



State of the Gaza Strip's border crossings 01 – 31 December 2014

This report documents the impact of the ongoing Israel-imposed closure for the eighth year on Palestinian civilians, which affects their economic and social conditions. It also addresses the state of commercial crossings and the movement of persons during 2014. Moreover, this report sheds light on the most significant developments relevant to Gaza's border crossings and movement of persons during the reporting period 01 – 31 December 2014:

Most Significant Features of the Closure during 2014:

- **The ongoing closure for the 8th year consecutively:** In 2014, Israeli forces continued to impose more closure measures on the Gaza Strip population and tightened restrictions on the commercial crossings and those relevant to the movement of persons for the 8th year consecutively.
- **High rates of poverty and unemployment:** The closure has led to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation of the civilian population and resulted in the emergence of serious indicators in this regard, especially with regard to the levels of poverty and unemployment. According to data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the closure has increased the rate of Palestinian families living below the poverty line to 38.8%, 21.1% of which suffer from extreme poverty. According to the same statistics, the unemployment rate in the occupied Palestinian territory has amounted to 23.7%. The rate in the Gaza Strip is 32.5% while in the West Bank is 19.1%.
- **The International Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism contributes to the institutionalization of the closure:** Although 5 months have passed since the latest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip that caused massive destruction to thousands of civil facilities and houses, the scene of devastation overhanging the Gaza Strip is still the same. The reconstruction is an almost impossible mission based on the mechanism reached by the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East, Israel and the Palestinian Authority regarding the reconstruction process in the Gaza Strip in light of international monitoring on the supply and use of construction materials to make sure that they are used for civil purposes.
- **PCHR criticizes the Gaza reconstruction mechanism and calls for lifting the closure:** PCHR strongly condemned this mechanism immediately when it was announced and considered it as an institutionalization of the closure and an international cover for it. PCHR also believed that it legitimized the collective punishment and war crimes committed against civilians. PCHR also emphasized that this mechanism agreed by all parties would lead to deterioration of the civilians' suffering, including the owners of destroyed houses, and would not contribute to the reconstruction process. Moreover, PCHR stressed that the right way to end the serious effects left by the Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip is to immediately announce the complete end of closure and allow the freedom of movement of persons and goods. The statistics of the construction materials that are entered into the Gaza Strip after the comprehensive military offensive ended emphasize PCHR's point of view regarding the Gaza reconstruction mechanism. The quantities of imported cement,



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construction steel and aggregate are very limited and do not meet the minimum of the Gaza actual needs. As a result, thousands of civilians whose houses were destroyed during the latest Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip suffer due to their inability to rebuild or repair about 32,000 housing units that sheltered them.

- **Tightened restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons:** Residents of the Gaza Strip are still deprived of their right to the freedom of movement due to the continued closure of the Beit Hanoun Crossing "Erez", which is the sole outlet for the Gaza Strip population to the West Bank, including Jerusalem and/ or Israel. As a result, residents of the Gaza Strip were denied access to holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem to perform religious rituals. Students were prevented from traveling to join universities in the West Bank. Families were prevented from visiting their relatives in the West Bank or vice versa. Israel only allows the movement of a limited number of groups: patients in critical conditions; international journalists; international workers; and travelers abroad. These groups were allowed to travel via the crossing under severe restrictions, complicated procedures and degrading treatment.
- **Denying Gazan patients the right to receive medical treatment in hospitals in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and/or Israel resulted in the death of dozens of them:** In 2014, despite the Israeli claims of facilitations on the movement of patients, the Israeli authorities obstructed the access of 3,188 patients to health care in hospitals in the West Bank and/or Israel.: 529 of whom were denied for security reasons; 320 were asked to change their companions; 323 has to wait for a new appointment; while 2,016 had to wait for Israel's reply after their security interviews as their applications were under consideration.
- **Closure of Rafah Crossing Point:** according to the Borders and Crossings Commission, in 2014 the Rafah Crossing Point was closed for 241 days (i.e. 66% of the number of the days of the year). Due to the almost semi-permanent closure of the Rafah Crossing, which has been the sole outlet for the movement of the population of the Gaza Strip to the outside world in light of the continued closure of the Beit Hanoun crossing, 1.8 million Palestinians were deprived of their right to the freedom of movement to and from the Gaza Strip. Consequently, thousands of Palestinians, including patients, Palestinian families living outside and hundreds of university students who study abroad have been stuck in Egypt waiting to be allowed to travel back to the Gaza Strip. More than 40,000 civilians in the Gaza Strip suffer due to being denied their right to travel abroad. Of those civilians are hundreds of patients who need advanced medical treatment that is not available in the Gaza Strip, holders of residency permits in other countries, hundreds of persons working abroad and university students studying abroad.
- **Movement of Commercial Goods**

In 2014, Israeli authorities closed Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) crossing, the sole commercial crossing of the Gaza Strip, for 143 days (i.e. 39.1% of the total days of the year). As a result, there was a shortage of many goods and basic needs, including fuel and cooking gas and all construction materials.

