



# المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

## State of the Gaza Strip's Border Crossings 1 April 2013 to 30 April 2013

This report documents the impact of the ongoing Israel-imposed siege on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, which affects their economic and social conditions. The report addresses the state of commercial border crossings and the border crossings designated for the movement of people. It refutes Israel's claims that it has eased the closure on the Gaza Strip, which it has imposed consecutively for almost six years now. The following are the most significant developments relevant to Gaza's border crossings during the reporting period 1 April 2013 to 30 April 2013:

- The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) observed the escalating closure of border crossings in April 2013 under the pretext of security reasons and Jewish holidays. Israel closed Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) crossing, which is the sole commercial crossing in the Gaza Strip, for 17 days (56.6%) during the reporting period. In addition to this, Israel closed the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing for 7 days and partially for 4 days. This shows Israel's disregard for the basic needs and requirements of civilians in the Gaza Strip. These measures resulted in deterioration of the economic and social condition and serious problems, including the unavailability of sufficient amount of cooking gas and preventing the patients, who have been referred to Israeli and/or Palestinian hospitals in the West Bank, from travelling.
- Israel continued to impose a near-total ban on exports of products from the Gaza Strip to markets in the West Bank, Israel, and other countries, excluding limited amounts of agricultural products. As an exception, during the reporting period Israel allowed 8 truckloads of goods to be exported from the Gaza Strip, which is extremely low as compared to the average 150 truckloads of goods exported on a daily basis before the total closure of the Gaza Strip in 2007.
- Israel continued to impose restrictions on the import of basic supplies and raw materials. The amount of basic supplies allowed to enter the Gaza Strip from Israel does not meet the minimal needs of the population.
- During the reporting period, people in the Gaza Strip experienced shortages of cooking gas due to the limited quantities of gas allowed into the Gaza Strip and also due to the frequent closure of Karm Abu Salem crossing. In April, Israel prevented the entry of cooking gas into the Gaza Strip for 18 days. As a result, empty gas cylinders were overstocked in the petrol stations for several weeks. Only 2,008 tons on gas was allowed to enter the Gaza Strip, at an average of 67 tonnes per day. According to the General Petroleum Corporation in Gaza (EGPC), this amount represents only 33.4% of the daily gas requirement of the population, which is 200 tons.
- Israel continued to impose a complete ban on imports of construction materials into the Gaza Strip for the private sector. Limited quantities of construction materials were allowed to enter for international organisations. 38,750 tonnes of construction aggregates; 6,033 tonnes of cement; and 1,025 tonnes of construction steel for international projects were allowed to enter. These imports were permitted in the context of the so-called 'easing' of the closure, which was declared by Israel over 2 years ago.
- During the reporting period, Israel completely closed the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing for 7 days, restricting patients, including those who are permitted, from travelling to hospitals in



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Israel and/or Jerusalem and the West Bank for medical treatment. Israel partially opened the crossing during the remaining days. 859 patients who submitted urgent applications for medical treatment were allowed to travel via the Beit Hanoun crossing. Israel obstructed dozens of patients from travelling due to different reasons; some of which were: security reasons, rejecting the person accompanying the patient from travelling, waiting for alternative appointments and security interviews.

- The Beit Hanoun crossing was closed for traders for 16 days. During reporting period, 1,244 traders were allowed to travel via the crossing, a daily average of less than 42 traders, which constitutes 28% of the average daily number of traders allowed to travel via the crossing prior to June 2007 (150 traders). In the same period, Israel allowed 22 journalists, 4 diplomats, and 561 workers of international organisations to enter the Gaza Strip. The procedures for entry to the Gaza Strip are complicated, resulting in prolonged waiting periods, sometimes up to several days.
- Israel resumed the programme of family visits to Palestinians from the Gaza Strip who are currently detained in Israeli jails, but it was suspended during the reporting period due to security reasons and Jewish holidays. They allowed 59 Palestinians to visit 43 detainees.
- There were significant improvements at the Rafah International Crossing Point during the reporting period. 19,126 persons were allowed to travel outside the Gaza Strip and 19,945 others entered the Gaza Strip. 1,449 persons were prevented from travelling by the Egyptian authorities.

