



PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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CLOSURE UPDATE NO. 39

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

For the twelfth consecutive month, Israel occupation forces have maintained a siege on most of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including areas controlled by the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Israeli forces also escalated measures to isolate occupied east Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, in addition to occasionally closing the Al-Karama/Allenby crossing between the West Bank and Jordan. Internally, Israeli occupation forces still maintain roadblocks and checkpoints on major roads between Palestinian cities and towns.

This series of reports details the impact of Israel's siege and closure policy on the Gaza strip. The Gaza strip remained almost entirely shut off from the outside world, with Gaza international airport closed since February and the continued closure of Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing in the north. According to data collected by PCHR, Israeli occupation forces continued to block Salah el-Din road, the main traffic artery between the northern and southern parts of the Gaza strip, while closing all bypass routes, thus impeding movement between Palestinian towns. These measures continued hand-in-hand with shootings, shelling of Palestinian institutions, house demolitions, and the destruction of agricultural land.

Israeli occupation forces also continue to restrict trade, leading to economic deterioration. Palestinian workers are still forbidden to reach their workplaces in Israel. Israeli occupation forces maintain a military marine siege on Palestinian fishermen, preventing many fishermen from doing their work. Meanwhile, travelers stuck at the Rafah border crossing during frequent closures also suffer from long waits, up to days at a time.

PCHR in this series documents the impact of the closure on the social and economic situation of the Palestinians in the Gaza strip. This report covers the following areas:

1. Continued restrictions on external movements
2. Continued restrictions on internal movements
3. Restrictions on commerce and trade
4. Tightening of the marine military siege
5. Deterioration in education
6. Violation of the right to practice religion
7. Denying the right of prisoners to family visits

1. Continued restriction on external movement at Rafah crossing

On 19 August, Israeli occupation forces reopened Rafah border crossing between the Gaza strip and Egypt after a six-day closure that causing an enormous backlog of travelers returning from



Egypt. It was estimated that 2,000 travelers were forced to sleep outdoors while others were forced to return to Al-'Arreish in Egypt to find temporary housing. After the re-opening, the number of Palestinians allowed through was between 1,500 and 2,000; those who were not allowed through were delayed due to Israeli "security" measures, including:

1. Strict and time-consuming searches of travelers and their luggage
2. Lack of sufficient Palestinian workers allowed at the crossing. Only 20 of the normal complement of 200 personnel are allowed by Israeli occupation forces to work at the crossing.
3. Strict security measures by Israeli occupation forces upon the Palestinian workers at the crossing
4. Some passengers were forced to meet with Israeli General Security Service (Shaback) officials, some of whom were arrested and others prevented from traveling
5. Decreased work hours at the crossing: from 09:00 to 16:00 for departures, and from 09:00 to 19:00 for arrivals. Before the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the crossing was open 24 hours per day.

2. Continued Restriction on Internal Movement

Israeli occupation forces maintain restrictions on the movement of Palestinians between cities and towns in the Gaza strip, including blockades on Salah el-Din street, the main traffic artery connecting the northern and southern parts of the strip, as well as bypass roads. As a result, Palestinians are denied the right to freedom of movement, and farmers are often prevented from reaching their fields. Moreover, civil servants cannot arrive at work on time. Israeli occupation forces also isolated Rafah, in the southern part of the Gaza strip, while maintaining restrictions on the movement of Palestinians inside the Al-Mawasi area, which is shared by Khan Yunis and Rafah. On 4 September, Israeli occupation forces closed Al-Shuhada' junction near "Netzarim" settlement, for one hour, citing security concerns. A PCHR researcher affirmed that Israeli soldiers fired on taxis on the coastal road during the evening. On 9 September, Israeli occupation forces closed Abu Houli checkpoint, which connects the northern and southern parts of the Gaza strip, for one hour.

Siege and Isolation of Rafah

On 29 August, at midnight, approximately 18 Israeli tanks and 2 bulldozers invaded the eastern part of Rafah city, moving approximately 4km into the area, blocking the eastern road connecting the city to the rest of the Gaza strip. They destroyed two Palestinian security installations. The tanks took up positions near the European Hospital while the bulldozers started to level nearby land, thus isolating the city from the rest of the Gaza strip. Over 130,000 Palestinians were not able to leave the city except by bypass roads. A PCHR fieldworker estimated that traveling to Khan Yunis by bypass roads takes approximately 1.5 hours, whereas the normal travel time is 15 minutes. In addition, people in Rafah were not able to access the medical care given at the European Hospital, instead relying on the Abu Yusuf Najjar hospital, whose facilities were insufficient for the task. Numerous farmers were also unable to reach their fields. Palestinians living in Rafah but working outside were unable to return, while others were unable to reach the Rafah border crossing to leave the Gaza strip.