Exports: Israeli forces continued to impose an almost-complete ban on the export of Gaza Strip products to the West Bank, Israel and other countries. In a limited exception during the last 3 years, Israeli authorities allowed the exportation of limited quantities of Gazan



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products (most of which are agricultural goods) in an average of less than one truckload per day while the Strip's exports used to reach 150 truckloads daily before the imposition of the closure. The ban on the exportation of the Gaza Strip products to the outside world resulted in the closure of hundreds of factories in the Gaza Strip, including dozens of clothing and knitting factories in addition to factories of home and office furniture known of its high quality.

Imports: The actual percentage of the Gaza Strip imports is low as around 200 truckloads are allowed per day (i.e. 35% of the number of truckloads, which used to be entered into the Gaza Strip before the closure (570 truckloads daily). Moreover, most of the imports are consumer products as the delivery of raw materials into the Gaza Strip are still banned except for very limited items and quantities. During the last years of closure, residents of the Gaza Strip depended on entering their basic needs through tunnels established at the Palestinian-Egyptian border. The closure of tunnels resulted in significant shortages of basic goods, including most of fuel types and all construction materials. For more than 2 years, the Gaza Strip has witnessed an acute shortage of cooking gas. It should be mentioned that civilians wait for weeks to be able to refill their gas cylinders due to the limited quantities of cooking gas that are allowed into the Gaza Strip. The daily average is only 140 tons representing less than 50% of the actual daily needs of the population, which is more than 300 tons.

The following are the most significant developments relevant to Gaza's border crossings during the reporting period 01 – 31 December 2014:

- During the reporting period, the Gaza strip witnessed a lack of most commodities due to restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on the only commercial crossing in the Gaza Strip, Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom), as it was closed for 8 days (25.8%) due to the Israeli holidays. During this period, Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 6,454 truckloads, an average of 208 truckloads daily. The number of truckloads allowed to be entered constitutes 36.5% of the number of truckloads which used to be entered into the Gaza Strip before the closure (570 truckloads daily).
- The Gaza Strip witnessed a significant rise in prices of all construction materials and lack of some of them in the markets due to restrictions imposed on their entry for international projects and being banned for the private sector. In June, Israel allowed the entry of limited quantities of construction materials: 18,228 tons of cement, 16,481 tons of construction aggregate; and 1,424 tons of construction steel, which constitute around 21.7%, 23.5% and 2.5% of the monthly needs of the Gaza Strip respectively. These quantities were entered for projects of international organizations
- The cooking gas crisis has continued in all gas stations, and piles of empty gas cylinders are currently being left at gas stations waiting to be refilled due to the limited quantities allowed by Israel into the Gaza Strip. During the reporting period, the amount of gas allowed into Gaza was 4,650 tons only, an average of 150 tons per day. This amount represents 42.8% of the actual daily needs of the population, which is 350 tons in winter.
- Israeli forces continued to impose an almost-complete ban on the exportation of the Gaza Strip products to the West Bank, Israel and other countries. In a limited exception, Israeli authorities allowed the exportation of only 27 truckloads; 24 truckloads of agricultural goods and 3 truckloads of fish, during the reporting period while the Strip's exports used to reach 150 truckloads daily before the imposition of the closure on it.