### **Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) Crossing**

During the reporting period, Israel closed the Karm Abu Salem, which is the sole commercial crossing, for 17 days (56.6% of the total period). This is the longest closure period of the crossing for over a year. On the days it was open, Israel allowed 3,833 truckloads of goods to enter, an average of 128 truckloads daily, representing only 22.4% of the number of truckloads that was allowed into the Gaza Strip before the total closure was imposed in June 2007 (570 truckloads daily).<sup>1</sup>

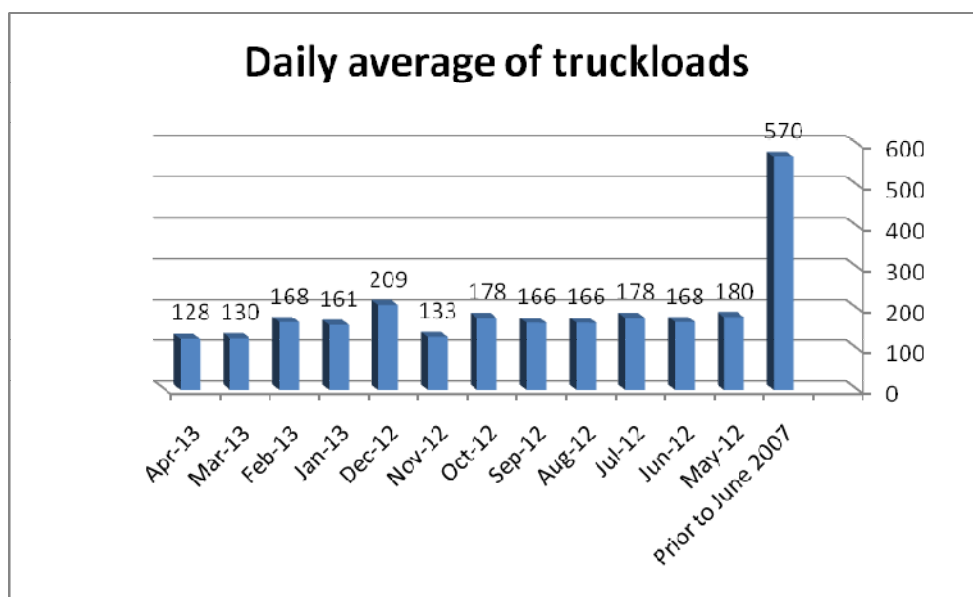
<sup>1</sup> Source: The Palestinian Ministry 138 of National Economy in Gaza.



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### Number of truckloads allowed into the Gaza Strip over the past 12 months and percentage of needs met

Description	Daily average of truckloads	Percentage of needs met
Prior to June 2007	570	100%
May 2012	180	31.60%
June 2012	168	33.33%
July 2012	178	31.18%
August 2012	166	29.1%
September 2012	166	29.1%
October 2012	178	31.2%
November 2012	133	23.3%
December 2012	209	36.7%
January 2013	161	28.2%
February 2013	168	29.4%
March 2013	130	19.7%
April 2013	128	22.4%



The data above confirms that the truckloads allowed to enter from the Karm Abu Salem crossing do not meet the total requirements of the population in the Gaza Strip. The population's needs were previously met through the use of four commercial crossings. The data also refutes Israel's claims that the closure has been eased and that the number of truckloads allowed into Gaza has



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doubled. The level of imports is low and does not meet the needs of Gaza's population. The entry of various types of raw materials continues to be prohibited, with the exception of very limited types that are imported through complicated procedures.

Israel has continued to impose a near-total ban on exports from the Gaza Strip to markets in the West Bank, Israel, and other countries, excluding limited amounts of agricultural products. As an exception, during the reporting period, Israel allowed the following exports from the Gaza Strip: 513,000 flowers (4 truckloads), 850 kilograms of basil, 950 kilograms of mint, 200 kilograms of tarragon and 50 kilograms of sage (4 truckloads).

The closure of al-Mentar crossing on 02 March 2011,<sup>2</sup> and the destruction of its facilities, is a further obstacle to the movement of goods in and out of the Gaza Strip. The location of the Karm Abu Salem crossing in the extreme southeast of the Gaza Strip has resulted in increased transportation costs, leading to an increase in the price of imports and extra financial burdens for exporters and importers. Mr Jihad Salim, Secretary of the Association of Road Transport in the Gaza Strip, reported that the cost of transporting a goods container from the Port of Ashdod to the Gaza Strip (a distance of 70 kilometres) is 10,400 NIS, while the cost of transporting the same container from China to the Port of Ashdod is 6,600 NIS (a distance is 9,000 kilometres).