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On 30 August, Israeli occupation forces prevented UNRWA Commissioner-General Peter Hansen from arriving at Rafah while he was escorting a convoy of humanitarian aid. Israeli soldiers threatened him at gunpoint, forced Hansen to take a bypass road. Hansen's visit to Rafah was intended to inspect the sites of homes demolished by Israeli occupation forces in Rafah and to determine how assistance could be provided to those made homeless by these demolitions.

Continued Suffering of Residents of Al-Mawasi

The condition of Palestinians living in the Al-Mawasi area between Rafah and Khan Yunis continued to deteriorate. Since November 2000, Al-Mawasi has been subject to extraordinarily strict siege and closure by Israeli occupation forces. The siege was tightened, preventing farmers from working their fields and going to markets in the Gaza strip. Since 8 February to this writing, the people of Al-Mawasi have been forbidden from bringing agricultural equipment and cars into the area. Israeli occupation forces added tanks and sandbag barriers to the Al-Tuffah and Tal al-Sultan checkpoint, tightening the siege of Al-Mawasi. Moreover, the fishing sector has continued to suffocate due to the military marine siege imposed by Israeli occupation forces since 14 February. Many fishermen have been arrested while trying to do their work.

The daily suffering of Al-Mawasi residents continues. They are denied the right to free movement, education, access to medical attention, to visit relatives, or even to allow food in unrestricted. They are subject to harassment and arrest by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints. Israeli occupation forces have arbitrarily imposed a system of giving special identification numbers to adults living in the area in order to distinguish them from other Palestinians. This system denies many in Al-Mawasi area the freedom of movement, including those who used to live in Al-Mawasi. Women married to men outside Al-Mawasi are not able to visit relatives as they do not have such numbers. PCHR affirms that at 18:00 on 7 September Israeli occupation forces at al-Tuffah east of Khan Yunis completely closed the checkpoint there until 9 September. In addition, some 300 students in Al-Mawasi were unable to attend their schools in Khan Yunis.

Continued Suffering of People in Al-Sifa Area

In the area between "Dogit" and "Elei Sinai" settlements, called Al-Sifa, Palestinians are continuously subjected to strict siege by Israeli occupation forces. On 1 September, Israeli occupation forces prevented students from arriving at their schools on time at 07:00. The next day, at 06:30, Israeli soldiers fired at Palestinians who were trying to pass through a checkpoint, but no casualties were reported. The Palestinians were forced to wait until 07:00 before being allowed to pass. On 22 June, residents of this area were not allowed to enter and they were shot at by Israeli soldiers, but no casualties were reported. On 5 July, Israeli occupation forces established an electronic gate 50m northeast of "Dogit" settlement. The people of the area were informed by an Israeli officer that they could only enter or exit the area through this gate between 07:00-09:00 and 15:00-17:00. Soldiers also established a tower nearby, and a second south of "Elei Sinai" settlement, used to observe and shoot at Palestinians who try to enter the isolated area. On 8 July, Israeli occupation forces began to implement new measures, mandating



strict searches of Palestinians entering or exiting the area during which their names were cross-checked with a list of residents.

3. Restrictions on commerce and trade

Al-Mentar (Karni) crossing.

Karni crossing is still subject to restrictions by Israel.:

1. Palestinian trucks are still not allowed to transfer products to and from Israel and the West Bank, thus increasing the final cost of products for the Palestinian consumer.
2. A fee of approximately 350 NIS is imposed on each truck
3. Priority is given to Israeli products. Palestinian products, especially fruits and vegetables, are delayed in favour of Israeli products, leading to damage and rotting of large quantities of produce.
4. Continued closure of the crossing for hours at a time, under security justifications.
5. Prevention of export of Palestinian products. On 16 August 2001, vegetable exports from the Gaza strip were blocked for that day.

Continued Closure of Sofia Crossing

Some 1,200 Palestinian workers who normally go through Sofia crossing have been prevented from doing so by Israeli occupation forces. On 24 May, Israeli occupation forces reopened the crossing for Gazan workers from Rafah and Khan Yunis, but the import of construction raw materials was prohibited. The crossing had earlier been reopened for construction materials on 16 March, but under restrictive conditions, causing an increase in the per-ton cost of aggregate from 35 NIS to 85 NIS, and a consequent sharp decrease in the amount of aggregate allowed to enter from 9,000 tons per day to 2,500. As a result, construction has come to a virtual halt in the Gaza strip.

