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## **CLOSURE UPDATE NO.3**

*Report by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights  
on the latest closure imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel*

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Since February 25th 1996 Israeli authorities have imposed a total closure on the Occupied Territories, including those areas under Palestinian jurisdiction. Three million Palestinians are imprisoned in these small areas of land; where the economy is devastated and living conditions are becoming increasingly intolerable. This systematic policy of closure constitutes the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

This is the third in a series of weekly updates published by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, documenting the effects of the ongoing total closure imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip.

The drastic effects of the closure, which were documented in Closure Updates 1 and 2, remain and have been intensified. Commercial activity is paralysed, basic foodstuffs are in short supply, there are drastic losses for farmers, heavy closures in the industrial sector and access to the sea is severely restricted; Palestinians continue to be denied the freedom to move out of the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in deaths because people cannot reach vital medical treatment; over 22,000 Palestinians are prevented from reaching their places of work in Israel, students are prevented from reaching their educational establishments and Palestinians in Israeli prisons in Israel are denied family visits and access to their lawyers.

The information contained in this Update has been provided by the staff of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights who have been given the specific mandate of

conducting daily monitoring and documentation of the devastating effects of the latest closure on the lives of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. This Update is based on an Arabic version, and where there are inconsistencies the Arabic version should be considered the original.

### **1. PARALYSIS OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY AND CONTENUED DETERIORATION OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

The Israeli authorities still prevent any commercial activity between the Gaza Strip and Israel or via Israel. As a result the shortage of basic foodstuffs, building materials and raw materials for local industry in the Gaza Strip becomes increasingly devastating.

Farmers are prevented from exporting their produce out of Gaza to Israel, the West Bank or abroad. The industrial sector is in crisis because Israel prevents the export of industrial products from Gaza and the import of raw materials necessary for industrial processes.

**a. Shortage of basic foodstuffs**

Any foodstuffs which have to be imported from or via Israel are now in severe shortage. These include basic foodstuffs such as flour, sugar, salt and dairy products.

Between March 7th and 17th 1996, 667 tonnes of flour were imported in Gaza from Egypt. However daily Gazan consumption is 250 tonnes, so this amount can only sustain requirements in Gaza for 3 days.

The following table shows how little flour and sugar has been allowed into Gaza over the past ten days:

**AMOUNT OF FLOUR AND SUGAR IMPORTED TO GAZA  
FROM MARCH 7TH - 17TH 1996**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>AMOUNT OF FLOUR IMPORTED (in tonnes)</b>	<b>AMOUNT OF SUGAR IMPORTED (in tonnes)</b>
7/03/96	30	18
10/03/96	63	0
11/03/96	133	0
12/03/96	175	0
13/03/96	125	0
14/03/96	116	0
17/03/96	25	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>667</b>	<b>18</b>

**b. Commercial activity through Karni is restricted**

The Karni Outlet was designed to facilitate commercial transactions even in the event of a total closure. It was closed by the Israeli authorities on February 25th, re-opened on 29th and closed totally from March 4th to March 12th, when it was re-opened allowing limited commercial traffic to bring in only basic foodstuffs:

**March 13th:** Karni was open from 10.00am until 7.00pm.  
8 Israeli haulage vehicles bought in:

flour	130 tonnes;
animal feed	40 tonnes;
wheat and barley	100 tonnes.

**March 14th:** 12 haulage vehicles bought in:  
dairy products 2 loads;  
flour 196.5 tonnes.

In addition Karni is now subject to costly and time consuming security arrangements. These are as follows:

- i. A list of names of the Palestinians who work at the Outlet have to be forwarded to the Israeli authorities and approved by them.
- ii. Israeli haulage vehicles are searched thoroughly before being allowed to enter the zone where goods are transferred. They are accompanied at all times by Israeli soldiers.
- iii. The produce is then unloaded under the supervision of Israeli soldiers, and placed on the ground. Contact between the Palestinian workers at Karni and the drivers of Israeli haulage vehicles is forbidden.
- iv. Palestinian haulage vehicles are searched by Palestinian police before being allowed to enter the zone.
- v. The produce is then loaded onto Palestinian haulage vehicles.

Under previous arrangements goods could be loaded and unloaded directly from vehicle to vehicle. Unloading goods first onto the ground increases the chance of damage and slows the process down considerably. Nor was it required before for Palestinians who work at Karni to have Israeli security approval.

**c. Increased losses for farmers**

Palestinian farmers remain in crisis because all export activity is still blocked by Israel.

