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CLOSURE UPDATE NO. 27

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

The Impact of Total Closure on the Gaza Strip

This is the 27th special update in a series published by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights on the closure imposed by the Israeli occupation forces on the Gaza Strip. The Israeli occupation forces have continued to impose a total siege on the occupied Palestinian territories for the second consecutive month. These forces have also continued to threaten more oppressive measures against the Palestinian people and their property. The Palestinian people suffer an unprecedented economic, social and political strangulation under this siege. In this special update, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights continues to review the daily impact of closure on the people of the Gaza Strip. The latest information indicates that the siege has been tightened, which means further deterioration of the Palestinian economy in all its sectors. It also means continued denial of laborers' access to their work places, restricting the movement of Palestinians between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and abroad through Israel. In addition, families have been prevented from visiting their sons detained in the Israeli jails. Furthermore, citizens of the Gaza Strip lack free movement inside the Gaza Strip because of the roadblocks established by the Israeli occupation forces between Palestinian cities and villages. On Monday, November 20, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces closed Salah El-Din Street (the main road between the north and south of the Gaza Strip), separating the north of the Gaza Strip from its south. This closure is still in effect.

1. Further Deterioration of the Economic Situation in the Gaza Strip

The economic situation gets worse day by day as a result of the total siege that has been imposed by the Israeli occupation forces on the Gaza Strip for more than a month and a half. In a step to tighten strangulation of the Gaza Strip, the Israeli occupation forces re-closed Al-Mentar (Karni) Outlet on Tuesday, November 14, 2000. This Outlet had been partially reopened on November 4. This Outlet is the main crossing through which basic goods enter the Gaza Strip. Under closure, the Israeli occupation forces prohibit import and export to and from the Gaza Strip. This means that about 450 trucks stopped their irregular work of transporting goods through this Outlet. In addition, the work of laborers, drivers and merchants completely stopped. Furthermore, another 120 trucks used in a convoy system since the closure was imposed were forced to stop their work, and approximately 250 trucks which used to transport construction raw materials through Sofa Crossing also stopped their work.

1) Further Deterioration of the Agricultural Sector

Through the closing of Al-Mentar (Karni) Outlet, the Israeli occupation forces prohibited the import and export of agricultural products to and from the Gaza Strip. This particular action is a heavy blow to Palestinian farmers and agriculture,

especially as it coincides with the season for exporting flowers. At this time, more than 100,000 flowers are supposed to be exported from the Gaza Strip, but not a single flower has been exported from the Gaza Strip to date. Losses due to this particular action are estimated at 60,000 NIS (US\$ 15,000) to date, and are expected to increase as long as closure continues and export is prevented. The Gaza Strip annually exports more than 65 million flowers to European markets.

Great losses have also hit strawberries and olives, as now is the season for marketing these products. If the closure continues, the Palestinian agricultural sector will face a serious, increasing deterioration. The following table details the total amounts of agricultural products marketed by the occupied Palestinian territories during the short periods of opening the crossings, based on sources from the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture:

Agricultural Product	In Normal Conditions	Under Closure
Guavas	3,000 tons	700 tons
Potatoes	10,000 tons	3,966 tons
Tomatoes	47,233 tons	23,321 tons
Cucumbers	24,402 tons	19,880 tons
Flowers	100,000 flowers	Zero

In addition, more losses were recorded in the agricultural sector due to sweeping of agricultural land carried out by the Israeli occupation forces throughout the Gaza Strip since the outbreak of Al-Aqsa Intifada. These forces have swept hundreds of donums of agricultural and wooded land and have destroyed irrigation networks, water pumps, greenhouses and other agricultural equipment.¹ This has caused large losses to Palestinian farmers who have lost their agricultural products and fruit-bearing trees, and consequently lost their sole source of income.

The Ministry of Industry of the Palestinian National Authority estimates daily losses to the Palestinian agricultural sector at US\$3.7 million. This is in addition to the losses recorded as a result of the Israeli occupying forces destroying and damaging property.