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Movement of Persons: during the reporting period, Israeli authorities continued to impose tightened restrictions on the movement of the Gaza Strip population via Beit Hanoun "Erez" Crossing, which is the sole outlet for the Gaza Residents to the West Bank, including Occupied Jerusalem and/ or Israel. As a consequence, 1.8 million people have been deprived of their right to movement to the West Bank to access hospitals, universities and holy places; family visitations; and their right to travel to other countries despite their desperate need for it. However, the Israeli authorities allowed very limited categories to travel via the crossing: patients suffering from serious illnesses; Arabs holding Israeli IDs; international journalists; workers of international humanitarian organizations; business people; and persons travelling via al-Karama crossing. These categories are allowed to travel through the crossing under very complicated procedures. Although those categories are very limited, PCHR observed the following:

- In December, Israel obstructed the travel of 324 patients permitted to receive medical treatment at the Israeli hospitals or at hospitals in the West Bank; 50 of whom were prevented due to security reasons; 46 of them were asked to change the companions; 11 others were forced to wait for a new appointment; and the remaining 217 patients are awaiting an Israeli reply following their security interviews. According to the Ministry of Health, the number of applications presented on behalf of Palestinians patients referred to hospitals in Israel or the West Bank was 1,702, but Israeli authorities issued permits to 1,378 applications only and obstructed the travel of the rest for different reasons.
- During the reporting period, 7,202 traders were allowed to travel via the crossing. In the same period, Israel allowed the entry of 1,746 persons for personal needs, 640 workers of international organizations into the Gaza Strip, and 80 travelers via al-Karama (Allenby) crossing on the Jordanian border under some complicated security conditions. The procedures for entering the Gaza Strip are complicated, resulting in prolonged waiting periods, sometimes up to several days.
- Israeli authorities reduced the number of family visits to their relatives in the Israeli prisons as the days of visits coincided with the Jewish holidays and the days in which the crossing was closed due to security claims. In a tight range, Israeli authorities allowed 243 family members of prisoners. The number of family visits is very limited in this period (146 visits) compared to the number of visits allowed under the agreement reached between the detainees and Israeli forces in May 2012 as it allowed 2 visits, each of which include 2 persons, for each detainee per month. This means 1,760 persons of the detainees' families are allowed to visit 440 detainees twice per month (around 880 visits per month).
- During the reporting period, Rafah International Crossing Point was closed for 28 days as a result of the Egyptian internal situation and the deteriorating security situation in north Sinai. This unveiled the reality of the situation in the Gaza Strip under the policy of collective punishment and the Israeli closure imposed over all border crossings, especially Beit Hanoun crossing that has been closed for 7 years.
- The closure of Rafah International Crossing Point negatively affected the Gaza Strip's population. In the Gaza Strip, 40,000 Palestinians, including hundreds of patients, students and holders of residencies in other countries, who were registered in the lists of the Interior



المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Ministry waiting for their turn to travel abroad. When the crossing point was partially opened for 3 days, only humanitarian cases were allowed. Around 1,516 Palestinians travelled abroad via Rafah International Crossing Point, 836 Palestinians returned to the Gaza Strip and 91 were returned to the Gaza Strip by Egyptian authorities.

Commercial crossings

In the framework of a plan made by the Israeli authorities in order to tighten restrictions on the Gaza Strip, they closed all the commercial crossings to make Karm Abu Salem crossing the main and only crossing in the Gaza Strip. As a result, the suffering of the Gaza Strip population aggravated, and more obstacles were created for the limited movement of imports and exports. In addition, the expenses of transportation increased causing a rise in the prices of imports. It was also an extra financial burden for the Gaza exporters because of the location of the crossing in the far southeast of the Gaza Strip.¹

Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) Crossing

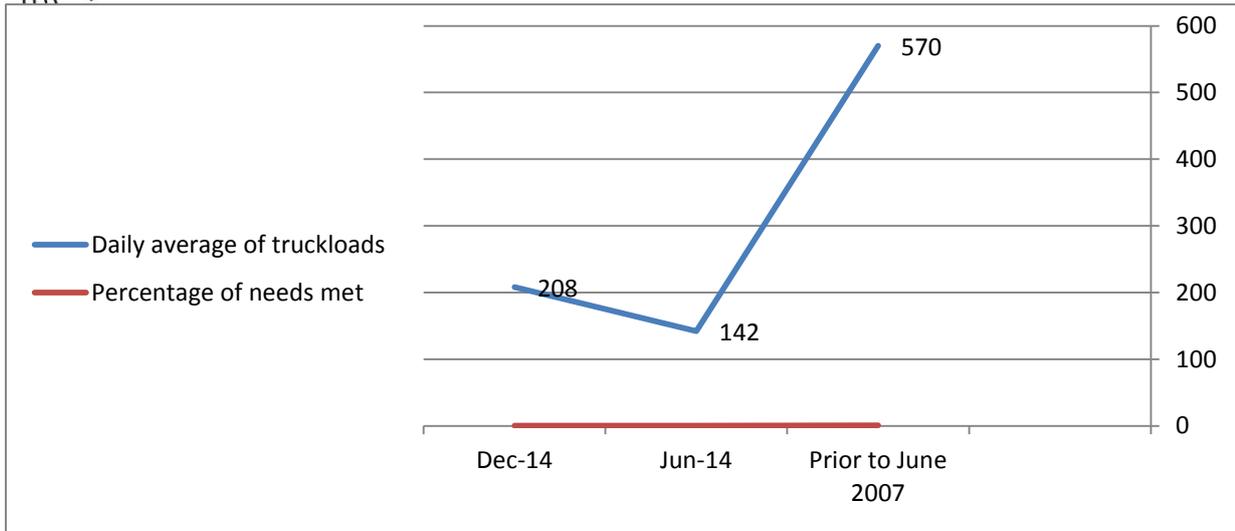
During the reporting period, Israel closed Karm Abu Salem, which is the sole commercial crossing, for 8 days (25.8% of the total period). On the days it was open, Israel allowed the entry of 6,454 truckloads, an average of 208 truckloads daily, representing 36.5% of the number of truckloads that was allowed into the Gaza Strip before the total closure was imposed in June 2007 (570 truckloads daily).²

