



المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

State of the Gaza Strip Border Crossings 01 – 30 September 2020

In conjunction with the coronavirus outbreak in the Gaza Strip, and recording hundreds of infections and several deaths outside quarantine centers, the Israeli authorities continued its illegal and inhuman closure on the Gaza Strip for the 14th consecutive year.

The tightened closure restrictions led to a catastrophic deterioration in humanitarian conditions, a collapsed health system, and weak economic infrastructure in Gaza, which negatively affected ability of the Gaza Strip authorities to confront the spread of the Corona virus. This also reflected poorly on the provision of basic services for at least 2 million Palestinians who live in poor living conditions in the Gaza Strip, which is classified as the most overpopulated area in the whole world.

Additionally, medical facilities struggled to operate due to the electricity crisis, especially as they were already worn-thin before the outbreak of coronavirus in the the Gaza Strip with shortages in coronavirus testing kits, urgent need for intensive care units, respirators, and coronavirus diagnostic equipment, medicines, medical consumables and protective gear to prepare it to combat coronavirus. However, hospitals and medical centers currently suffer from a serious shortage of 45% of the essential drugs list, and 31% of medical consumables, and 65% of laboratory products and blood banking supplies.

The Gaza economy incurred huge losses due to the suspension of work in industrial, commercial and agricultural facilities that the mechanism of their productions depend on electricity. For the 14th consecutive year, these facilities suffered from the Israeli restrictions on the entry of goods classified as “dual-use items.” These items are issential for the civilian population, and the ban on their entry is a main factor in the deteriorating infrastructure, economic, health and education sectors.

The continued Israeli closure on the Gaza Strip warns of a true catastrophe which shall deepen its humanitarian and living crises especially with the skyrocketing unemployment, poverty and food insecurity. The Gaza unemployment rate is 46% (i.e. 211,300 are unemployed), 63% of which is among youth. Also, more than half of the Gaza Strip population live in poverty as the poverty rate reached around 53% according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Meanwhile, more than 62.2% of the Gaza Population suffer from food insecurity according to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

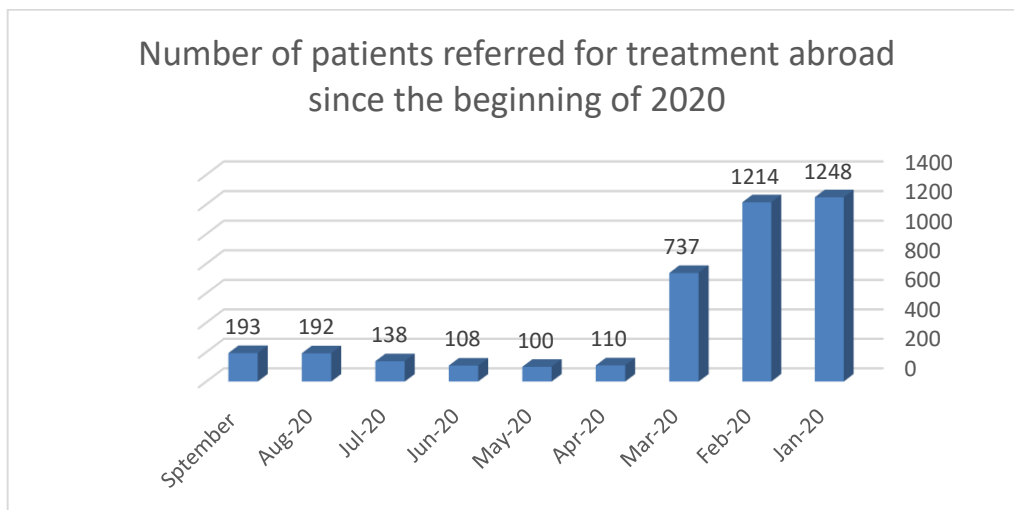
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Restrictions on the Movement of Persons:

- In September, Israeli authorities maintained tightened restrictions on the movement of the Gaza Strip population through Beit Hanoun "Erez" Crossing as these restrictions were intensified since early March due to measures imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities and the Palestinian Authority to combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). Israeli authorities also banned the movement for all, even the limited categories it previously allowed entry in March 2020, which include: patients with serious conditions and their companions, Arabs holding Israeli ID cards, international journalists, workers of international humanitarian organizations, businesspeople, relatives of prisoners in the Israeli jails, and persons travelling via the King Hussein Bridge. On the other hand, Israeli authorities allowed the entry of several humanitarian cases within the narrowest scope, mainly critically ill patients whose treatment is unavailable in the Gaza Strip.
- **Patients:** during the reporting period, the Palestinian Ministry of Health reduced the number of patients referred for medical treatment in the hospitals in Israel or the West Bank for the maximum extent possible. They only granted referrals to patients with serious conditions whose treatment is unavailable in the Gaza Strip. In spite of that, 193 patients accompanied by 154 of their relatives, were able to travel for treatment in Israeli hospitals or in West Bank hospitals, including occupied Jerusalem. Because of the coordination and liaison office of the Palestinian Ministry of Health stopping coordination procedures for travel of patients transferred to the Gaza Strip to receive treatment in West Bank hospitals and Israeli hospitals, the Center's researchers were unable to obtain the number of patients who were prevented by the Israeli occupation authorities from traveling for treatment abroad, and refused to grant them a pass through the crossing.





