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CLOSURE UPDATE NO.6

**Report by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
on the closure imposed by Israel
on the Occupied Territories**

This is the sixth 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 closure of the Occupied Territories, including those areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, imposed by Israel on 25th February, has now been in place for 45 days. This systematic policy of closure constitutes the collective punishment of 3 million Palestinian people who are suffering under the strictest closure ever imposed since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967.

The staff team from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights continues to monitor the effects and implications of the closure on the lives of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Our most recent information suggests that the effects, which we documented in our previous Closure Updates, continue: The free-flow of commercial goods is still severely restricted; living conditions for Gazans continue to deteriorate because of continuing economic hardship, stagnation of local production sectors, and the high rate of unemployment; around 22,000 Palestinian workers, who formerly worked in Israel before the closure, are still prevented from reaching their places of work in Israel; access to the sea off the Gaza shore is still restricted. Restrictions on the freedom of movement in and out of the Gaza Strip, and between areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, are maintained; consequently Gazan Students are prevented from traveling to their universities in the West Bank, many Gazan medical patients are denied access to proper medical treatment which can only be found outside Gaza, and there is a shortage of medical supplies because Israel restricts their import.

The information contained in this Update has been provided by a team of staff from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, who have monitored and documented daily, the devastating effects of the closure on 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. RESTRICTIONS ON COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY CONTINUE

Israel claims that it has taken measures to ease the closure so that commercial activity can be resumed with the Gaza Strip. Although some exports are now allowed, close investigation by our Monitoring Team suggests that these claims are an exaggeration.

Any renewed commercial activity is aggravated by the fact that there are restrictive security arrangements in place at the border crossings,¹ which are not designed with the appropriate treatment of perishable goods, such as agricultural produce, in mind. The result is that exporters suffer much damage to their produce at the borders, and heavy financial losses.

Since April 3rd 65 Palestinian commercial vehicles, carrying 780 tonnes of citrus bound for Jordan have been waiting to cross Erez checkpoint. They all possess the required permits.

Restrictions on industrial exports to or via Israel are still in place. Raw materials necessary for the industrial and construction sectors are only allowed to be imported in very limited amounts, which are insufficient to sustain these sectors. There are thus shortages in raw materials, resulting in the continued closure of many factories and work-shops, leaving the thousands of people usually employed by these industries redundant.

2. ISRAEL CONTINUES TO RESTRICT ACCESS TO THE FISHING ZONE OFF THE GAZA SHORE

On March 8th Israel closed off access to the sea for Gazans. From March 11th Israel allowed access for Gazans up to 6 nautical miles from the shore. On March 22nd this limit was extended to 12 nautical miles. These restrictions have caused serious damage to the fishing sector in Gaza, on which 4,000 people depend for employment. Israel's restrictions on Gazan access to the sea violate the Cairo Agreement signed in September 1994 between Israel and the PLO.²

¹ See Closure Updates 3 & 5.

² Annex 1, Article XI of the Cairo Agreement, signed May 1994 between the PLO and the Government of Israel, guarantees access for Gazans to sea resources in a zone which stretches out for 20 nautical miles (37 kilometres) from the Gaza shoreline

3. PALESTINIAN WORKERS ARE STILL RESTRICTED FROM RETURNING TO THEIR WORK IN ISRAEL

On April 1st Israel announced that it would allow 3,000 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to work in the agricultural sector in Israel, subject to new security measures, which include:

- i. possession of a valid magnetic card to enter Israel;³
- ii. possession of a valid work permit;
- iii. workers must be over 45 years of age.

However the Palestinian Ministry of Labour states that by April 7th the Minister had received only 332 work-permits. Before the closure 22,000 Palestinian workers went to work in Israel every day.