### • Entry of Vehicles into the Gaza Strip

Israel continued to impose restrictions on the entry of vehicles to the Gaza Strip, although they increased the number of vehicles allowed to enter the Gaza Strip to 80 per week. In April, Israel allowed the entry of only 136 vehicles. As a result, vehicle prices have been rising, as compared with prices in the West Bank. In addition, they allowed the entry of 2 buses and 3 trucks.

### • Fuel

During the reporting period, Israel prevented the entry of cooking gas into the Gaza Strip for 18 days; for the remaining 12 days, Israel allowed the entry of limited quantities. The amount of gas allowed to enter was 2,008 tonnes, an average of 67 tonnes per day. According to the General Petroleum Corporation in Gaza (EGPC), this amount represents 33.4% of the daily needs of the people, which is 200 tonnes.

Mr. Mahmoud al-Shawwa, director of Petrol Station Association in the Gaza Strip, said that the gas crisis prevailing in Gaza goes back to the frequent closure of Karm Abu Salem crossing and the entry of less than 50% of the basic needs. As a result, gas was not available in petrol stations, due to which they remained shut.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Al-Mentar crossing was established in 1995. According to the Crossings Agreement of November 2005, the operational capacity of this crossing allows the daily export of 400 truckloads of vegetables, fruits and commercial and industrial products, as well as the daily import of 600 truckloads of goods for the Gazan population. The crossing is located inside the main industrial zone of the Gaza Strip, which was destroyed by Israel's forces during their offensive on the Gaza Strip between December 2008 and January 2009. This location facilitated the movement of imports and exports. Al-Mentar crossing was, before its closure on 02 March 2011, the major commercial crossing in the Gaza Strip. Al-Mentar crossing had an operational capacity amounting to 400 truckloads daily, so 75% of the Gaza Strip's needs used to be imported via this crossing.

<sup>3</sup> A statement to news agencies on 27 April 2013.



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He added that Israel allows the entry of 120-130 tonnes of gas, while the Gaza Strip needs 250-300 tons of gas daily to overcome the current crisis.

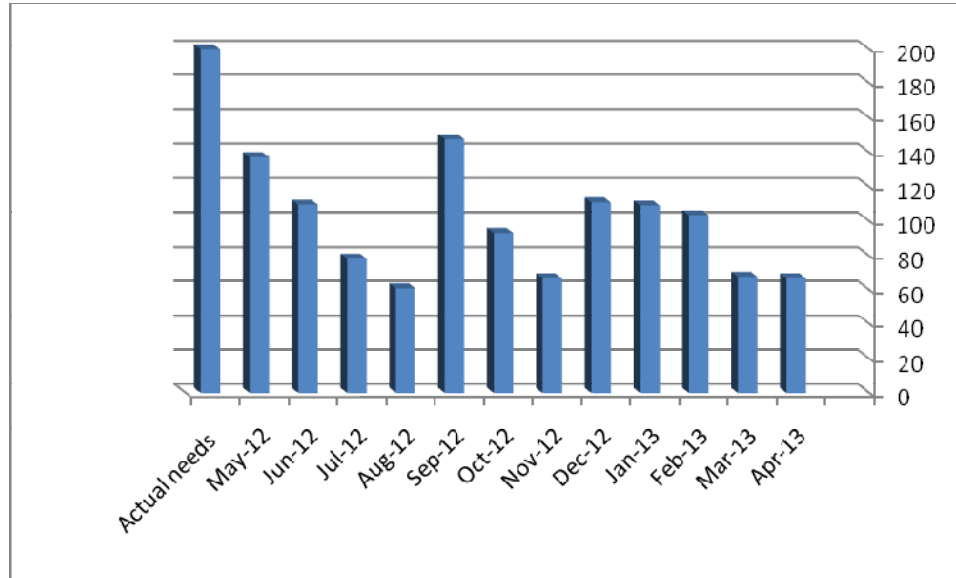
Al-Shawwa called upon the Palestinian government in the West Bank to increase the quantity of gas imported to help manage the crisis.