The fowl sector also has suffered large losses under the siege. One person who raises fowl stated that the consumption by the Gaza Strip of eggs used to produce chicks has decreased to 500,000 eggs per month from an original number of 2.5 million eggs prior to the siege; that is, consumption was reduced 80%. Additionally, the price of a chick has decreased to 1 NIS instead of 2 NIS before the siege. There has also been a shortage of gas used to operate hatching equipment, which has resulted in the deaths

¹For more information, see reports by PCHR on sweeping of agricultural and wooded land carried out by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip, on October 25, and November 22, 2000.

of a substantial number of chicks, and this in turn has led to large losses for fowl raisers. Moreover, these fowl raisers are threatened by the danger that feed may run out as a result of the continued tightened siege.

2) Further Deterioration of the Industrial Sector

Losses in the industrial sector increase day by day because of the continued siege. Since the start of the current siege, owners of factories have been prevented from exporting their products, so these products have accumulated in stores. Many factories stopped their work due to the lack of raw materials which are imported from Israel. Consequently, thousands of laborers lost their work places. For instance, 18 tile factories, 16 concrete factories and a number of brick factories stopped their work; consequently, 25,000 laborers lost their sources of income.

In addition, the Israeli occupation forces destroyed a number of Palestinian factories as a part of their illegal policy of collective punishment against the Palestinian people and their property. On October 4, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces shelled an iron factory, owned by a citizen of the family of Al-Aschi, located at Al-Shuhada (Netzarim) Junction, to the south of Gaza City. The factory, with its machines and equipment, was destroyed. Losses were estimated at US\$2 million. On October 30, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces destroyed a factory of electrical tools, owned by the family of El-Souda, near Al-Mentar (Karni) Outlet. On November 20, the Israeli occupation forces and settlers attacked Metalco aluminum factory, owned by the El-Rayyes and El-Ja'farawi families. They destroyed the factory after they stole its machines and equipment.

Losses to the industrial sector resulted from:

- Prevention of the entry of raw materials.
- Prevention of the export of industrial products abroad.
- Laborers being unable to reach their work places due to the siege imposed on Palestinian cities and villages.
- The cessation of internal trade between Palestinian cities due to the siege.
- Imposition of taxes by the Israeli occupation authorities on raw materials being imported through Israeli harbors and stored in these harbors.

In addition to these losses, there have been indirect losses, including the negative impact on the investment climate, which will inevitably have negative effects on future local and international investment. Furthermore, obligations of many Palestinian contracts, which were reached with foreign countries, were not met. This will affect the credibility of Palestinian producers and will force them to pay fines for the delays.

The siege caused a reduction of production capacity for local industries, as shown in the following table (figures of reports by the Palestinian Ministry of Industry):

Kind of Industry	Percentage of Reduction
Food Industry	75%
Construction	90%
Plastic and Chemical Industry	60%
Textiles and Clothes	70%
Wood and Furniture	60%
Technical, Mechanic and Electrical Industry	70%
Leather and Rubber Industry	80%
Professional Industry	70%
Stone and Granite	99%

The Palestinian Ministry of Industry estimates direct losses to the industrial sector at about US\$3,459,000; this does not include indirect losses.

3) Continued denial of Laborers' Access to Work Places

The situation of Palestinian laborers has not improved, as the Israeli occupation forces have continued to deny the access of 120,000 laborers to their work places in Israel. In addition, thousands of laborers have lost their work places in local factories because these factories have stopped their work due to the siege. This has led to a significant increase in the percentage of unemployment – several sources assert that the percentage of unemployment has increased to 50% and that a further increase is expected as long as the current siege on the occupied Palestinian territories continues.

The Palestinian Ministry of Labor estimates daily losses for labor and laborers at about US\$6,250,000 (this number includes all categories of laborers either inside Israel or inside the occupied Palestinian territories). In addition, the Palestinian National Authority has lost revenue from taxes and health insurance collected from laborers estimated at US\$5 million daily.

