



# المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

## The State of Gaza Strip Border Crossings

1 March – 30 April 2007

Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have continued to close all border crossings of the Gaza Strip either completely or partially, excluding limited periods of eased restrictions. IOF have also continued to impose severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinian civilians and goods. Even though IOF have allowed the entry of basic foodstuffs, medical supplies and other necessities into the Gaza Strip, the total siege imposed by IOF on the Gaza Strip has left disastrous impacts on the humanitarian situation and has violated the economic and social rights of the Palestinian civilian population. It has also paralyzed most economic sectors. According to UNRWA estimations, 4 out of each 5 persons live below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> Unemployment has also amounted to 40%.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the living conditions in the Gaza Strip have further deteriorated with the non-payment of salaries for the public sector for more than one year as international donors have frozen aids provided to Palestinians and Israeli authorities have suspended the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) since March 2006. Moreover, the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip has severely impacted the flow of food, medical supplies and other necessities such as fuel, construction materials and raw materials for various economic sectors.

The most notable developments regarding the Gaza Strip border crossings during the reporting period can be summed up in the following:

### **Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing**

During the reporting period, this crossing was completely closed for 61 days. Thus, the number of closure days of the crossing since the beginning of 2007 has increased to 120. IOF have allowed less than 300 Palestinian traders and some staff members of international and local organizations who have necessary permits to travel through the crossing.

As to the humanitarian cases, during the reporting period, IOF allowed the passage of an average of 13 patients daily. However, only 567 patients were able to travel to hospitals in Israel and the West Bank through the crossing due to the severe restrictions imposed by IOF at the crossing.<sup>3</sup> IOF have also prevented 172 from passing through the crossing. These figures reflect a decrease in the number of patients allowed to pass through the crossing in comparison to January and February 2007, when 819 patients were allowed to travel to hospitals in Israel and the West Bank.

<sup>1</sup> See the speech of Karen Koning Abu Zayd, UNRWA Commissioner-General, before the Political and Security Committee of the EU Council of Ministers, Brussels, 27 April 2007, [http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/statements/2007/PolSecCom\\_27Apr07.pdf](http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/statements/2007/PolSecCom_27Apr07.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See the Survey of Palestinian Labor Force, Annual Report 2006, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, April 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Figures are taken from the General Directorate of Emergency and Medical Aid, Palestinian Ministry of Health. I



## المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

IOF have decreased the number of patients allowed to travel through the crossing for alleged security claims, even though those patients do not pose any threat to the security of Israelis and they are badly in need for advanced medical treatment. Patients who are allowed to pass through the crossing are forced to wait for long hours to undergo complicated passage and security procedures. They are thoroughly checked in a humiliating manner. Patients are also forced to pay additional financial expenses to use Israeli ambulances to transport them from the crossing to hospitals since Palestinian ambulances are banned from transporting patients. It is noted that the number of patients passing through the crossing progressively decreased from 50 patients daily 7 months ago.

According to a number of patients who were allowed to pass through the crossing, the passage procedures did not change and waiting periods even increased even after IOF had modernized the crossing.<sup>4</sup>

On Friday morning, 2 March 2007, IOF closed the crossing for Jewish occasions, and only international diplomats and senior Palestinian officials were allowed to travel through it. The crossing was reopened on Tuesday morning, 6 March 2007.

IOF also closed the crossing from 1 to 11 April 2007 on the occasion of the Jewish Easter. During that period, only internationals, newspapers, the post and a few patients were allowed to pass through the crossing. IOF closed the crossing again from 22 to 24 April 2007.

### ***Al-Mentar (Karni) Crossing:***

During the reporting period, this crossing was completely closed for 7 days completely and 7 days partially. Despite the relative ease of restrictions imposed on the flow of goods, as the average number of containers allowed to pass through the crossing daily has mounted to 520 when the crossing is operated normally,<sup>5</sup> the number of containers decreases in days to partial closure. The fees of transportation at the crossing have sharply increased from 2000 NIS (approximately US\$ 500) to 9000 NIS (approximately US\$ 2250), which has led to a sharp increase in the prices of goods in the local markets.

