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CLOSURE UPDATE NO. 23

**Report by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
on the Closure Imposed by Israel
on the Gaza Strip**

Social and Economic Suffocation

Since September 29, 2000, the Israeli occupation authorities have imposed a comprehensive siege on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as soon as clashes broke out between Palestinians and the Israeli occupying forces, in protest to a provocative visit by the leader of the Israeli rightwing Likud party to Al-Haram Al-Sharif (the Holy Sanctuary). In these clashes more than 90 people have been killed and more than 2400 injured. Under such a siege, the Israeli occupation authorities closed all the border crossing of the Gaza Strip, including Al-Mentar Outlet (Karni Outlet), Gaza International Airport, Rafah Border Crossing and Erez Checkpoint. They prevented Palestinian citizens from moving between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The siege included also closing some internal outlets, such as Al-Tuffah Checkpoint, which connects Khan Yunis with Al-Mawasi area in which 5,000 inhabitants live. This is in addition to areas of contiguity and clashes, which were automatically closed. Under the siege, which was strengthened on October 5, 2000, Palestinians, including the ministers and senior officials of the Palestinian National Authority, are prevented from moving between the areas under Palestinian jurisdiction and Israel. Palestinian Laborers have been also denied access to their work places in Israel, and all import and export deals into and from the Gaza Strip have been halted. On October 14, the siege was partially lifted, as some necessary foodstuffs were allowed into the Palestinian areas.

The sealing of borders and restrictions of movement of persons and goods have been a policy of the Israeli occupying authorities. It is a policy of collective punishment of more than 2 million Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Such a policy contradicts all internationally accepted standards of human rights.

This is the 23rd update in a series which the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights have been publishing since 1996, documenting the effects of the ongoing total siege imposed by the Israeli occupying authorities on the Gaza Strip, specially those which

are related to economic and social rights. The information in this update has been provided by the staff of PCHR who have been given a specific mandate of conducting daily monitoring and documentation of the devastating effects of the latest siege on the lives of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

1. Health Sector:

An official source of the Palestinian Ministry of Health asserted that the Israeli occupying forces have used more dangerous weaponry in the recent clashes, such as missiles, live ammunition, Dum-Dum bullets and heavy machine guns whose bullets are about 6mm in diameter. The high number and seriousness of injuries among Palestinians entailed transferring dozens of the injured into hospitals in some Arab countries, which were ready to receive them, as local hospitals were not qualified to receive such a high number of injuries, specially when injuries are serious. In addition, these countries have provided medical support to Palestine through sending medicines and medical equipment and staff. The total siege hindered the access of medical equipment, ambulances, medical missions and medicines donated by these countries which are necessary for treating the injured. There have been also restrictions on moving the injured into hospitals in the Arab countries through Gaza International Airport and Rafah Border Crossing. It is worth mentioning that 19 Palestinian ambulances were damaged or burnt as a result of being shot at by the Israeli occupying forces. Medicines have not been allowed into besieged areas, except those provided by the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) for hospitals and clinics in those areas.

2. Labor Sector:

An official source in the Palestinian Ministry of Labor stated that about 110,000 laborers from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were working in Israel before the ongoing siege, including 40,600 who worked legally; that is, they had special permits by the Israeli Labor Department. In the Gaza Strip, the number of organized laborers in Israel was 24,600. When the siege was imposed on September 30, 2000, all laborers were denied access to their work places in Israel, and their permits were cancelled. On October 5, 2000, the Israeli occupying authorities allowed access of some laborers to their work places in Israel after a process of re-computerization which included issuing new permits on new security standards. Two days later, those laborers were denied access to their work places in Israel again, even though they have valid permits. On October 14, 2000, the Israeli occupying authorities issued 15,000 new work permits for laborers who are over 26. Despite issuing those permits, laborers were denied access to their work places in Israel. Thus, the

percentage of unemployment has increased to 28% among legally organized laborers, and 50% among unorganized laborers. The Gaza Strip has lost 40 million NIS (\$1 million) daily of financial revenues of organized work; this is not to include the financial revenues of unorganized laborers.

The loss of financial revenues of laborers of the Gaza Strip has a bad effect on the Palestinian economy and the continuity of other services which may stop progressively, such as local factories, ateliers, taxis, stores, etc. These services depend essentially on the revenues of work in Israel.

3. Industrial Sector:

Local industry has been devastated by the total siege, as Palestinian factories depend mostly on raw material imported via Israeli ports. Official sources of the Palestinian Ministry of Industry stated that the amount of loss due to the total siege is about \$ 5 million daily. The Israeli occupying authorities have prevented the movement of Palestinian products between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. They have also prevented the export of Palestinian products to other countries, which have resulted in a \$ 2 million daily loss according to Dr. Sa'di Al-Kronz, Minister of Industry, stating that the financial revenues of exporting Palestinian industrial products are about \$ 50 million monthly. Al-Kronz added that the Israeli occupying authorities prevented owners of factories from importing raw material from abroad, which constitutes 90% of the raw material they depend on. These factories have become unable to continue their work, and a large amount of ready-for-import products were hindered.

4. Agricultural Sector:

The Gazan agricultural sector is suffering large losses as a result of Israel's ban on agricultural exports, specially guava, tomatoes and cucumber, to markets in the West Bank and neighboring Arab countries. Agricultural products, which cannot be exported, have accumulated in local markets, and as there is no sufficient consumption capacity for these products in the Gaza Strip, the result has been a large depreciation of their values and retail prices to the extent that costs of production are not being covered. Because of the current hard situation in the area, it has been difficult to obtain specific amounts of losses in this sector. The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture is trying to record amounts of loss and will release them then.