2. Further Deterioration in Palestinian Health

The health situation has not improved since the siege was imposed. The Israeli occupation forces have continued to obstruct the entry of trucks loaded with medicine and medical equipment into the Gaza Strip through Rafah Border Crossing. Nine of these trucks were prevented from entering the Gaza Strip, and they were forced to

return and be stored at Al-Arish airport in Egypt. These trucks were loaded with 30 perfectly equipped ambulances. In addition, the Israeli occupation forces have continued to obstruct the transfer of wounded Palestinians to neighboring Arab countries. This increases the burden on hospitals in the Gaza Strip, especially as the number of seriously wounded patients increases and the Israeli occupation forces continue to excessively use internationally banned weapons.

The Israeli occupation forces isolated the north of the Gaza Strip from its south and separated the areas through roadblocks. As a result, physicians and medicines could not reach hospitals in the south. The Palestinian Minister of Health Dr. Riadh El-Zanoun stated that his ministry could not transfer 102 oxygen cylinders from Gaza to Khan Yunis. In addition, the Israeli occupation forces obstruct the transfer of patients to hospital through roadblocks established by these forces between cities and villages. In this context, Jamal Ibrahim Olwan, 30 years old, who suffered from heart problems, was obstructed at a road block of the Israeli occupation forces (Senjil-Ramallah roadblock) for hours, while he was being evacuated to hospital on November 18, 2000. He died a result of this delay. On November 19, 2000, a pregnant woman from Al-Mawasi (agricultural) area of Khan Yunis gave birth to her baby on a cart, after the Israeli occupation forces at Al-Tuffah roadblock prevented her evacuation by ambulance to hospital. The woman, who was in labor, gave birth to her baby with the assistance of some women accompanying her.

Under the current siege, many patients have encountered difficulties in getting to Israeli hospitals. There are 20 cancer patients and 75 heart patients who were getting treatment under a specific timetable in Israeli hospitals. The Israeli occupation forces have also prevented the return of the wounded to their homeland following treatment.

3. Preventing the Entry of Petrol

In an action that aims at tightening the siege on the Palestinian people, on November 16, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces prevented the entry of petrol into the Gaza Strip. As a result, gas storage ran out and a shortage of other fuels emerged.

On November 16, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces prevented two ships, coming from France, from unloading their cargo, which held 4,200 tons of gas for the Palestinian National Authority. In addition, the PNA had to pay enormous amounts of money as long as these two ships were blocked in the two Israeli harbors of Ashdod and Al-Majdal.

Lorries of gas and fuel pump these materials at special stores near Nahal Ouz Crossing on the eastern border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. An official Palestinian source stated that the Gaza Strip consumes 100 tons of gas and 0.5 million liters of fuel daily at a cost of US\$300,000. The storage of gas ran out and the storage of fuel is expected to run out in a few days if the current situation does not change.

The most serious effect of this particular action is that it endangers lives of the wounded, as the lack of fuel will inevitably force hospitals and ambulances to stop their work, including the evacuation of the wounded. In addition, the situation of the Palestinian economy will deteriorate as factories, companies and cars stop their work.

4. Further Deterioration in the Fishing Sector

About 3,500 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip work in the fishing sector. Due to actions taken by the Israeli occupation forces, Palestinian fishermen are not able to exceed the limit of 8 miles from the coast, although these fishermen have the right to reach 20 miles maximum, according to the agreements signed between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. In a serious escalation, on November 10, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces imposed a sea siege on the southern coast of the Gaza Strip. Under this siege, Palestinian fishermen are prevented from carrying out their work. A number of these fishermen said that they had not been able to pull their nets out of the sea since November 9, 2000. They believe that these nets will inevitably be damaged.

An official source at the Department of Fishery Wealth, estimated the direct daily losses to this sector resulting from the siege at US\$41,000. This is in addition to other daily losses of approximately US\$25,000 brought about by fishermen not being allowed to export fish to foreign countries. The consequent freezing decreases the price.

5. Continued Prevention of Free Movement and Travel

Closing Rafah Border Crossing with Egypt and Gaza International Airport is a blatant violation of the Palestinians' freedom of travel. These two international outlets are still closed to Palestinian citizens.² In this regard, hundreds of Palestinian families have been blocked in Egypt or at the Egyptian side of Rafah Border Crossing. These families face severe conditions as they wait for permission from the Israeli occupation forces to be allowed to enter the Gaza Strip.