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- During the reporting period, the Coordination and Liaison Department in the Palestinian Ministry of Health continued suspending the travel coordination for the Gaza Strip patients who receive treatment in the hospitals in Israel or the West Bank. This move came upon the Palestinian President's decision declared on 20 May 2020, stating that the State of Palestine and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) are no longer bound by treaties and agreements with the American and Israeli governments and all consequent obligations to such treaties and agreements. As a result, thousands of serious health conditions patients were banned from travelling for treatment or continue their treatment protocols. As 8,000 cancer patients in the Gaza Strip are suffering from the inability to travel abroad for treatment or find the necessary or alternative treatment in the Gaza hospitals, as their health conditions require them to receive chemical doses and therapeutic protocols periodically.
- In July and August, a limited number of patients referred for treatment in Israeli hospitals resorted to directly coordinate with the hospitals to communicate with Israeli authorities and facilitate their travel from the Gaza Strip through Beit Hanoun "Erez" crossing. Coordination to reach the Palestinian Ministry of Health hospitals in the West Bank is done through Israeli human rights organizations, and in limited cases (saving a life), the PRCS do the coordination with a request from the Ministry of Health in Gaza.
- On 07 September 2020, the United Nations Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process, Nikolai Miladinov, announced that a temporary agreement had been reached to support patients in the Gaza Strip, to obtain treatment abroad. In accordance with this agreement, the World Health Organization (WHO) office in Gaza took over the task of sending the documents of the patient referred for treatment abroad, after completion by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, to the Israeli authorities, and receives a reply from him after checking the request. The implementation of this agreement began on 6 September 2020, and 90 patients managed to travel under this new mechanism.
- The Israeli authorities bear full responsibility for the lives of Palestinian patients in the Gaza Strip who are in dire need for medical treatment abroad and face imminent death as a result of denying them access to basic medical services that are unavailable in the Gaza Strip.
- The Israeli authorities also impose restrictions on items that can be carried by travelers via Erez, primarily electronic and electric devices, food, and cosmetics in addition to preventing travelers from using wheeled bags.
- According to the September data available at the General Authority for Civilian Affairs (GACA), Israeli authorities allowed 384 Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip via "Erez" Crossing, including 9 for personal needs; 193 patients; 154 patients companions; 2 international organizations employees; 10 diplomats, and 15 from Arabs holding Israeli ID

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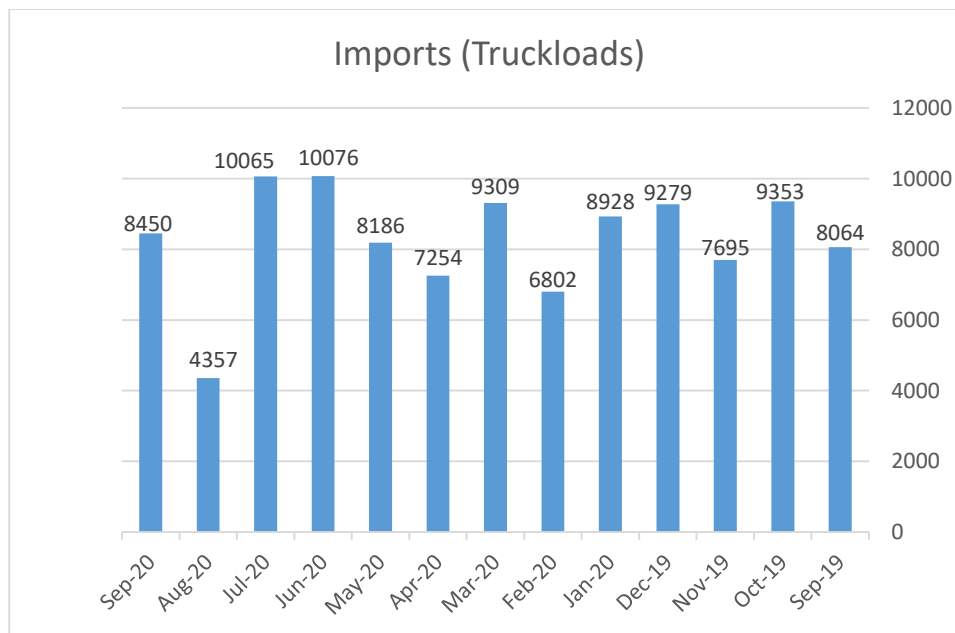
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cards. Meanwhile, 372 were allowed to return to the Gaza Strip, including 168 patients, 143 patient companions, 11 persons with special needs, 19 workers of international humanitarian organizations, 12 Arabs holding Israeli ID cards, and 2 detainees released.