As a result Palestinian agricultural produce has to be stockpiled or thrown away, incurring extra costs for farmers and increasing their already drastic losses.

For example over 15,000,000 flowers had to be stockpiled. On March 16th 2,000,000 of these had to be discarded because they had perished, and 7,000,000 no longer reach export standards.

1,150,000 flowers were exported to the Netherlands via Cairo airport on March 13th, and a further 1,100,000 are on their way, also via Cairo. However this amount is too small to sustain the industry in Gaza and the lifting of the current Israeli closure remains an urgent need for Gazan farmers.

**d. Closures in the industrial sector**

Local industry has been devastated by the total closure. Industrial products have to be stored because they cannot be exported to or via Israel, and the raw material required for production processes are prevented from being imported.

25 factories which produce tiles have been closed because there is a shortage of cement and other raw materials which are usually imported from or via Israel. Many other factories have closed leaving thousands of Palestinian workers unemployed.

## **2. CLOSURE OF THE SEA CONTINUES**

On March 8th the Israeli authorities closed off access to the sea, prohibiting Palestinian fishermen from fishing. This violates the Cairo Agreement, signed May 1994 between the PLO and the Government of Israel, which gives Palestinians access to sea resources in a very small zone which stretches out for only 20 nautical miles (32 kilometres) from the Gaza coastline.

On March 11th Israeli authorities announced the easing of the closure and allowed access to the sea for fishermen in a far reduced area which reaches out only 3.5 nautical miles (6 kilometres) from the coastline. This allows only very limited fishing of limited species of fish, and is insufficient to sustain the industry.

The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture estimates losses in the fisheries sector at US\$ 795,725 between March 9th and 11th. Thousands of dollars of these losses are due to lost equipment. The closure on the sea was imposed while fishermen already had their nets cast, and Israel prevented them from hoisting them back in, resulting in their loss.

The following table details these losses by region:

**FISHERIES SECTOR LOSSES IN US DOLLARS  
BETWEEN MARCH 9TH AND 11TH 1996**

<b>REGION</b>	<b>LOSSES IN FISHING EQUIPMENT (US \$)</b>	<b>LOSSES IN CATCHES (US \$)</b>	<b>TOTAL LOSSES (US \$)</b>
Gaza	30,000	300,000	330,000
Deir El Balah	74,800	60,000	134,800
Khan Younis	44,825	126,000	170.825
Rafah	86,700	73,400	160.100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>236,325</b>	<b>559,400</b>	<b>795,725</b>

**3. CONTINUE RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR PALESTINIAN PEOPLE IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES**

Israel continues to Palestinian people their freedom of movement. Palestinians are still restricted from leaving the region via Ben Gurion airport; Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are prevented from leaving and from travelling between Palestinian autonomous areas; 22,000 Palestinians who usually work in Israel are rendered unemployed; and 3,500 Palestinians who languish in Israeli prisons in Israel are prevented from receiving visits from their lawyers and their families.

**a. 22,000 Palestinian workers redundant**

More than 22,000 Palestinians continue to be prevented from reaching their places of work in Israel.

On March 13th Israeli authorities allowed 300 of the 1,200 Palestinians who worked in the Industrial Zone of Erez prior to the closure, to enter the Zone to work. This is a very small number of the total workforce and will do little to alleviate the devastation caused by the high unemployment resulting from the closure.

**b. Palestinian prisoners isolated**

More than 3,500 Palestinian prisoners languish in Israeli prisons in Israel. The closure means that they are deprived of contact with their families and lawyers, in violation of accepted international laws and principles.

The last family visits to Nafha and Ashkelon prisons by people from the Gaza Strip were paid on February 6th and 7th 1996, respectively. Since then Israel has prevented all family visits and refuses to issue permits for Palestinian lawyers from Gaza Strip to visit their clients in Israeli prisons.

**c. Senior Palestinian officials cannot travel between autonomous areas**

Senior Palestinian officials and members of the newly elected Legislative Council are also prevented from moving between Palestinian autonomous areas; even though their work regularly necessitates such movement.

The only possible outlet for Gazans is via the Rafah Border between Gaza and Egypt. This is also subject to Israeli security and is therefore also difficult to cross. However the Egyptian authorities recently announced additional security measures: From March 11th Palestinians are only allowed to enter Egyptian territory on condition that the traveller:

- i. has a valid visa; or
- ii. is in transit through Egypt and has proof of transit; or
- iii. is an urgent medical case which demands treatment not available in Gaza and whose transit has been arranged between Egyptian and Palestinian authorities.

