



## **No Solutions Are Foreseen**

### **The Power and Fuel Crisis Paralyzes Life in the Gaza Strip**



**Report on the impact of the lack of fuel and the electricity outages on the life of  
Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip**

**20 March 2012**



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# The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

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## ***The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights***

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.



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## The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

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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.

### **Administrative Board**

Dr. Riad Al-Zanoun

Ms. Nadia Abu Nahla

Mr. Hashem Al-Thalathini

Mr. Raji Sourani

### **Director**

Raji Sourani

### **Palestinian Centre for Human Rights**

**Gaza City 29** :Omar El Mukhtar Street, Near Amal Hotel, PO Box 1328

Tel/Fax (972) 8 2824-776 / (972) 82825-893

**Khan Yunis Branch** :El Amal Street, Branch of Jamal Abdul-Nasser Street, near the College of Education

Tel/Fax: (972) 8 2061-025/ (972) 8 2061-035

**Jabalya Branch** :Jabalya Refugee Camp, Opposite to Timraz Fuel Station

Tel/Fax: (972) 8 2454-150/ (972) 8 2454-160

E-mail :[pchr@pchgaza.org](mailto:pchr@pchgaza.org)

Webpage :[www.pchgaza.org](http://www.pchgaza.org)

## Introduction

For the second consecutive month, the Palestinian civilian population of the Gaza Strip is experiencing a disastrous situation due to the ongoing crisis of fuel and power. As a result, the suffering of around 1.6 million Palestinian civilians living in the Gaza Strip has been aggravated, as they have been deprived of their economic, social and cultural rights. The main concern of the population has turned into the primitive provision of basic humanitarian needs such as health services, sanitation, drinking water, cooking gas, access to education facilities as well as transportation. Ensuring such basic needs has become a complicated task, resulting in additional financial burdens that the population of the Gaza Strip cannot afford.

According to PCHR's observation, this crisis has emerged following the suspension of fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip for more than one month. The cities of the Gaza enclave resemble ghost towns due to the electricity outages almost all day and night. This electricity shortage is also severely affecting the pumping of water to high residential apartments. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) is unable to properly operate water wells neither to ensure a continuous water supply. The functioning of waste water treatment plants is harshly hampered. The disposal of waste water in wastewater treatment basins, or the ability to treat waste water before pumping it into the sea are also affected by the lack of electricity supply. Therefore the marine life and holidaymakers' activities are at risk. Further, various parts of the Gaza Strip are experiencing a severe crisis in transportation, especially in weekly rush hours such. At night, almost no cars are seen on the streets.

Conditions continue to deteriorate in view of the failure by the concerned authorities to fulfill their obligations towards the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. These obligations include taking immediate action and exerting all possible efforts to ensure immediate flow of fuel to the Gaza Strip. At the practical level, these duties involve undertaking a serious and effective coordination between the Energy authorities in Gaza and Ramallah, which ensure the prompt delivery of fuel to the Gaza Power Plant. So far the parties responsible for the power sector in the Gaza Strip have failed at managing the ongoing crisis in an effective way.

This special report observes the deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip over the past month as a result of the ongoing severe shortage in the supplies of fuel. At present there is not enough electricity to ensure the continuation of basic services (the fuel required for the operation of the power plant, diesel, benzene and cooking gas) that are essential for the daily life of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. This report also addresses the impact of the suspension of fuel supplies on the enjoyment by civilians in the Gaza Strip of their economic and social rights, including their rights to an adequate level of living; to have access to health services; sanitation services; drinking water; cooking gas; access to educational facilities; and transportation services.

## Roots and Development of the Crisis

In January 2011, the Palestinian government in Gaza decided to stop the import of industrial fuel from Israel. Owners of petrol stations preferred to stop importing diesel and benzene from Israel due to their disrupted supply, resulted from the closure imposed in the Strip by Israel, and to their high prices. The Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) used the fuel as a means of collective punishment against the civilian population. By imposing a severe policy of closure on the Gaza Strip, Israel restricted the freedom of movement of civilians and goods. In November 2007, Israel decided to reduce the quantities of fuel delivered to the Gaza Strip. Since then, the Gaza Strip started depending on the fuel supplied from Egypt through tunnels under the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. Since mid February this year, the Egyptian authorities decided to stop fuel trafficking through these tunnels and declared their readiness to provide the Gaza Strip with fuel through official crossings at international rates. The fuel smuggled into Gaza through the tunnels had been so far subsidized by Egypt. In February, the Egyptian government announced that those conditions could not remain as Egyptians were the only beneficiaries of that fuel. Also, the importation of large quantities of fuel to the Gaza Strip created a fuel crisis in Egypt. Following these events, the Energy Authority in Gaza and the Energy Authority in Ramallah announced, each separately without any coordination between them and amidst political wrangling, that they engaged in negotiations with the Egyptian authorities. They declared that these negotiations resulted in an agreement that guaranteed the supply of fuel for the operation of the Gaza Power Plant and settled the electricity crisis over three stages. In turn, the Egyptian authorities announced that they reached an agreement with the Palestinian Authority to deliver fuel to Gaza via official crossings and at international rates. So far, this agreement has not lead to any tangible results and has not contributed to the alleviation of the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza.