In addition, the Israeli occupation authorities do not allow the renewal of permits of those who came from other countries and are in the Gaza Strip, and these authorities also do not allow the return of those who are abroad to the Gaza Strip. An official source of the Palestinian Ministry of Civil Affairs stated that several families visiting the Gaza Strip have not been allowed to travel abroad; for example, the Qozaat family, which holds US citizenship, could not leave despite all the attempts of the US Embassy to intervene with the Israeli side.

²See Annex (1), a table of dates of closing the crossings and the Airport.

Additionally, foreign missions and international organizations have not been allowed to enter the Gaza Strip except upon permission by the Israeli side. Only diplomats and journalists are excluded from this measure.

Furthermore, the Israeli occupation forces have continued to deprive Palestinians of their right to free movement between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank through Erez Checkpoint and the Safe Passage. In addition, internal closure on Palestinian cities and villages is a hindrance to free movement between these cities and villages, as many citizens have not been able to travel to their work, universities or schools.

The Israeli occupation forces have continued to isolate Al-Mawasi (agricultural) area in the west of Rafah and Khan Yunis. PCHR's field officer in Khan Yunis reported that Jerar El-Qedwa School, the only school in that area, in which more than 600 elementary and preparatory pupils study, was still closed, as teachers from Khan Yunis city were not able to enter the area. PCHR's field officer added that the secondary stage students from the Al-Mawasi area were able to go to their schools in Khan Yunis in the morning everyday, but they were not allowed to go back home except late at night. Students were forced to wait for several hours every day as the Israeli occupation forces would close Al-Tuffah roadblock between the Al-Mawasi area and Khan Yunis city to them earlier in the day.

In a serious escalation, on November 20, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces completely isolated the south of the Gaza Strip from its north. These forces closed Salah El-Din Street (the main road between the north and south of the Gaza Strip), near the junction leading to Gush Qatif settlement block, the junction leading to Kfar Darom settlement, the junction leading to Morag settlement and the junction leading to Kissufim Crossing (to the south of Deir El-Balah). These forces reinforced their presence along Salah El-Din Street with large numbers of troops, tanks and heavy machine guns, preventing the movement between the north and south of the Gaza Strip. The Israeli occupation forces also closed passage at Al-Tuffah roadblock between Khan Yunis city and Al-Mawasi (agricultural) area, which is under the control of these forces, and at Tal El-Sultan roadblock between Rafah and Al-Mawasi area. These forces also closed all branch roads leading to the south. As a result, citizens of the southern area could not attend their work, universities or schools. Those students and employees who went early in the morning to their universities and work were not able to come back home, and were forced to stay in Gaza City. In addition, the Israeli occupation forces prevented ambulances from moving the wounded from the southern area to hospitals in the north. As hospitals in the south are not able to deal as well as hospitals in the north with serious cases, the lives of the wounded are endangered.

On November 22, 2000, the Israeli occupation forces started to open Salah El-Din

Street twice a day, from 10:00-12:00 and 16:00-18:00 local time, under tight and intimidating security. On Monday, November 27, 2000, the first day of Ramadan, Palestinians returning home from Gaza City to the south of Gaza, were forced to turn around by Israeli occupation forces. The Israeli occupation forces fired bullets over the tops of Palestinian vehicles. Those Palestinians hoping to return home to break the fast of Ramadan with their families were unable to do so.

6. Construction

Construction has completely stopped since the siege on the Gaza Strip was imposed. Construction raw materials have not been allowed entry into the Gaza Strip, neither through Israel nor through Rafah Border Commercial Crossing. A Palestinian official source said that 250 Palestinian trucks have been prevented from entering Sofa Crossing to bring construction raw materials into the Gaza Strip. Cement has not entered the Gaza Strip since the siege was imposed. A Palestinian official source stated that 75,000 tons of cement were brought monthly into the Gaza Strip before the siege was imposed. With no cement, construction in the Gaza Strip has stopped.