- **Prisoners' Visits:** The Israeli authorities did not allow prisoners visits in September, in violation of detainees' right to the right of detainees to contact with their families through family visits, which is a guaranteed right by international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Restrictions on Movement of Goods

- For 9 days (29%) during the reporting period, Israeli authorities continued tightening their restrictions on the entry of goods. In September, Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 8,450 truckloads, including 399 fuel, 244 aid, and 7,807 truckloads for the private sector.
- 803 truckloads entered the Gaza Strip via Rafah crossing, including 318 truckloads of fuel, and 485 truckloads for the private sector.



- **Ongoing ban on Gaza Strip exports:** Israeli authorities continued to ban the Gaza Strip exports. However, in a limited exception, they allowed the exportation of very limited types of goods; most of which are exported to the West Bank and the rest are exported to Israel and other countries. In September, the Israeli authorities allowed the exportation of 103 truckloads (39 to the West Bank, and 64 to Israel). Those truckloads included agricultural

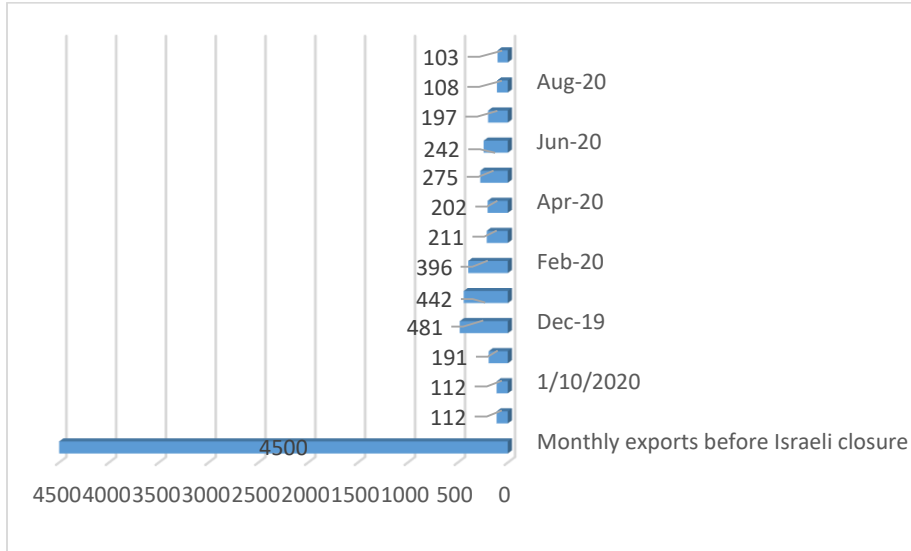
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products, fish, furniture, animal skin, aluminum scrap, clothes, and furniture. The exports during the reporting period constitute only 2.2% of the total monthly exports before the closure was imposed in June 2007 (4500 truckloads/month).



- The Israeli authorities continued to impose tightened restrictions on the list of items classified as “dual-use.” The dual-use items include 62 types and hundreds of goods and commodities that are essential to the life of the population. Imposing these restrictions caused infrastructure, economy, healthcare, and education to deteriorate severely. These items include communications equipment, pumps, big generators, iron bars, iron pipes in all diameters, welding equipment and welding rods used in welding, various types of wood, UPS devices that protect the electric devices from breaking down when the electricity suddenly cuts off, X-ray machines, cranes and heavy vehicles, elevators, types of batteries and several types of fertilizers.
- The process of submitting applications by the Gaza Strip residents to import goods classified by the Israeli authorities as “dual-use items” is very complex and ambiguous. Any person from the Gaza Strip should send a request to the Palestinian Coordination Committee for the Entry of Goods, which refers the request to the Israeli Coordination and Liaison Office at “Erez” Crossing. Afterwards, the goods will be classified and sent to the relevant Israeli officer to examine it. Moreover, the Palestinian trader should close the transaction with the Israeli seller or broker and pay for it to be able to submit the request. If the response was positive, the coordination for the entry of goods will be allowed through the Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shaloum) crossing. A number of traders and contractors said to PCHR that the abovementioned measures are very complicated as the Israeli authorities deliberately delay responses to applications for months. Additionally, in many cases, the Israeli forces stationed at (Kerem Shaloum) crossing return the goods that had been already approved entry. This inflicts heavy losses on traders who pay large amounts of money for

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the storage and demurrage charges and to contractors who are legally obliged to deliver their projects on time.

Movement at Rafah Border Crossing:

- Gaza authorities, in agreement with the Egyptian authorities, decided to shut Rafah Border Crossing, under the state of emergency declared for the purpose of combating the spread of coronavirus. The Crossing was opened exceptionally for 3 days for humanitarian cases. During the reporting period, 2,659 persons travelled from the Gaza Strip, and 1,738 others returned back to Gaza, according to statistics by the Crossing and Borders Authority in Gaza, who also confirmed that thousands of Palestinians registered for travel at the Ministry of Interior are unable to travel to this date.
- Travelers returning to the Gaza Strip via Rafah Crossing suffer from prolonged, recurrent and unjustified searches, extending the return journey from Cairo to Rafah Crossing for several days where travelers sleep in cars and restaurants despite the fact that the same journey used to last less than 6 hours via car.

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