The effects of the total siege on the agricultural sector, according to initial information, can be stated as follows:

- Farmers had no access to their farms adjacent to areas of contiguity for several days, so the fruits, which must be cultivated on a daily basis, damaged, and agricultural products in hothouses damaged also because of the lack of ventilation and agricultural chemical materials.
- Exports of vegetables and fruits, specially guava, from the Gaza Strip to markets abroad have stopped.
- Raw material necessary for agriculture, such as feeds and drugs of animals and plants have been difficult to obtain.

Difficulties which face farmers are expected to increase in the next few days, as the season of olive cultivation is very close. The amount of Palestinian production olive oil for this year is expected to be 15,000-20,000 tons. If the siege continues, farmers might be forced to cultivate olive before its due time, which inevitably affects the density and quality of oil.

It is worth mentioning that the Israeli occupying forces swept 24 donums of orange and lemon in Nezarim area, and 10 agricultural donums near the settlement of Dogit in the northern area of the Gaza Strip.

5. Transportation and Commercial Transactions Sector:

- **Closing Karni Outlet:**

Krni outlet is the main port of transit of commercial goods between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Israel and abroad. About 250 trucks pass daily via Karni Outlet. On September 28, 2000, the Israeli occupying authorities closed Karni Outlet, and reopened it partially on October 12, 2000 allowing basic foodstuffs into the Gaza Strip.

- **Closing Sofa Outlet:**

The Israeli occupying authorities closed Sofa Outlet located on the Green Line to the northeast of Rafah on October 8, 2000. As a result, 1,200 Palestinian laborers have been denied access to their work places in the areas inside the Green Line adjacent to the Outlet. Officer of the Palestinian Preventive Security Service at Sofa Outlet Suleiman Abu Jazar stated that 250 Palestinian trucks were prevented from passing via the Outlet to load raw material, such as “base course”, necessary for construction of buildings and roads from the Negev. In the same context, in the evening of Monday, October 9, 2000, Jewish settlers attacked Palestinian trucks which stopped near the Outlet, burning and destroying some of them.

- **Closing Erez Checkpoint:**

Erez Checkpoint was closed on September 28, 2000. The entry of Palestinian trucks, which move in a caravan system (“Levoi”), was denied. About 120 trucks were passing into Israel daily to transport cement and some foodstuffs. Closing Erez Checkpoint has caused construction in the Gaza Strip to stop. Merchants have suffered large losses as Palestinian goods have been delayed in Israeli ports.

- **Closing Gaza International Airport and Rafah Border Crossing:**

On Sunday, October 8, 2000, the Israeli occupying authorities closed Gaza International Airport and Rafah Border Crossing, in the aftermath of shooting at an Israeli vehicle of Israeli security officers near Dehnia area. Rafah Border Crossing was reopened with a reduced staff, as the number of Palestinian officers was reduced to 12 and then to 7 after their number was 45 before closing the Crossing. So, the capacity of work at the crossing decreased to 10%. The Israeli occupying forces escalated their actions when they deployed tanks and armored vehicle on the ground of the Crossing. Gaza International Airport has been closed since October 8, 2000. This resulted in halting aviation from and into the Gaza Strip. Deputy Director of Gaza International Airport Shafiq Abu Thabet, and Director of Civil Liaison of Rafah Border Crossing, stated that commercial transactions via the two crossings were completely halted. This has resulted in shortages of some foodstuffs and imported goods. Travelers’ movement has been deeply affected as a result of closing the two crossings. The Israeli occupying authorities have denied entry of returnees into Gaza, but allowed travelers to travel abroad.

- **Blocking Goods in Ashdod Seaport:**

Many imported goods have been blocked in Ashdod Seaport as transporting them into the Gaza Strip is prevented by the Israeli authorities. Palestinian merchants have to pay daily large amounts of money to the authorities of the port for their goods being stored at the port, even though they are not responsible for blocking these goods.

In addition, closing crossings lead to shortages of foodstuffs, specially milk products, frozen meat and fish, and many other goods which the Gaza Strip exports from the West Bank and Israel.

6. Restrictions on Internal Movement:

Palestinians have been prevented moving freely among the areas under the Palestinian jurisdiction since September 28, 2000. Residents of the Gaza Strip cannot go to the

West Bank and *vice versa*, the only outlets of the Gaza Strip into the West Bank, Erez Checkpoint and the Safe Passage, are closed. Israeli-Palestinian agreements provide for safe passages between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that ensure free movement of Palestinians between the two areas based on special arrangements. Persons who have VIP cards of the first class only are allowed to move between the two areas under the siege. Gazan students at universities of the West Bank are denied access to their universities, and cannot visit their families in the Gaza Strip for those who are currently in the West Bank.

School children whose schools are in areas of contiguity are deprived from going to their schools. Students of the College of Education near Netzarim Junction cannot have classes as the campus was shelled by the Israeli occupying forces.

Conclusion:

The Israeli occupying authorities continue to impose a total siege on the whole Palestinian territory. This policy of collective punishment against the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is a blatant violation of internationally accepted standards of human rights. This policy has destructive effects on the lives of Palestinian on both the economic and social levels. Import and export are banned, and thousands of laborers are denied access to their work places in Israel. The result is an increase on unemployment. Industry and production sectors are also badly affected by the siege.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights condemns continuing to impose a total siege on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and warns of disastrous effects on the social, economic and humanitarian levels. PCHR calls on the international community to intervene in order to halt the horrible military, political and economic war waged by the Israeli occupation authorities against the Palestinian people.

“End”