Recently, the Energy and Natural Resources Authority announced on its website that it paid two million US\$ as an advance payment to the Egyptian Petroleum Authority for the Egyptian fuel. However, no fuel has been delivered to the Gaza Power Plant until now. Dr. Mohammed Asqoul, Secretary General of the Council of Ministers in Gaza, accused the Egyptian intelligence of obstructing an agreement to deliver fuel from Egypt to Gaza via the Rafah International Crossing Point. Eng. Canaan Obeid, Head of the Energy Authority in Gaza, said today, in a statement published on the website of the al-Resalah newspaper, that the Egyptian intelligence foiled the agreement which was reached with the Petroleum Authority in Egypt to deliver fuel to the Gaza Strip. Obeid explained that this irresponsible step aims at forcing Palestinians to accept the delivery of fuel via crossings run by the Israeli occupation, namely Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) crossing.

On the other hand, Yasser Othman, the Egyptian Ambassador to the Palestinian Authority, explained in a statement quoted by al-Ahram Egyptian newspaper on 20 March 2012, that two main issues cause the fuel crisis in the Gaza Strip. The first one is the urgent need to ensure the fuel supply for the operation of the Gaza Power Plant. The second one is the implementation of joint electricity projects between Egypt and the Gaza Strip through what is known as electricity grid in 8 Arab countries. The Egyptian ambassador noted that Egypt is already experiencing a crisis in fuel supply suffering from a 30% shortage. He said that while some major Egyptian governorates suffer from severe shortages, large quantities of fuel are smuggled to the Gaza Strip and to other countries. He added that the Gaza Strip needs, based on announcements made by competent authorities, 35-40 million liters of fuel monthly, including 15 million liters for the Power Plant; i.e., which represents more than the quantity of fuel consumed by five Egyptian governorates. Othman stressed that Egypt allocated more than \$ 1 billion to settle the fuel crisis internally and to cover the needs of the Gaza Strip. He also pointed out that Egypt would not reserve any efforts to solve the problem faced by the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless he noted that the Egyptian authorities

take the Gaza Strip into consideration when signing any agreements relating to fuel and that the needs of the Gaza Strip are part of the Egyptian needs.

On 16 March 2012, following the total suspension of the delivery of fuel through tunnels, the fuel ran out in all the 145 petrol distribution stations in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Mahmoud al-Shawa, Director of the Petrol Station Owners Association in the Gaza Strip stated that all the petrol stations in Gaza were almost shut down as a consequence of the absence of fuel supply through the tunnels.

## **The Electricity Sector**

The civilian population in the Gaza Strip has been suffering electricity outages for long periods that amount to 16 hours daily for more than one month since the Power and Natural Resources Authority announced, on 14 February 2012, the shutdown of the Gaza Power Plant in Gaza. The Power Authority stated that the Power Plant stopped due to the shortage in fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip. It declared that this was part of what it called "intentional measures aimed at preventing the supply of fuel to Gaza." According to current data, the available electricity resources are as follows: 142 megawatts including 120 megawatts delivered from Israel (84.5% of the electricity available) and 22 megawatts imported from Egypt. According to this calculation, the Gaza Strip still needs approximately 360 megawatts.

Following the shut down of the Gaza Power Plant, the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company declared that the electricity shortage in the Gaza Strip had increased by 70% of the daily needs and that the Company faced unprecedented serious challenges. In a statement published on 14 February 2012, the Company stated that it would face serious technical complications in the distribution of power to consumers, noting that the electricity would be provided for 6 hours daily to various parts of the Gaza Strip while power outages would amount to 12 hours daily. The electricity crisis has affected various aspects of life in the Gaza Strip, especially considering the cold weather experienced by Gazans over the past few weeks making stronger the need for electricity for heating purposes.

The majority of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip bought their own power generators, which are smuggled via tunnels under the border with Egypt to meet their needs of electricity. So far, no supervision is made over these generators to ensure they are in compliance with quality and safety standards. As a result, the families who are forced to use these generators inside their houses have been subjected to serious environmental risks. Further, these generators cause very loud noise in residential areas and commercial streets throughout the Gaza Strip. Ten persons have died and dozens of others have been injured over the past years in accidents related to the use of generators inside houses. As generators also require fuel for their operation, in the current context of fuel scarcity, civilians have endured further burdens while looking for it. If civilians manage to find fuel, they are forced to buy it at very high prices.