Continued Closure of Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing

Israeli occupation forces have maintained a closure of Beit Hanoun crossing since 8 October. Palestinian trucks which normally used to work in the convoy system are forbidden from entering Israel. The number of Palestinian trucks which used to work daily at the crossing was estimated at 120. These trucks transferred materials from Israeli harbours to the Gaza strip. As a result of the closure, construction in the Gaza strip has ground to a virtual halt. In March, some 6,392 Palestinians workers were granted permission to go to their jobs in Israel but these permits were later cancelled. In addition, Israeli occupation forces granted some 4,600 permits for Palestinians to work in the Erez industrial zone. Despite the protests of international organisations working in the OPT, Israel maintains its restrictive closure policies.

Continuation of Military Marine Siege

Israeli occupation forces have imposed restrictions on fishing since the start of the Intifada, including searches of fishermen, and only allowing them to fish up to 3 miles into the sea, despite declaring that they would be allowed up to 6 miles into the sea (under the Oslo accords, they are supposed to be able to fish up to 20 miles into the sea). These measures have severely



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affected the number of fish available, thus dealing a severe blow to the fishing industry and the families who depend on it. A PCHR researcher reported that on 23 August, Israeli occupation forces arrested one Palestinian fisherman and others while they were fishing in the sea 6 miles from shore. Ibrahim ‘Omar Al-Habib was arrested and held in a military prison inside Erez Industrial Zone. A trial date has been appointed for 27 August. In another incident on 26 August, a fisherman, Khalil Mohammed Zayed, 60 was injured by a live bullet in the chest while on the beach. He is in critical condition.

On 4 September, Israeli occupation forces stopped a Palestinian fishing boat belonging to Salim Taher Abu Al-Sadir, 76, from Al-Shati refugee camp. The five fishermen inside were forced to line up in the boat before they were sprayed with water hoses by Israeli soldiers. The boat’s windows were destroyed, injuring several of the fishermen. The Palestinian fishermen were:

1. Khaled Ahmed Abu Amar, 36, from Al-Shati, injured in the head, face, and hands
2. Rahed Abdel Raziq Bakar, 42, from Al-Rimaal, injured in the left hand
3. Ehab Fayez Abu Sadiq, 14, from Al-Shati, injured throughout the body
4. Hamad Said Al-Amoudi, 40, from Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood, injured throughout the body
5. Fayez Salim Abu Sadiq, 37, from Al-Shati, injured throughout the body

Furthermore, on 10 September Israeli occupation forces fired at a number of Palestinian boats near Beit Lahia beach for some 20 minutes but no casualties were reported.

4. Denial of the Right to Education

On 1 September, the first day of the academic year, Israeli occupation forces presented hundreds of students and teachers from the southern part of the Gaza strip from arriving at their schools in the north. They also established a number of roadblocks and checkpoints near “Kfar Darom” and “Netzarim” settlements, barring access to nearby schools. On 3 September, Israeli occupation forces opened fire on a number of children while on the way home from school from Al-Sifa area. No casualties were reported. The continued roadblocks also prevent teachers and school staff from reaching their work places. In addition, the isolation of the Gaza strip from the West Bank means that Gazan students enrolled at West Bank universities either cannot reach classes or are stranded at school and cannot go home.

5. Denial of the Right to Worship

Israeli occupation forces continued violating the right to worship through the closure. Access to the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem is limited only to women and men over age 40 living in Jerusalem, who pray under extremely tight security and supervision. Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip cannot reach the mosque. In addition, shelling in the Hebron area and strict security measures make access to the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron very difficult as well.

6. Continued Denial of Right to Visit Prisoners



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On 2 June, Israeli occupation forces reached an agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross, setting specific dates for Palestinian families to visit prisoners in Israel. Israeli occupation forces have not upheld these agreements and prevented the families from visiting the prisoners and have prevented Palestinian lawyers from visiting their clients as well. There are currently 2,250 Palestinians in Israeli prisons: 300 from the Gaza strip, 1,625 from the West Bank and east Jerusalem, 300 from inside the green line, and 25 from other Arab countries.

Conclusion

The total siege on the West Bank and the Gaza strip maintained by Israeli occupation forces constitute a form of collective punishment are illegal under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Gaza Strip has effectively been transformed into three giant collective jails, and living conditions have deteriorated in all sectors.

PCHR calls for a lift of the total siege imposed on the OPT and for an end to the policy of applying economic pressure and collective punishment against the Palestinian people.

PCHR further calls for:

1. The international community to pressure to Israel to lift the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, and to stop its aggression against the Palestinian people and their property
2. The provision of immediate medical and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people, whose living conditions have been increasingly deteriorating under the siege
3. The immediate activation of mechanisms of intervention by the UN and its agencies, and the ICRC, to ensure access of medical and food assistance to the areas of the OPT affected by the siege
4. The international community to oblige Israel to respect international conventions and comply with UN Security Council Resolutions, especially 242 and 338, which call for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the OPT to the 1967 borders
5. Effective measures by the EU, under Article 2 of the Euro-Israel Association Agreement, which provides that Israel must respect human rights



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