



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
occupied Palestinian territory

## Humanitarian Update – August 2004

*Humanitarian concerns in Beit Hanoun – Tackling Poverty - Demolitions in Hebron's Old City – EC provides €1.35m for victims of house demolitions in Rafah - "Forbidden Roads" –WFP extends emergency assistance to Palestinians — Masafer Yatta need for international assistance - Humanitarian monitoring briefs*

### Overview

Among the main developments regarding the humanitarian situation in August were the effects of the Israeli operation "Forward Shield" in Beit Hanoun between 29 June to 5 August 2004. The operation was aimed at preventing rocket attacks into Israel. Extensive damage and destruction to property, including agricultural land and infrastructure occurred, in one of Gaza's most important agricultural regions.

On 6 August, Israel reopened the Rafah Terminal, between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, where an estimated 2,500 Palestinians, including many women and young children, had been stranded since the terminal was closed on 18 July. Israel closed the border citing security concerns. However, men between the ages of 16 and 35 are still not permitted to cross.

On 15 August, reportedly more than 2,900 Palestinian prisoners and detainees went on a hunger strike to demand more humane treatment. The strike lasted 18 days.

On 19 August, The Israeli Supreme Court ordered the government to address within 30 days the ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that declared the Barrier in the West Bank illegal. The order by the Israeli court was made in response to a petition by residents of a West Bank village. However, the Israeli court order did not include East Jerusalem because while the international court regards East Jerusalem as occupied territory, the Israeli court does not.

On 24 August, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on Israel to cease West Bank settlement expansion. The UN stated that such activities clearly contradict Israel's obligations under the Road Map that stipulates that Israel freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth of settlements.

On 31 August, 16 people were killed and another 100 were injured in suicide bombings on two buses in Beersheba, a southern Israeli city. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attacks. On 11 August, an explosive device had been detonated at the Qalandiya checkpoint, north of Jerusalem. Two Palestinians were killed and 15 injured, including six Israelis. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility.

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) said there is no evidence that funds from the non-targeted EU Direct Budget Assistance to the Palestinian Authority have been used to finance illegal activities, including terrorism. OLAF emphasizes however that the investigations are still ongoing, therefore final conclusions cannot yet be drawn. *For more information, go to: [ <http://europa.eu.int/olaf>]*

### **Humanitarian concerns in Beit Hanoun**

A preliminary assessment by OCHA of the effects of the Israeli operation “Forward Shield,” in the northern Gaza Strip, particularly in Beit Hanoun, shows that Beit Hanoun and neighbouring areas suffered considerable damage.

Israeli forces deployed around Beit Hanoun 29 June to 5 August in an attempt to stop the firing of rockets into Israel by Palestinian militants.

Ministry of Health sources report that in the period, 19 Palestinians were killed and 154 were injured. Three IDF soldiers were reported injured during the same period.

Damage and destruction to property and infrastructure are the primary humanitarian concerns resulting from the operation. At least 17% of total arable land in Beit Hanoun was leveled. A compilation of sources indicates that since September 2000, the start of the current Intifada, approximately 6,500 dunums (650 hectares) of agricultural land has been leveled in Beit Hanoun – more than 50% of the total agricultural land.

In addition, public and private property – homes, factories, educational facilities, roads, electricity, and water and sewerage networks – were damaged or destroyed in Beit Hanoun and in the neighbouring areas of Beit Lahia and Jabalia. At least 22 industrial facilities were also damaged or destroyed.

UNRWA reported that 24 families (145 people) are now homeless in Beit Hanoun, a result of 17 residential buildings being destroyed during IDF operations. Another 84 families (584 people) residing in 76 residential buildings had their properties damaged.

Israeli forces remain on the eastern border areas of Beit Hanoun.

*See Beit Hanoun situation reports at: [ <http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/>]*

### **Tackling Palestinian poverty**

As part of its ongoing campaign to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will use nearly \$2 million (about NIS 7.8 million) from the United Kingdom in an effort to streamline anti-poverty planning in the occupied Palestinian territory.

On 19 August, representatives of UNDP, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the United Kingdom signed an agreement in Ramallah approving the grant. This money will fund a joint project of the UNDP and the PA's Ministry of Planning. *For more information, please see: [ <http://www.papp.undp.org.>]*

Meanwhile, Australia is providing \$8 million (NIS 36 million) over three years to implement the Middle East NGO Cooperation Agreements (AMENCA), an initiative that seeks to reduce the vulnerability of Palestinians to poverty and conflict. *For more information, please see: [<http://www.fed.gov.au/>]*

### **Historic buildings demolished in Hebron**

In Hebron's Old City, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) demolished historical buildings from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The demolitions appear to have been to widen a road that runs through the Palestinian neighbourhood to secure the passage of Jewish settlers to the Tomb of the Patriarchs. Also known as the Ibrahimi Mosque, the site has significance for both Jews and Muslims.