During the reporting period, exportation from the Gaza Strip through the crossing decreased to 55 containers daily. The exported goods included furniture, electrical appliances, biscuits, vegetables, flowers and fish. In January and February 2007, the number of containers exported from the Gaza Strip was 61 ones daily. According to the Palestinian – Israel Agreement on Border Crossing, the number of exported containers from the Gaza Strip should be at least 400 ones that should be increased in seasons of certain products.

<sup>4</sup> On Friday, 16 February 2007, IOF operated new facilities at the crossing and declared the transformation of the crossing into an international one. The new procedures at the crossing have impacted Palestinians of East Jerusalem and those living in Israel and internationals, but have not affected the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip as they have been subject to the same procedures. For more details, see the previous update issued on 1 March 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Weekly and other holidays are excluded.



## المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

On 18 March 2007, IOF prevented exportation from the Gaza Strip. On 21 March 2007, IOF closed the crossing for alleged security reasons. On 25 March 2007, the operation of the crossing was delayed until 14:30, thus decreasing the number of imported containers to 394 and exported ones to 30. On 2 April 2007, IOF closed the crossing for at least 5 hours. On 3 April, the crossing was closed for a Jewish holiday. On 8 April 2007, the crossing was closed for at least 5 hours, thus decreasing the number of imported containers to 146 and exported ones to 28. On 16 April 2007, IOF closed the crossing at 16:30 earlier than the specified time for its daily closure. On 23 April 2007, the crossing was closed from 08:00 to 13:30, which decreased the number of imported containers to 150. On 24 April 2007, the crossing was completely closed for a Jewish holiday.

### **Nahal Ouz Crossing:**

This crossing is designed for fuel imports for the Gaza Strip. It has operated below its capacity. During the report period, the crossing was closed for 15 days.<sup>6</sup> The entry of benzene was denied for 23 days and the entry of gasoline was denied for 20 days. Thus, the crossing has been completely closed for 46 days since the beginning of 2007. The number of days in which the entry of benzene was denied has mounted to 46 and those in which the entry of gasoline was denied has mounted to 35. On 20 March and 3 April 2007, the crossing was closed for alleged security reasons. The crossing was also closed on 9, 13, 24 and 27 April 2007 for Jewish holidays. During the reporting period, 2,953,000 liters of benzene; 16,032,000 liters of gasoline; and 11,054 tons of gas were entered into the Gaza Strip. These amounts did not meet the actual needs of the Gaza Strip.

### **Sofa Crossing:**

During the reported period, this crossing, which is designed for the entry of raw construction materials, was completely closed for 53 days, whereas it was partially operated for 6 days.<sup>7</sup> Since the beginning of 2007, IOF have closed the crossing for 68 days. The Palestinian side closed the crossing from 8 to 20 March 2007 in protest of the robbery of a car belonging to the director of the crossing when he was on his way to the crossing.<sup>8</sup> IOF closed the crossing from 23 March to 28 April 2007 allegedly to establish new gates. During the reporting period, only 28,090 tons of aggregate were allowed into the Gaza Strip, whereas 277,365 tons were allowed into the Gaza Strip in January and February.

### **Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) Commercial Crossing:**

IOF closed the crossing for 101 days since the beginning of 2007. During the reporting period, the crossing was partially reopened for 7 days, allowing the entry of 3,240 tons of Egyptian aids to the Palestinian people through World Food Programme. IOF also allowed the entry of

<sup>6</sup> This figure includes Saturdays, the official Jewish holidays.

<sup>7</sup> This figure includes Saturdays, the official Jewish holidays.

<sup>8</sup> On 8 March 2007, a number of unknown gunmen stopped Mr. Ahmed al-Braim, the director of the crossing, when he was on his way to his work, and stole his car.



## المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

---

75 tons of rice provided by the Egyptian people to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, and some food aids for a number of humanitarian organizations in the Gaza Strip. The closure of the crossing has resulted in a decrease in aids allowed into the Gaza Strip. During the reporting period, 3,910 tons of food aids and 38 containers of other aids were allowed into the Gaza Strip.

### **Rafah International Crossing Point:**

During the reporting period, the crossing point was completely closed for 37 days, and was partially opened for 24 days. Thus, the crossing point has been closed for 83 days completely and 37 days partially since the beginning of 2007, and for 234 days completely and 69 days partially since 25 June 2006.

As a result of the repeated closure of the crossing point, thousands of Palestinian civilians wishing to travel from and to the Gaza Strip have been blocked at both sides of the crossing point. When the crossing point is opened, it witnesses congestion due to the high number of travelers. Palestinian travelers, especially patients, face extreme difficulties passing through the crossing point and they have to wait for long periods.

The closure of Rafah International Crossing Point have left disastrous impacts of hundreds of Palestinians, who have been stuck at the Egyptian side of the crossing after they had received medical treatment in Egypt and others who have been held at Egyptian airports.

Rafah Commercial Crossing has been completely closed since the implementation of the unilateral Disengagement Plan on 12 September 2005.



# المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

## PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

**Table of Days of Operation of Rafah International Crossing Point  
1 March – 30 April 2007**

Date	Number of Departing Travelers	Number of Arriving Travelers	Notes
2 March	274	Nil	The crossing point was operated from 09:00 to 15:00 to allow Palestinians, mostly patients, to travel abroad.
6 March	958	1,420	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 15:00. Most of the travelers were patients.
8 March	504	590	The crossing was opened at 09:00. It was extremely congested and chaos spread over the area. As a result, an old man died and 5 others were injured. <sup>9</sup> The crossing point was closed in the face of departing travelers at 11:00, and it was closed for arriving travelers at 15:00.
9 March	1,215	350	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 19:00.
12 March	1,215	350	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
14 March	1,580	660	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
15 March	1,293	350	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
19 March	907	652	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
22 March	492	640	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
26 March	685	830	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
27 March	906	829	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
30 March	432	531	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00. Work at the crossing point was suspended for 3 hours for a failure in computer sets.
4 April	1,020	840	The crossing point was operated on

<sup>9</sup> For more details, see PCHR's press release on 8 March 2007.



# المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

## PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

			both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
5 April	850	970	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
6 April	600	660	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
10 April	909	791	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
12 April	1,110	832	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
16 April	870	1,040	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
17 April	1,006	1,020	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
19 April	884	790	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.
26 April	763	1,040	The crossing point was opened at 10:00 and it was extremely congested. It was closed at 13:00 as the EU Observation Team withdrew from it after a number of Palestinian gunmen stormed the crossing point demanding a special treatment for one of their colleagues. The EU Observation Team returned to the crossing point at 16:00 and worked until 17:00.
27 April	600	1,220	The crossing point was opened at 09:00. At approximately 10:00, crowds of people attempted to break into the crossing point and a man pointed a pistol at a member of the Palestinian Presidential Guard. Security men at the crossing point opened fire. As a result, a man was killed and 3 others were wounded.
29 April	755	999	The crossing point was operated on both directions from 09:00 to 17:00.



# المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

## PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

---

### In light of the above:

- 1) PCHR asserts that the closure imposed by IOF constitutes a form of collective punishment and retaliation against the Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- 2) The closure violates international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, and international human rights law, particularly the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- 3) The policy of closure leaves disastrous impacts on all aspects of life in the OPT, and causes further deterioration in economic and social conditions.

PCHR reiterates its call for the international community, including the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to take effective steps to pressure Israel to stop collective punishment and lift the siege imposed on the OPT and force it to comply with its obligations under the international law.