunums with cherry tomatoes. During the current seasons which begun in February, I managed to export only two truckloads to European markets. The last truckload was exported mid-March. The exportation was concluded and resulted in heavy losses. I stored the product but it was not allowed to be exported. During the current season, I suffered losses of approximately \$3,000 per dunum. If the crossings were opened, I would have exported between seven and 10 tons of cherry tomatoes."

Conclusion and Recommendations

The tightened siege, the continued closure of crossings and the additional restrictions imposed on the Gaza Strip by IOF can only be framed as part of the collective punishment policy imposed on the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. This policy is prohibited under international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention. Article 33 of this Convention provides for that: "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited. Pillage is prohibited. Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited." Article 55 of the same convention states that: "To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate. The Occupying Power may not requisition foodstuffs, articles or medical supplies available in the occupied territory... and then only if the requirements of the civilian population have been taken into account."

In addition, the repercussions of the ongoing closure result in serious violations of the international human rights law. IOF are violating all civil, political, economic and social human rights of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. IOF actions are in contradiction with Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) which states that: "In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence" and Article 5 which states that: "Nothing in the present Covenant may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights or freedoms recognized herein,"

- PCHR repeats its call upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention to promptly intervene in order to ensure respect for the rules of the Convention, including putting an end to the policy of collective punishment imposed on the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.
- PCHR also calls for compelling IOF to lift all forms of closure imposed on the Gaza Strip, including the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of goods and individuals, and reopening the border crossings.
- Calls upon the international community, including international organizations, to provide urgent assistance to the different Palestinian economic sectors, especially persons working in the agricultural sector given the heavy losses endured by them as a result of the closure which has been imposed by IOF for approximately four years.