Thousands of laborers and engineers have lost their work places as their companies dismissed them or gave them non-paid vacations. Concrete and tile factories also stopped their work because of the lack of raw materials.

Many construction and development projects in the Gaza Strip stopped. For example, work ceased on infrastructure projects, including Gaza Harbor and the electricity generation station. Work also came to a halt on national, social and religious buildings and institutions.

7. Continued Prevention of Prisoner Visitation Rights

Thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails have been deprived from being visited by their families as a consequence of the total siege on the occupied Palestinian territories. Lawyers have not been able to visit prisoners to follow up their cases. This worries the families of these prisoners. It also negatively affects prisoners' psychological condition, especially when taken in conjunction with the inhumane conditions of detention.

8. Continued Deprivation of the Right of Education

Since the current total siege was imposed on the occupied Palestinian territories, Gazan students have not been able to attend classes at their universities in the West Bank. Many Gazan students living in the West Bank have not been able to visit their families in the Gaza Strip.

In addition, internal roadblocks between cities in the Gaza Strip have also restricted the freedom of students to go to their universities and schools. Students of the southern area of the Gaza Strip have not been able to attend classes at their universities in Gaza City because Salah El-Din Street (the main road between the north and south of the Gaza Strip) has been closed. Students of the southern area constitute about 50 percent of the student population of universities in Gaza, so study at these universities has been suspended.

9. Continued Deprivation of the Right to Visit Holy Sites

Under the total strict siege on the occupied Palestinian territories, Palestinians of the Gaza Strip, both Muslims and Christians, have been deprived by the Israeli occupation forces from visiting the holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. They have been deprived of their right to worship in these places. In addition, the Israeli occupation authorities have prevented Muslims of Jerusalem and from inside the Green Line, who are under 45 years old, from entering Al-Aqsa Mosque for Friday prayer.

Conclusion

The Israeli occupation forces have imposed a total siege on the occupied Palestinian territories for more than a month and a half. Under the siege, the suffering of the Palestinian people continues. Living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories have deteriorated. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are facing a frightening, unknown future. The policy of collective punishment and other oppressive actions adopted by the Israeli occupation forces frustrate the Palestinian people.

PCHR condemns the total siege imposed on the occupied Palestinian territories and warns of disastrous consequences on the economic, humanitarian and social levels. PCHR calls on the international community to immediately intervene to put an end to the violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories by the Israeli occupation forces. PCHR calls on the international community to ensure Israel's compliance to international conventions through:

- (a) Pressing Israel to lift the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip while stopping its excessive and disproportionate aggression against the Palestinian people and their property.
- (b) Providing immediate medical and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people, whose living conditions have been increasingly deteriorating under the siege.
- (c) Activating mechanisms of immediate intervention by the UN and its agencies, and ICRC, to ensure the access of medical and food assistance to the occupied Palestinian territories under siege.

- (d) Obligating Israel to respect international conventions and to comply with the UN Resolutions, especially 242 and 338, which call for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.
- (e) Taking effective steps by the EU, under Article 2 of the Euro-Israel Association Agreement which provides that Israel must respect human rights.

“End”

Annex (1)

Crossing closures during Al-Aqsa Intifada

The Crossing	Closure	Partially Reopening
Al-Mentar (Karni)	Closed on September 29, 2000 Re-closed on October 8, 2000 Re-closed on November 14, 2000	On October 2, 2000 On October 10, 2000 On November 19, 2000
Sofa	October 8, 2000 – now	
Erez	October 8, 2000 – now	
Rafah Border Crossing	Closed on October 8, 2000 Re-closed on October 12, 2000 Re-closed on October 16, 2000 Re-closed on November 8, 2000	On Oct. 10, with reduced staff On October 15, 2000 On October 19, 2000 On November 20, 2000, and was re-closed on the same day
Gaza International Airport	Closed on October 8, 2000 Re-closed on October 29, 2000 Re-closed on November 8, 2000 - now	On October 15, 2000 On November 6, 2000