## **The Health Sector**

of diagnostic radiology. The Ministry of Health in Gaza stressed that it has been suffering a severe crisis due to the shutdown of the Power Plant, especially as it is suffering from a shortage in the fuel required for the operation of the power generators in hospitals, clinics and health care centers. Dr. Ashraf al-Qidra, Spokesman of the Ministry of Health in Gaza, stated that the health conditions of more than 80% of Gaza patients have been at risk due to the long hours of electricity outages. Dr. al-Qidra warned of a health disaster that would directly affect all the patients particularly those needing of electrical devices for their survival. These patients include 100 immature babies in the nursery; 400 patients, including 15 children, who need kidney dialysis two or three times a week; and 66 patients in the intensive care unit. He added that 39 operation rooms throughout the different hospitals in the Gaza Strip would be closed, in

addition to the closure of the reception and emergency departments, maternity departments, laboratories and departments

According to Eng. Bassam Ali al-Hamadin, Director of Engineering and Maintenance Department at Shifa Hospital, those patients in intensive care units, babies in nurseries, patients in the artificial kidney unit and patients who need surgeries are the most affected by the crisis. He noted that his Department has witnessed the irreparable damage of different types of devices as a result of the electricity crisis. According to al-Hamadin, over the two past weeks, the power generators of 6 clinics and primary health centers in the Gaza Strip were broken down. These generators are not designed to work for long hours, but for short periods such as emergency cases only.

Dr. Kamal Abu Eyada, Deputy Director of the Intensive Care Unit at Shifa Hospital, noted that the severe shortage in fuel and electricity supplies forced the Ministry of Health to announce the state of emergency, as it happened last February. In cases of emergency, all surgeries are suspended except for very urgent ones. Additionally, air conditioning systems are stopped, operations in the laundry are reduced and water purification operations are limited. Therefore, the level of hygiene and cleanliness in hospitals are affected. Dr. Abu Eyada explained that when there is a power cut, the heart and blood pressure monitors switch off. The internal sensors inside the machines are broken by the electricity cuts, which cause the alarms to go off unnecessarily, making it difficult to properly diagnose the situation of patients.

## **Transportation**

The governorates of the Gaza Strip is witnessing a severe crisis in transportation due to the unavailability of fuel from all the 145 fuel distribution stations in the Gaza Strip. This has been reflected on the movement of vehicles especially during rush hours. At night, almost no vehicles are found on the streets. Civilians have been enduring additional suffering as they are forced to wait for long times before being able to find taxis to take them to their destinations. The waiting time has increased significantly as hundreds of vehicles remain off the road. Hundreds of school children have been forced to walk for long distances to arrive at their schools. These difficulties have also affected the access of the population to health care centers and hospitals to receive the necessary medical care.

PCHR collected testimonies from many taxi drivers who said that they face great difficulties to get limited quantities of fuel to operate their taxis. Additionally, they spend long times looking for fuel. As a result of the fuel scarcity, taxi drivers have been forced to reduce their working hours. They only work in peak hours and totally stop working at night. Other drivers were obliged to stop their activity because of the unavailability of fuel.

## **Cooking gas**

The Gaza Strip has been suffering severe shortage in cooking gas for a month due to the reduction by IOF of the quantities of cooking gas delivered to Gaza. IOF claimed that maintenance works are ongoing on the infrastructure used to deliver cooking gas in Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Salom) crossing. The cooking gas was frozen in the pipes due to the cold weather and thus it was difficult to deliver it to Gaza. According to Mr. Mahmoud al-Shawa, Director of Petrol Station Owners Association in the Gaza Strip, the cooking gas crisis emerged when IOF reduced the quantities of cooking gas delivered to Gaza during the last month. IOF allowed the delivery of between 40 and 60 tons of cooking gas to Gaza daily while Gaza daily needs 200 tons of cooking gas. As a result, the shortage in cooking gas suffered by Gaza civilians has reached 75%. Al-Shawa stated that the crisis has appeared recently although the reduction has started more than one month ago because gas distribution stations exhausted their stock of cooking

gas. He noted that the civilians have been affected by the crisis since the running out of the stock. As a result of this situation, Gaza's 29 cooking gas distribution stations have shut down and thousands of cooking gas cylinders have been accumulated in cooking gas distribution stations. Al-Shawa explained that his Association contacted concerned parties and as a result, the quantities of cooking gas delivered to Gaza have been increased to 180 tons daily since the beginning of the current month. However, the repeated closure of Karm Abu Salem crossing for security claims and for Jewish holidays has prevented the regular delivery of the required quantities of cooking gas. Thus, the cooking gas crisis has continued to affect the population in the Gaza Strip.