The Number of truckloads allowed into the Gaza Strip and percentage of needs met

| Description | Daily average of truckloads | Percentage of needs met |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Prior to June 2007 | 570 | 100% |
| June 2014 | 142 | 24.9% |
| December 2014 | 208 | 36.5% |

¹ The Israeli authorities have tightened the closure over the Gaza Strip to make Karm Abu Salem crossing the main and only crossing in the Gaza Strip in spite of its low operational capacity. Moreover, the Israeli authorities closed Sofa crossing, which was designated to the entry of construction materials in November 2008 and transferred the limited quantities of construction materials to be entered into Gaza also via Karm Abu Salem crossing. On 04 January 2010, the Israeli authorities closed Nahal Oz crossing, which was designated for the entry of fuel into Gaza, and transferred that fuel to be entered via Karm Abu Salem crossing as well. On 02 March 2011, the Israeli authorities closed al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, which was the largest and best equipped commercial crossing. 75% of the Gaza Strip supplies used to enter via Karni crossing that had the capacity of around 400 truckloads daily.

² According to the Ministry of National Economy in Gaza.



The above data confirms that using the Karm Abu Salem crossing as the only commercial crossing for the Gaza Strip does not meet the Gaza Strip's needs. The population's needs were previously met through the use of four commercial crossings. The average imports are low and do not meet the needs of Gaza's population, in addition to the fact that most imports are consumables. The entry of various types of raw materials continues to be prohibited, with the exception of very limited types that are imported under complicated procedures.

• Exports

Israeli authorities continued to impose a ban on the exports of the Gaza Strip to the markets in the West Bank, Israel and the outside world. In a limited exception and during the reporting period, Israeli authorities allowed the exportation of 27 truckloads; 24 of which are loaded with agricultural goods (tomatoes, cucumbers, strawberries, sweet peppers, sweet potatoes and onions) and 3 of which were loaded with fish.