None of the buildings was occupied at the time of demolition but residents fear that adjacent houses may be damaged. This is the first time the IDF have demolished historical buildings of the Old City. More demolitions are expected to take place as work to widen the road continues.

### **EC provides €1.35m for victims of house demolitions in Rafah**

The European Commission has allocated €1.35 million (NIS 7.6 million) for victims of house demolitions in Rafah, in the south of the Gaza Strip.

Temporary accommodation will be provided for than 3,500 people whose houses were destroyed or damaged during the Israeli army incursions last May and June. In addition, part of the funds will be used to repair shelters that house 2,000 people, key public infrastructure damaged as well as water supply networks, sewerage systems. Two schools will be rehabilitated.

Commenting on the decision, Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Poul Nielson said in a press release, "These funds do not absolve the occupying power of its responsibilities to uphold international humanitarian law. The Israeli authorities must take urgent action to alleviate the suffering of the population in the occupied territories, where the humanitarian situation has alarmingly deteriorated over the past years."

"As reiterated by the European Union and the United Nations, house demolitions are disproportionate acts that contravene international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, and show a reckless disregard for the lives of civilians," he added.

Over the past four years, more than 22,000 people had their houses demolished by Israeli military bulldozers in the Gaza Strip, of whom more than 15,000 live in Rafah.

The grant, channeled through the Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), is directed to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). *For more information, go to:*

*[[http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/field/gaza/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/field/gaza/index_en.htm)]*

### **“Forbidden Roads”**

B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, released a report entitled “The Forbidden Roads: The Discriminatory West Bank Road Regime”.

The report states that Israel restricts Palestinian travel on 41 roads and sections of roads throughout the West Bank, totaling more than 700 kilometers of roadway.

According to B’Tselem, the “Forbidden Roads Regime has created a fundamental change in the travel habits of Palestinians in the West Bank.” Rather than using main roads, most of the population has to use alternate long and winding routes. The road regime alters the normal routine of Palestinians with regards to economics, education and health. In addition, the report says the regime disrupts social and family life.

The report classifies roads according to one of three types: "sterile roads" where Palestinian traffic is completely prohibited; partially prohibited roads, roads where Palestinians require special permits; and roads with restricted access. The regime applies only to Palestinians. Israeli vehicles can travel freely along these roadways.

Israel uses three primary means to enforce the system: staffed checkpoints, physical roadblocks and patrols.

*To read the full report, go to: [<http://www.btselem.org>]*

### **World Food Programme extends emergency assistance to Palestinians**

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced 3 August that it would extend its emergency operation in the occupied Palestinian territory for a further 12 months, beginning 1 September.

Under the new \$41 million (NIS 186 million) operation, WFP will provide relief food distribution to 480,000 Palestinians facing severe hardship. According to WFP's vulnerability assessment last April, an estimated 38% of the population is food insecure while a further 26% is at risk.

Within the Gaza Strip alone, food insecurity rates reached as high as 66% in Rafah, 56% in Jabalia, 40% in Khan Younis and 23% in Gaza city, the report added. Rafah is particularly affected due to access restrictions from Israeli closure measures that isolate Palestinians from sources of employment and income.

According to the WFP, poor households are resorting to negative coping strategies that include selling assets, accruing debt, reducing the quantity and number of meals, and cutting out more expensive, but nutrient-rich foods such as meat, milk and dairy products.

“Unless we continue to provide food assistance, the malnutrition among this population will most likely increase,” said Jean-Luc Siblot, Country Director for WFP’s operations in the occupied Palestinian territory. *For more information, go to: [<http://www.wfp.org>]*

### Hebron “Cave Dwellers” in need of international assistance

Some 1,200 Palestinians live in Masafer Yatta in 20 hamlets on 36,000 dunums (3,600 hectares) of land in southeastern Hebron, stretching from the town of Yatta to the Green Line. Masafer Yatta occupies the central part of a “closed area” anticipated to fall between the Green Line and Israel’s Barrier in the West Bank.