## **Water and Sanitation**

The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) has been affected by the continued electricity outages for long times. In particular, the CMWU has lost between 30-40% of its capacity to produce drinking water, which negatively affected the CMWU's ability to supply enough quantities of water to civilians. The CMWU announced that although it managed to operate the water wells during the outages period, this does not totally solve the problem because it is impossible to ensure the supply of water to civilians when there is no electricity. Eng. Omar Shabat, director of CMWU technical operations, stated to a PCHR fieldworker that the CMWU's ability to produce water has sharply declined due to the power outages and shortage in fuel supplies. Before the current crisis, the CMWU was able to produce 220,000 cubic meters of water, a quantity which is sufficient to cover civilians' needs of water in the Gaza Strip, but these quantities decreased to 140,000 cubic meters of water. This has affected the provision of civilians' basic needs of water and reduced the per capita share of water from 90 liters daily to less than 60 liters daily. Investigations conducted by PCHR revealed that many neighborhoods in the different parts of the Gaza Strip have been suffering from water cuts for several days due to inconsistency between the times of water provision and power outages. Many civilians reported that they received very little quantities of water once every 5 days.

Further, the CMWU is experiencing problems relating to the treatment of wastewater. The CMWU expressed concerns that wastewater in basins may flood, and reported that it is unable to treat wastewater and just pump it into the sea without any treatment. Eng. Shabat stated that CMWU experienced problems in wastewater plants, especially when it rains, explaining that the power outages and the severe shortage in fuel may result in wastewater flooding from basins because the CMWU is unable to pump the waste water. He noted that the CMWU faced a serious problem last week. The rain together with the inability to operate the water pumping plant in Beit Lahia due to the power outages and the severe shortage in fuel resulted in the creation of a basin of water near this water pumping plant. Eng. Shabat warned that the lack of fuel is endangering the functioning of other 42 water pumping plants. He explained that the CMWU is also facing another serious problem as the four wastewater treatment plants in the Gaza Strip are unable to treat wastewater in times of power outages and thus this water is pumped into the sea, resulting in sea pollution and risks to marine life.

## Recommendations:

In light of the above findings due to the fuel crisis which has been ongoing for over a month and the clear failure to deal with this crisis, PCHR:

1. Calls for an immediate end to the suffering endured by the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. PCHR notes that civilians must not be responsible for the results of the failure of parties responsible for the ongoing fuel crisis. Thus, responsible parties must be committed to provide civilians with all types of fuel and with electricity under all circumstances. These parties must take prompt and immediate action in order to end the total darkness in the cities and towns of the Gaza Strip and enable civilians in the Gaza Strip to their right to free and decent life.
2. Warns of the serious consequences of the total suspension of fuel and the resulting impact on the access of 1.6 million Palestinians to vital services, including the supply of drinking water, and on the work of some vital sectors such as health, sanitation, education and transportation. PCHR reminds that the life of Palestinian civilians is not a field for political wrangling and must never be a hostage for political or financial interests.
3. Affirms that it is important to immediately start to put strategic solutions for the ongoing fuel crisis and the chronic crisis in the electricity sector that has been affecting the Gaza Strip for 6 years. These solutions must include looking for alternative resources of fuel in order to end the suffering endured by the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.
4. Calls for unification of the energy authorities in Gaza and Ramallah as a first step to end the aggravation of the fuel and electricity crisis, and to exert all necessary efforts to ensure supplying fuel required for the operation of Gaza Power Plant.
5. Calls upon the Energy Authority in Gaza to assume its legal responsibility under the Statute of the Energy Authority, especially those relative to coordination with the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company and the Gaza Power Plant in order to facilitate the provision of fuel and overcoming the current crisis.
6. Calls upon the Palestinian President to personally intervene immediately in order to reach a solution that ensure the provision of fuel to Gaza, including the fuel required for the operation of Gaza Power Plant.
7. Stresses the responsibility and obligations of the State of Israel, as the Occupying Power of the Gaza Strip, according to international humanitarian law, regarding the wellbeing of the civilian population in the occupied territory, and accordingly, it is obliged to allow the passage of basic materials, including the fuel needed for the operation of Gaza Power Plant, and is prohibited from imposing restrictions on the entry of basic materials into the occupied territory and using such restrictions as a form of collective punishment against the civilian population. The option to import fuel from Israel, as a solution for the current crisis, must be one of the options presented especially as the Egyptian fuel will be bought at international prices, while Egypt is suffering from an internal fuel crisis, and as the Gaza Strip mainly depends on the provision of its basic needs, including electricity and fuel, on Israel.