### Quantities of gas allowed in during the reporting period compared with the actual needs of the population of the Gaza Strip

Month	Daily average/tonnes	Percentage of needs met
April 2013	67	33.4%
March 2013	68	34%
February 2013	103.6	51.8%
January 2013	109.2	54.6%
December 2012	111	55.5%
November 2012	67	33.5%
October 2012	93.3	49.2%
September 2012	147.6	73.1%
August 2012	60.9	34.4%
July 2012	78.4	39.2%
June 2012	109.7	48.8%
May 2012	137.3	68.6%
Actual needs	200	100%

Source: GDP in Gaza.

### Amounts of gas allowed into the Gaza Strip over the past 12 months



During the reporting period, Israel allowed the entry of 222,400 litres of diesel, 49,000 litres of benzene, which are very limited quantities as compared to the actual needs of the Gaza Strip. It should be noted that, before reducing the fuel supplies, Israel permitted the delivery of 350,000 litres of diesel and 120,000 litres of benzene to the Gaza Strip daily. The Gaza Strip now depends on fuel smuggled through the tunnels operating at the Gaza-Egypt border.

#### • Construction Materials

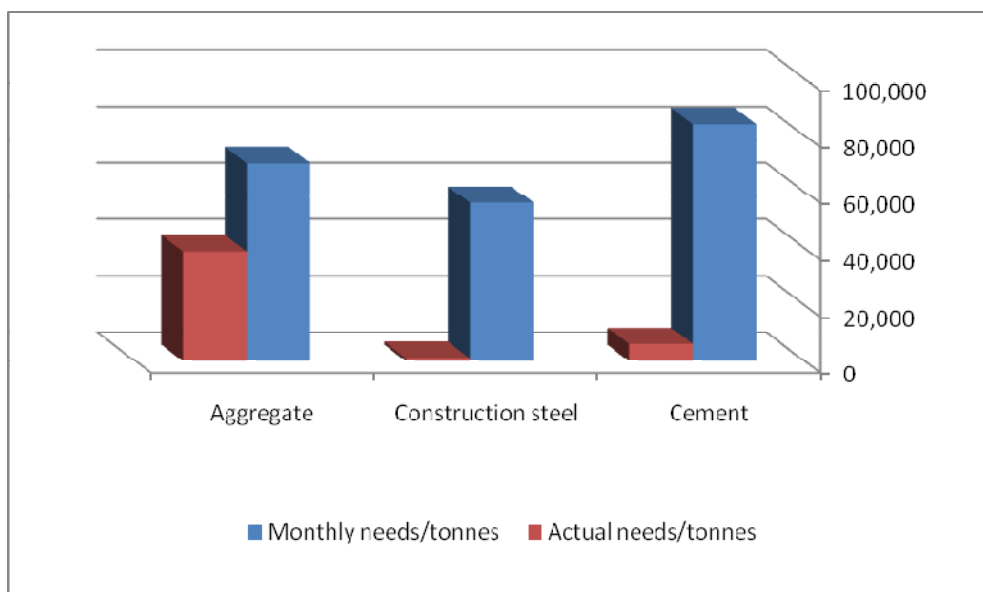
Israel has imposed a complete ban on the entry of construction materials into the Gaza Strip for over 6 years. However, they have agreed to allow the entry of limited quantities for international organisations. According to sources in the Ministry of National Economy, Israel allowed the entry of approximately 6,033 tonnes of cement, 1,025 tonnes of construction steel and 38,750 tonnes of construction aggregates for international organizations, in the context of the alleged easing of the closure declared in June 2010. They also allowed the entry of limited quantities of tar, construction materials, plumbing tools, ceramics and marbles.

In addition to this, for two years, the Gaza Strip's population has had to depend on the construction materials smuggled through tunnels at the Gaza-Egypt border. Such smuggled materials are not always available in the markets and they are not of a good quality.

**Quantities of construction materials entered into the Gaza Strip compared with actual needs in April**

Description	Cement	Construction steel	Aggregate
Monthly needs/tonnes	84,000	56,000	70,000
Actual needs/tonnes	6,033	1,025	38,750
Percentage	7.18%	1.83%	55.3%

Source: GDP in Gaza.



**Crossings Designated for the Movement of Persons**

• **Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing**

Israel has closed the Beit Hanoun crossing for the movement of Palestinian civilians, with the exception of limited categories: patients suffering from serious illnesses; Arabs holding Israeli IDs; international journalists; workers of international humanitarian organisations; traders; and persons travelling via al-Karama crossing. These people have to go through various complicated procedures to be able to travel through the crossing. According to the Civil Liaison Office in the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Israel closed the crossing completely for 5 days during the reporting period.

