



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
occupied Palestinian territory

## Humanitarian Update – September 2004

*Humanitarian concerns in Gaza – Rafah house demolitions – 10-year-old girl dies after being shot while in school – Access to schools – Intifada anniversary - Humanitarian monitoring briefs*

### Overview

On 28 September, Israeli forces began a large scale military operation – one of the largest in the four years of conflict - in the heavily populated areas of northern Gaza. Israel stated that the operation targeted Palestinian militants, who have been firing rockets into Israeli territory (detailed below). However, since the operation began and as of 4 October, more than 65 Palestinians, including many civilians, have been killed. *For the most up-to-date information, please see: [ <http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/>]*

On 1 October, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) released footage showing what it claimed were men loading a rocket into a UN vehicle in northern Gaza. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) says that the object loaded into the van was a stretcher, and has demanded an apology for the Israeli claims. The UN dispatched a team to investigate the incident.

Since the start of the Intifada four years ago - 28 September 2000 - 3,236 Palestinians and 989 Israelis have been killed. Almost half of the Palestinian population live in poverty (detailed further in this report). Furthermore, according to B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, the IDF has demolished some 3,700 Palestinian homes.

### Death toll rises in Gaza, Annan concerned about escalating violence

#### Operation “Days of Penitence”

Since the IDF entered Gaza on 28 September and as of 4 October, at least 65 Palestinians have been killed and at least 240 have been injured.

The incursion came in the wake of the continued firing of homemade rockets by Palestinian militants towards Israel, and the killing of three soldiers in Morag settlement on 23 September and one settler in Neve Dekalim on 24 September.

Israel says the operation, "Days of Penitence," is intended to stop rocket attacks from Palestinian territory into Israeli towns.

On 29 September, a Palestinian Qassam rocket landed in the southern Israeli town of Sderot, killing a 2-year-old Israeli girl and her 4-year-old brother. Ten others were wounded. As of 3 October, Qassam fire had continued.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said that the large scale and prolonged operation was aimed at pushing Palestinian missiles out of range of Sderot. The IDF will expand the "buffer zone" in the northern Gaza Strip to prevent attacks to ensure there is no withdrawal from Gaza under fire next year.

In a statement issued by a spokesperson on 3 October, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called on Israel "to halt its military incursions into the Gaza Strip, which have led to the deaths of scores of Palestinians, among them many civilians, including children.

"The Secretary-General likewise calls on the Palestinian Authority to take action to halt the firing of rockets against Israeli targets by Palestinian militants. He reminds both sides to this conflict that they have a legal obligation to protect all civilians."

The focus of the operation so far has been on the Jabalia camp to the north of Gaza city. According to UNRWA, the camp covers an area of 1.4 km<sup>2</sup> with a registered refugee population of 103,646 making it one of the most densely populated places in the world.

It is the largest camp in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), and it was in Jabalia that the first Intifada began in December 1987.

The intensity of the fighting and the refusal of Israeli authorities to allow access to Gaza by humanitarian agencies' staff have made it extremely difficult to undertake a humanitarian assessment in northern Gaza. The following information has been obtained from local sources.

According to UNRWA, 15 homes have been demolished since the start of the operation. The homeless have since been re-housed by UNRWA in rented accommodations in Gaza city. UNRWA reports that the boundary walls surrounding two of its schools in Jabalia have been knocked down by Israeli forces operating in the area. There are consistent reports that the IDF has taken over a number of homes and these are now being used by snipers.

Land levelling has also been reported in several areas.

International humanitarian staff working for the UN have been prevented from entering Gaza since Tuesday, 21 September. (The situation was ongoing through the end of September). This makes a total of more than 60 days for this year that UN staff have been refused entry, often with little or no prior warning. *For more information and most recent figures, go to: [ <http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/>]*

### **Northern Gaza Strip IDF incursion 8 to 11 September**

Earlier in the month on 11 September, the IDF ended a three-day incursion into Jabalia, Beit Lahia and other northern areas. At least 45 homes were damaged or destroyed during the incursion, affecting 54 families (350 people). Eight Palestinians were reported killed and 143 were injured, including 79 children. At least one Israeli soldier was also reported injured.

Israeli officials stated that the operation was aimed at halting ongoing rocket fire from the area into Israel. At least 10 rockets were launched from the northern Gaza Strip into Israel and nearby Israeli settlements between 8 and 11 September.

Approximately 68 dunums (6.8 hectares) of agricultural land was levelled during the operation.

Water, sewerage, electricity and telephone networks were damaged during the operation. Residents of Tel Al Zatar neighbourhood in eastern Jabalia reported that approximately 40% of their neighbourhood was without running water and electricity for 48 hours. PCHR reports that three water wells were destroyed. (UNRWA, PCHR, OCHA, Al Mezan, MoH and PRCS contributed to this report.)

### **House Demolitions in Rafah**

In the first eight months of the year, 468 houses in Rafah have been destroyed affecting 5,188 people. According to UNRWA, another 707 houses have been rendered unsafe or damaged affecting an additional 7,669 people.

In September, UNRWA handed over 103 new homes to families from Rafah refugee camp whose shelters have been destroyed by the Israeli military during the Intifada. The agency has also opened a new school whose students will largely be those who have lost their homes during the conflict.