Palestinians wishing to cross this border are exposed to humiliating treatment by Israeli security personnel, which includes deliberately slow processing of their exit and entrance, causing delays for many hours. This is in violation of Article 10(d) of Annex I of the Cairo Agreement, which states that "The two sides are determined to do their utmost to maintain the dignity of persons passing through the border crossings. To this end the mechanisms created will rely on brief and modern procedures".

The Palestinian people of Gaza are thus physically sealed off not only from the outside world, but also from their people in the diaspora, in the West Bank, Jerusalem and from other Palestinian autonomous areas.

#### **4. DETERIORATING HEALTH CONDITIONS**

The Israeli authorities continue to restrict the exit from Gaza of Palestinians who are in vital need of medical treatment in hospitals outside Gaza. Such restrictions have resulted in deaths.

The Gaza Strip has a dearth of medical facilities, as a result of 27 years of Israeli occupation, and thus for anything more than basic medical treatment it is necessary to transfer patients to the West Bank, Israel, Egypt or Jordan.

Palestinians wishing to travel for medical treatment must obtain a special travel permit through a Joint Liaison Committee of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. Such permits require Israeli authorisation.

98 critical cases have been submitted by the Palestinian side of the Joint Liaison Committee to the Israeli side for the required travel permits. However the Israeli authorities have only responded to 6 of these cases since February 25th 1996. As a result, 3 patients have died and the lives of many others are under threat.

In Updates 1 and 2 we detailed the cases of Khadija Odwan and Ahmed Zanoun who both died because of Israeli delays and obstruction in the facilitation of transit for medical treatment outside Gaza. The following are details of a third death which resulted from Israeli obstruction:

### **The death of Mohammad Awad Khawalda**

Mohammad age 2 years, from Khan Younis, died on February 29th as a result of Israel's refusal to give him a travel permit to go to Al Maqased Hospital in East Jerusalem.

Mohammad was suffering from a liver disease and was receiving a course of treatment at Al Maqased Hospital, requiring him to travel there regularly. Since February 25th his condition deteriorated and his treatment at all Maqased became increasingly vital.

All attempts to obtain a permit failed. The Israeli side of the Liaison Committee did not even answer telephone calls from the Palestinian side. On February 29th Mohammad died at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.

The justification by Israel for this total closure of the Gaza Strip is based on security concerns. But it is not a sustainable argument that humanitarian cases such as this jeopardise the security of Israel. Israel's actions are contradictory to international conventions and standards.

## **5. CONTINUED DENIAL OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

Israel continues to deny hundreds of Palestinian students the right to an education. Over 500 students who were trapped in Gaza when the closure was imposed on February 25th are prevented from returning to their educational institutions in the West Bank. Hundreds of students from Gaza who were in the West Bank when the closure was imposed, and who have valid documents issued by Israel, are interned in autonomous areas of the West Bank and prevented from reaching their educational establishments.

### **The students of Birzeit University**

Gazan students attending Birzeit University in the West Bank were ordered by Israel to leave Birzeit and neighbouring villages, which are under Israeli jurisdiction, and to go to places under Palestinian autonomy in Ramallah. On March 12th they were then ordered by the Israeli authorities to go to an Israeli Defence Force Coordination office in order to be transferred back to Gaza; this order declared illegal the continued existence of Gazan students in the West Bank, including those who were in areas of Palestinian autonomy.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is no suggestion when the total closure imposed by Israel will lift; and it seems unlikely to happen in the immediate future. The longer the closure remains in place the devastation of the livelihoods of the Palestinian people becomes more extensive and costly.

Access to and via Israel from the Gaza Strip is blocked and passage to the outside world except via Egypt is totally prevented. The small amounts of food which have been imported, and the small amounts of produce which have been exported via Egypt have not alleviated the deterioration of living conditions, or the shortages of basic foods and medical treatment; nor have they abated the rising unemployment, nor the paralysis in the industrial sectors of the economy.

This form of collective punishment imposed by Israel against the Palestinian people violates international law and principles and contradicts basic standards for the protection and promotion of human rights.

- ***The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights recalls its demand for an end to the policy of closure and its attendant denial of the basic needs of the Palestinian people.***
- ***The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights calls on governments and international organisations to exert pressure on Israel in order that an end can be brought to this illegal treatment of 3,000,000 Palestinian people. This closure has caused some of the greatest devastation for the Palestinian people since the beginning of the occupation by Israel in 1967.***