• Imports

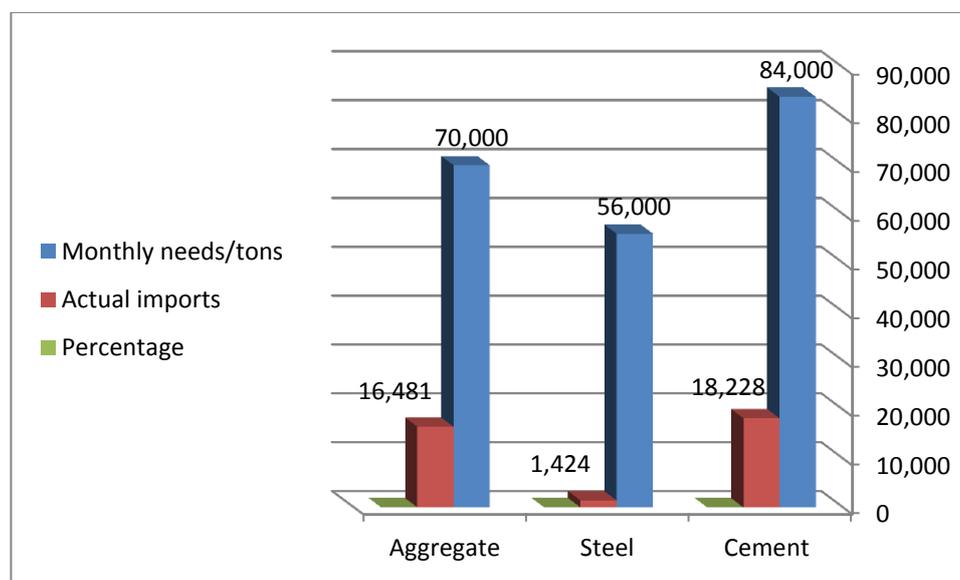
- Construction Materials

During the reporting period, Israel allowed the entry of limited quantities of construction materials for international organizations. These quantities do not meet the actual needs of the Gaza Strip. Israel allowed the entry of 18,228 tons of cement, 16,481 tons of construction aggregate and 1,424 tons of construction steel that constitutes less than 21.7%, 23.5% and 2.5% of the monthly needs respectively (excluding the Gaza Strip population's enormous needs of construction materials for the reconstruction process). All these quantities were entered for international organizations or Palestinian companies under a strict supervisory mechanism, with which the reconstruction process in the Gaza Strip is impossible.

Table comparing the quantities of construction materials allowed into the Gaza Strip and the actual needs in December 2014

| Description | Cement | Steel | Aggregate |
|--------------------|--------|--------|-----------|
| Monthly needs/tons | 84,000 | 56,000 | 70,000 |
| Actual imports | 18,228 | 1,424 | 16,481 |
| Percentage | 21.7% | 2.5% | 23.5% |

Source: Ministry of National Economy in the Gaza Strip.



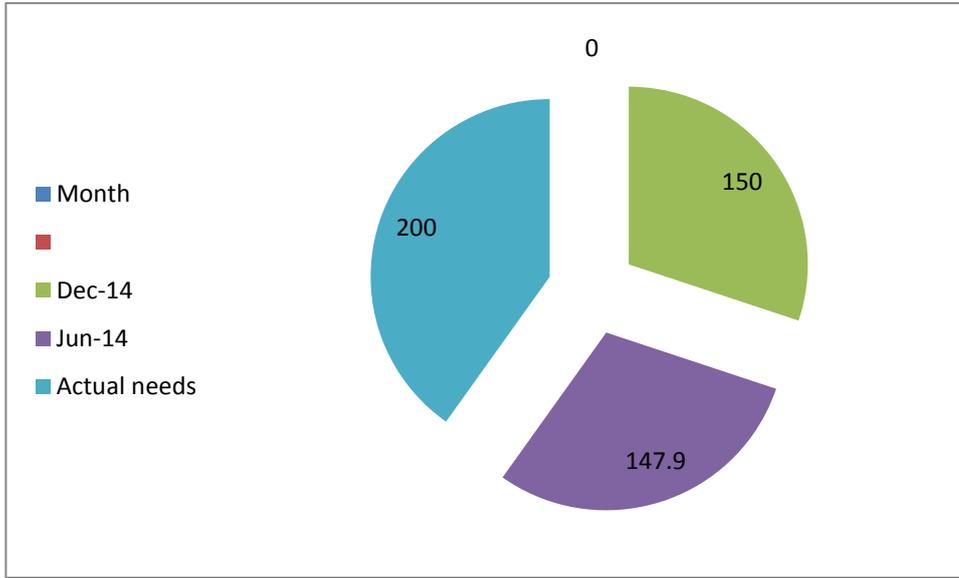
- Fuel**

During the reporting period, Israel prevented the entry of cooking gas into the Gaza Strip for 11 days. The civilians still need to wait for weeks to refill half of their cylinders to meet their basic needs. The amount of gas allowed in was 4,650 tons, an average of 150 tons per day. According to the General Petroleum Corporation in Gaza (EGPC), this amount represents 42.8% of the daily needs of the people, which is 350 tons.

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 |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| December 2014 | 150 | 42.8% |
| June 2014 | 147.9 | 73.9% |
| Actual needs | 200 | 100% |

Source: EGPC in Gaza.



The frequent closure of Kerm Abu Salem Crossing due to the Jewish holidays and security reasons made the diesel and benzene run out from all the gas stations in the Gaza Strip for a couple of days. During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 8,055,000 liters of diesel, 3,276,000 liters of benzene and 6,008,000 liters of industrial fuel, an average of 259,838 liters of diesel and 105,677 liters of benzene daily. These quantities are very limited compared to the actual needs of the Gaza Strip which reach 400,000 liters of diesel and 200,000 liters of benzene daily.