4. DETERIORATING HEALTH CONDITIONS

For tertiary medical treatment patients from Gaza must travel to hospitals in Israel, the West Bank, Egypt or Jordan. Permits for such travel must be obtained from Israeli authorities which conduct rigorous administrative security checks; in addition both patients and vehicles are subject to strict physical security checks at Erez Checkpoint on their departure from Gaza. There has been no reported improvement in the medical health situation in the Gaza Strip during the last week.

i. Israel restricts Gazan patients from obtaining medical treatment outside Gaza

Israel denies many patients the necessary permits to travel outside Gaza to obtain proper medical treatment. These obstructions of even the most urgent medical cases have resulted in fatalities.⁴

Between March 31st and April 7th the Israeli authorities have issued permits for only 6 patients who were in need of urgent medical treatment in Israeli hospitals; they allowed a further 4 patients to travel to Jordan.

ii. Israel restricts the import of basic medical supplies

Israel's restrictions on the import of medical supplies to Gaza have resulted in a shortage in hospitals and pharmacies of basic medicines such as antibiotics

³ Prior to the closure, Israel announced that all Palestinians who wished to enter Israel must obtain magnetic cards, which are issued by Israeli authorities following thorough security checks. Since the closure, Israel has canceled all magnetic cards issued to Palestinians before February 25th and ordered that they must reapply for them.

⁴ See Closure Updates 1, 2 & 3 for details of deaths which have resulted from Israeli administrative and security delays.

and immunizations, medicines for diseases such as cancer, irregular blood-pressure and diabetes; and pharmaceutical chemicals and solutions.

5. RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT CONTINUE

The measures claimed to have been taken by Israel to ease the closure do not extend to the easing of the restrictions on the freedom of movement for Palestinians. Thousands of Palestinians are not allowed to leave or enter the Gaza Strip. Those who were inside Gaza when the closure was imposed have been prevented from leaving via Israel; and those who were outside Gaza when the closure was imposed have been prevented from returning. This causes great inconvenience as people are forced to make expensive detours via Egypt if they can; plus access to embassies and consulates to renew visas is very hard and many people are experiencing problems with visa duration and expiration.

- i. Since February 25th Israel has not allowed Palestinians to travel to Jordan except in very severe medical cases.
- ii. Since February 25th the Israeli side of the Joint Liaison Committee has not approved any applications for visits by Palestinians in the diaspora, to their relatives in the West Bank or Gaza Strip.⁵ However the Palestinian Ministry of Interior states that 360 Palestinians from the diaspora who came to visit their relatives in the Gaza Strip before the closure, have not been allowed to leave while the closure has been in place. Many of these persons are experiencing permit and visa problems because they have expired, and access to embassies in order to renew them is difficult.
- iii. Around 70 Palestinians from the West Bank who were visiting family and friends when the closure was imposed have not been allowed to leave Gaza to return to the West Bank since the closure.
- iv. Palestinian students from Gaza Strip who study in other countries, and who were in Gaza when the closure was imposed, are restricted from traveling in order to resume their studies.
- v. Around 500 Gazan students who study in West Bank universities and who came to be with their families in Gaza for Ramadan, are prevented from returning to the West Bank in order to resume their studies; thus depriving

them of their right to an education. As yet the Israeli authorities have not shown any intention to end their crisis.⁶

⁵ Palestinians in the diaspora who wish to visit family members in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, must ask their closest relative in these Territories to apply to the Israeli authorities for a visiting permit. Palestinians cannot enter Israel or the Occupied Territories without this approval.

⁶ 27 years of occupation have resulted in the existence of only very basic educational facilities in the Gaza Strip. Therefore 1,218 Gazan students travel to educational establishments in the West Bank.

5. **ISRAEL PREVENTS PALESTINIANS FROM REACHING HOLY SITES IN JERUSALEM**

Restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of Palestinians deprive them of their right to freely exercise their religion, as Israel prevents access to Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem in order to worship.

Israeli authorities prevented thousands of Palestinian Christians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip from traveling to or entering Jerusalem in order to visit religious sites during Easter. 3,000 Palestinian Christians in the Gaza Strip are denied access to holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which is under Palestinian jurisdiction.

CONCLUSION

Israel continues to apply measures of collective punishment against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Calls to lift the closure have been ignored while Palestinian living conditions continue to deteriorate.

The Palestinian people had high hopes and expectations from the peace process. They expected tangible improvements in the quality of their lives following decades of occupation, under which they have been denied many basic and fundamental human rights. Israeli measures of collective punishment contradict principles of international law, and are against the letter and spirit of the Palestinian-Israeli peace agreements. They do not promote an atmosphere in which peace can thrive, and do not engender the belief of the people in the region in the peace process.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reiterates its call to international parties concerned with the peace process to intervene in order to put an end to the Palestinian suffering. The international community must not maintain its support of these measures, which can not be justified on grounds of security. These measures now threaten Palestinian national security and Palestinian food security.