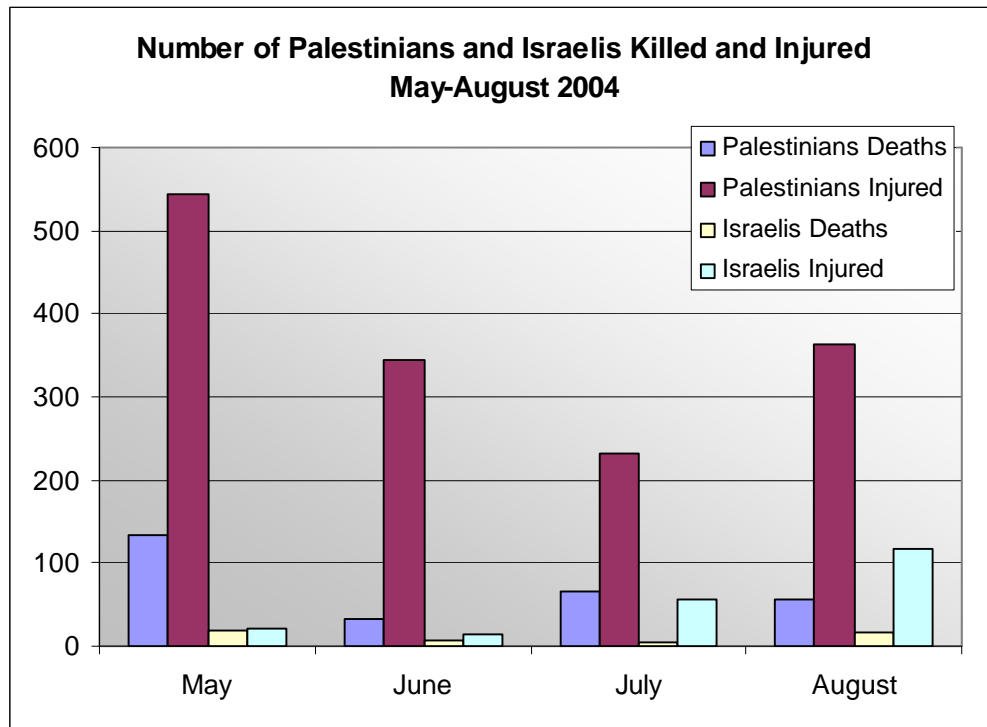
For the past 170 years, the population has maintained a self-sufficient lifestyle – based on agricultural and livestock care on the land. From the early 1970s, Israel began requisitioning the land for a military firing range – designated Fire Zone 918.

The socio-economic situation for the inhabitants has deteriorated raising poverty rates. As a result, the population faces a growing need for external international. A combination of Israeli plans to evacuate the area, settler violence, ongoing habitat and infrastructure demolitions, and closures are the predominant factors behind the communities’ current status.

*A comprehensive report by OCHA and the World Bank will soon be available at: [http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/]*

### Monthly Snapshot of Humanitarian Monitoring Issues

**Casualties** – Between 28 July and 31 August, 56 Palestinians were killed, another 364 were injured. Seventeen Israelis were killed and 118 injured in the same period, the majority of these casualties were a result of suicide bombings on two buses in Beersheba.



**Incidents involving ambulances/medical teams** – There were six incidents of ambulances or medical teams being denied access, and 21 incidents of delays – ranging in length from up to an hour to four hours. In two cases, shooting or damage to an ambulance was reported, which includes a PRCS ambulance that came under direct IDF gunfire on 24 August, while on route to Qararah. However, no injuries were reported in this incident.

**Curfews** – There were 31 incidents of curfew reported between 28 July and 31 August, ranging in duration from two hours to five days (Beit Furik, Nablus). The average duration of curfews was just under one day, 23 hours.

**Demolitions/people displaced** – During the month of August, 139 structures were reported demolished, the majority of which were houses. However, the number also includes water reserves, a gas station, an ice-cream factory, and an agricultural house. In addition, 31 structures were damaged to an extent that they were no longer usable.

**Land reports** – At least 4,165 dunums (416.5 hectares) of land were leveled, seized or uprooted between 28 July and 31 August, the majority of which was agricultural land. In addition, at least 810 trees were uprooted or destroyed.

*Sources: OCHA, FCU, PRCS, UNRWA, IDF, MoFA, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, PCHR*

*For more information on humanitarian monitoring issues, go to OCHA Updates at:  
[<http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/>]*

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*This update will be produced regularly by OCHA oPt to capture the main events and trends of humanitarian developments in the territory. OCHA invites UN agencies, international organisations, NGOs and donors to submit contributions for future issues.*

*Arabic and Hebrew versions will be made available on the OCHA website:  
[\[http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/\]](http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/)*

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