Crossings Designated to the Movement of Persons

- **Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing**

Israel has closed the Beit Hanoun crossing to 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 organizations; business people; and persons travelling via al-Karama crossing. These categories are allowed to travel through the crossing under very complicated procedures. According to the Civil Liaison Office in the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Israel closed the crossing completely for 4 days and another four days opened only for the emergency cases during the reporting period.

Patients

Israel obstructed the travel of 324 patients; 50 of whom were prevented due to security reasons, 46 of them were asked to change the companions and 46 others were forced to wait for a new appointment while the remaining 217 patients are awaiting an Israeli reply following their security interviews. According to the Ministry of Health, the number of applications submitted for medical treatment in hospitals in Israel or the West Bank reached 1,702 ones during the reporting period. The Israeli authorities issued permits for 1,378 and obstructed the travel of the remaining patients under various pretexts.



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- **Prisoners' Visits**

Israeli authorities reduced the number of family visits to their relatives in the Israeli prisons as the days of visits coincide with the Jewish holidays and the days in which the crossing was closed due to security claims. In a tight range, Israeli authorities allowed 243 family members of prisoner. The number of family visits is very limited in this period (146 visits) and divided into 4 groups:

Family visits to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons in December 2014

| Day | Number of visitors | Number of children | Number of visited prisoners | Prison |
|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| 01 December 2014 | 79 | 13 | 45 | Nafha prison |
| 08 December 2014 | 21 | 2 | 16 | Eishel prison |
| 15 December 2014 | 67 | 9 | 42 | Nafha prison |
| 22 December 2014 | 76 | 15 | 43 | Ramon prison |

The above table shows that the number of visitors is limited compared to the number of visits allowed under the prisoners' deal. According to the agreement, each prisoner has the right to two family visits a month. With 440 prisoners in Israeli prisons, the number of visits should reach 880 monthly. However, the Israeli forces only allowed 146 visits. The same applies to the number of family members who are allowed to visit their relatives; the number of these members mounted to 243, whereas, the number should include 1,760 persons in case each prisoner is visited by 2 members of his family twice a month.

The families were subjected to arbitrary practices, obstacles and immoral and degrading treatment. They also suffered from the Israeli provocative measures and the continuous threats to cancel their visits in the future if they did not obey Israeli orders.

It should be noted that the Israeli authorities determine a visitor who is allowed to visit a prisoner, and those authorized visitors are limited to the prisoners' father, mother or wife and one or two of them only. Furthermore, in case either one is incapable of visiting (due to sickness, old age or death), the Israeli authorities do not allow the change of the visitors' name; thus, the prisoner loses the right to his visit. Moreover, Israeli authorities continue to deprive children from visiting their fathers in Israeli prisons. Prisoners' families are not allowed to bring with them personal items, including clothes and food.

- **Other categories**

During the reporting period, 7,202 traders were allowed to travel via the crossing. In the same period, Israel allowed the entry of 1,746 persons for personal needs, 640 workers of international organizations into the Gaza Strip, and 80 travelers via al-Karama (Allenby) crossing under some complicated security conditions. The procedures for entering the Gaza Strip are complicated, resulting in prolonged waiting periods, sometimes up to several days



المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Rafah International Crossing Point

During the reporting period, Rafah International Crossing Point was closed for 28 days as a result of the situation in Egypt and the deteriorated conditions in north Sinai. This situation combined with the ongoing policy of collective punishment and closure imposed by Israel exposed the real suffering experienced by the Gaza population. In the Gaza Strip, thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of patients who are in urgent and serious need of medical treatment abroad, suffer because they are prevented from travelling abroad. Besides, hundreds of workers holding residency permits in different countries abroad were prevented from leaving the Gaza Strip. 40,000 Palestinians, including hundreds of patients, students and holders of residencies in other countries, who were registered in the lists of the Interior Ministry waiting for their turn to travel abroad. During the reporting period, when the crossing point was partially opened for 3 days, only humanitarian cases were allowed. Around 1,516 Palestinians travelled abroad via Rafah International Crossing Point, 836 Palestinians returned to the Gaza Strip and 91 were returned to the Gaza Strip by Egyptian authorities.



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:

- 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;
- Promptly and urgently intervene to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to put an end to the deterioration of living conditions across the Gaza Strip;
- 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;
- 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 fulfill 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
- 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 travelers 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 travelers doubles.