According to the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip, 859 applications were submitted by patients requesting permission to travel via the Beit Hanoun crossing during the reporting period, an average of less than 29 patients per day. However, Israel obstructed dozens of patients from travelling for several reasons, including security reasons, rejecting the person accompanying the patients from travelling, waiting for new appointments and security interviews.



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Israel also continued imposing severe restrictions on international journalists, diplomats and employees of international humanitarian organisations in the Gaza Strip. During the reporting period, 22 international journalists, 4 diplomats and 561 workers of international humanitarian organisations were allowed to enter Gaza, often under complicated procedures, resulting in prolonged delays for many of those allowed to enter. During the reporting period, the crossing was completely closed to traders for 16 days, with 1,244 traders passing via the crossing during the days it was open, an average of approximately 42 traders daily. This is a sharp decline in comparison with the number of business people who were allowed to travel via the crossing prior to June 2007, when 150 traders used to be allowed to travel via the crossing daily.<sup>4</sup>

### • Prisoners' Visits

In April, Israel suspended the programme of family visits to Palestinians detained in Israeli jails, for security reasons and Jewish holidays. This program is supposed to be conducted every Monday. During the reporting period, Israel allowed 59 family members to visit 43 prisoners in the Israeli jails on 22 April 2013.

The number of family visits to prisoners in the Israeli jails in April was very limited in comparison with the number that the agreement between the detainees and the Israeli government allows. According to the agreement, each detainee is allowed to have two visits every month. The number of family visits for the detainees is supposed to be 880 per month, as there are 440 detainees in the Israeli jails, while the Israeli authorities allowed only 43 visits. This applies to the number of the family members of the detainees who are allowed to visit their relatives, which was 59 persons while it should be 1760 persons if they allowed 2 persons from each detainee's family to visit them two times every month.

The families of the detainees were subjected to arbitrary measures, obstacles, and unethical and humiliating search procedures. Family members are forced to comply with Israeli orders under the threat that family visits would be cancelled if they refused.

It is noteworthy that the occupation authorities select the visitor who is allowed to visit by his/her name, and the visitor who is allowed has to be one of the close relatives like the father, the mother or the wife, one or two of them are only allowed to visit. In case one of them is not able to visit (due to illness, old age or death) the Israeli authorities do not allow substitution for this person, so the detainee loses his right to the visit. In the same context, Israel continued to prevent the sons of the detainees from visiting their fathers in the Israeli jails. Additionally, relatives of detainees are not allowed to take anything including food and clothes for their relatives in the Israeli jails.

<sup>4</sup> Source: The Civil Affairs Department – Gaza.





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- **Rafah International Crossing Point**

There were significant improvements at Rafah International Crossing Point in April. Nonetheless, hundreds of Palestinians were unable to travel or experienced prolonged delays, due to the restrictions that imposed on the movements of young men (18-40 years old) who are not included in the facilitations that were declared by the Egyptian authorities at the Rafah International Crossing point at the end of May last year. According to information of the commission of borders and crossings, 20,243 citizens were allowed to travel outside the Gaza Strip, 18,465 entered the Gaza Strip, and 1,317 others were prevented from travelling by the Egyptian Authorities.



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### Recommendations

PCHR calls upon the international community, particularly the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, to:

1. Exert effective pressure on Israel to compel it to open all of Gaza's crossings, both those used for commercial purposes and those used for the movement of civilians, to allow the civilian population of the Gaza Strip to reconstruct civilian property destroyed during Israel's latest offensive on Gaza and to enable them to enjoy their fundamental civil and political rights, as well as their economic, social and cultural rights;
2. Promptly and urgently intervene to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and put an end to the deterioration of living conditions across the Gaza Strip;
3. Compel Israel to put an end to measures of collective punishment against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, including the tightening of the closure of Gaza's border crossings;
4. Remind the State of Israel, the Occupying Power, of its obligations towards the civilians of the Gaza Strip, under Article 55 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates 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." The High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must fulfil their obligation under Article 1 of the Convention by ensuring the implementation of the Convention's provisions by the State of Israel, in order to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip; and
5. Call on the Egyptian authorities to take more measures to facilitate movement at the Rafah International Crossing Point, in particular by increasing the number of travellers and opening hours, and to find a solution for the thousands of Palestinians wishing to travel via the crossing, particularly during the summer when the number of travellers doubles.