This project, which cost \$2.6 million, was funded by donations from Norway, Italy, and the United States. However, UNRWA still needs more than \$42 million in donations to meet the needs of the homeless in Gaza. At least a further 1,777 new homes are needed and every day brings new demolitions. *For more information, go to:* [<http://www.un.org/unrwa/>]

### **World Bank supports water and sanitation project**

This month, the World Bank approved a grant of \$7.8 million to the Palestinian Authority to deal with the impending public health, safety, and environmental hazards stemming from the lack of proper treatment of wastewater in North Gaza.

The World Bank reports that while 64% of the wastewater is collected in Gaza, most of it is not properly treated, contributing significantly to contamination of the coastal aquifer and seashore, including beaches. *For more information, go to:* [<http://www.worldbank.org/we>]

### **10-year-old schoolgirl dies in hospital after being hit by bullet in classroom**

In the third such incident in 18 months, a child sitting in the classroom of a UN-flagged school was struck in the head 7 September by gunfire from an Israeli position in the Gaza Strip. The 10-year-old girl died on 22 September at Gaza European Hospital in Khan Younis.

On 7 September prior to the shooting, a homemade rocket was fired by Palestinian militants in Khan Younis at the Israeli Neve Dekalim settlement in Gush Katif. The Israeli military responded with sporadic gunfire targeted at the western part of the Khan Younis refugee camp, according to UNRWA.

According to published reports, the army said it did not fire at any buildings or schools at the time of the incident, although it said soldiers had exchanged fire with militants. An investigation was continuing.

UNRWA also reports that on June 1, two 10-year-old children in an UNRWA school in Rafah were hit by a bullet and ricochets from a Israeli tank stationed on the sand dunes opposite the school. In March 2003, a 12-year-girl was hit in the head by a bullet fired from an Israeli observation post on the outskirts of Khan Younis. The bullet struck her head and left her blind. *For more information, go to:* [<http://www.un.org/unrwa/>]

### **Access to schools**

In September, some 1.2 million children returned to school in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after a summer break. However, the school year will not be without challenges - classroom size, quality of teaching, and, amid school closures, checkpoints and day-long curfews. Almost 200,000 children lost school days last year due to curfews and closures, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Already in September, students have lost school days because of curfew impositions. For example, on 4 September in Bethlehem district, 800 students and 30 teachers did not attend school due to a curfew.

According to UNICEF, years of conflict have damaged some 300 schools and forced many children to miss classes. Last year, 580 schools were periodically forced to closed and some schools remain closed after being declared military outposts by the IDF. *For more information, go to: [www.unicef.org]*

Meanwhile a new project by the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in the West Bank is planned to expand educational opportunities for thousands of underprivileged Palestinian young people.

The \$3 million project, funded in part by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will result in the construction or renovation of school classrooms, bathrooms, libraries, labs, playgrounds and other youth facilities in 24 villages in the Ramallah region. *For more information, go to: [http://www.iocc.org]*

In addition on 21 September, the OPEC Fund for International Development approved a grant of \$2 million to support the second phase of a project that will provide grants to nine non-governmental, non-profit universities to directly cover the tuition fees of needy students in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. *For more information, go to: [http://www.opecfund.org/]*

## Four years of Intifada

Four years ago, poverty affected one in five Palestinians. Now almost half the population lives in poverty, as incomes have fallen and Palestinians' assets have been exhausted. Living conditions have been further eroded by the substantial decline in the quality of health and education services, and the inability of Palestinians to access them.

Since the conflict began, 3,236 Palestinians and 989 Israelis have been killed.

The deteriorating humanitarian picture in the occupied Palestinian territory is a consequence of conflict and the 'closure' measures established by Israel since 2000. Closures, which are intended to address Israel's legitimate security concerns, restrict movement of Palestinian people and goods both within West Bank and Gaza and externally. They have devastated the Palestinian economy and continue severely to limit Palestinians' formerly close economic relationship with Israel.

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### Four Years of Intifada – Humanitarian Impact

**Rising poverty:** Poverty affected 21% of the population on the eve of the Intifada. The number has more than doubled. Sixteen percent of the population – and a quarter of Gazans – lives in deep poverty, and are unable to feed themselves adequately, even with food aid.

**Increased food insecurity:** Total food consumption has fallen by around one third since 1999 (World Bank/PCBS Poverty Update, forthcoming). Around 70% of the population is food insecure, or in danger of becoming so. The quality of food consumed by Palestinian children declined markedly between 2002-03.

**Declining health standards:** Demand for blood transfusion services increased 178% between 2000 and 2003, hospital emergency wards treated 52.6% more injuries in 2003 than in 2000, and major surgical admissions increased by 31%.

**Declining education standards:** Net enrollment in primary education has fallen every year since 2000. Between 2000 and 2003, students' grades in UNRWA schools in Gaza deteriorated by eight percent (Arabic) and 12% (mathematics).

**Reduced quality of water and sanitation:** Bacterial contamination of piped water has increased by 39% in some areas. Closures have had a particular negative impact on solid waste collection.

**Psychosocial damage:** Forty-eight percent of Palestinian children report personal experience of conflict-related violence or have witnessed violence affecting a family member. The number of mental health patients receiving treatment at community health centres increased by 38% since 2000.

**Casualties:** 3,236 Palestinians and 989 Israelis have been killed since September 2000.

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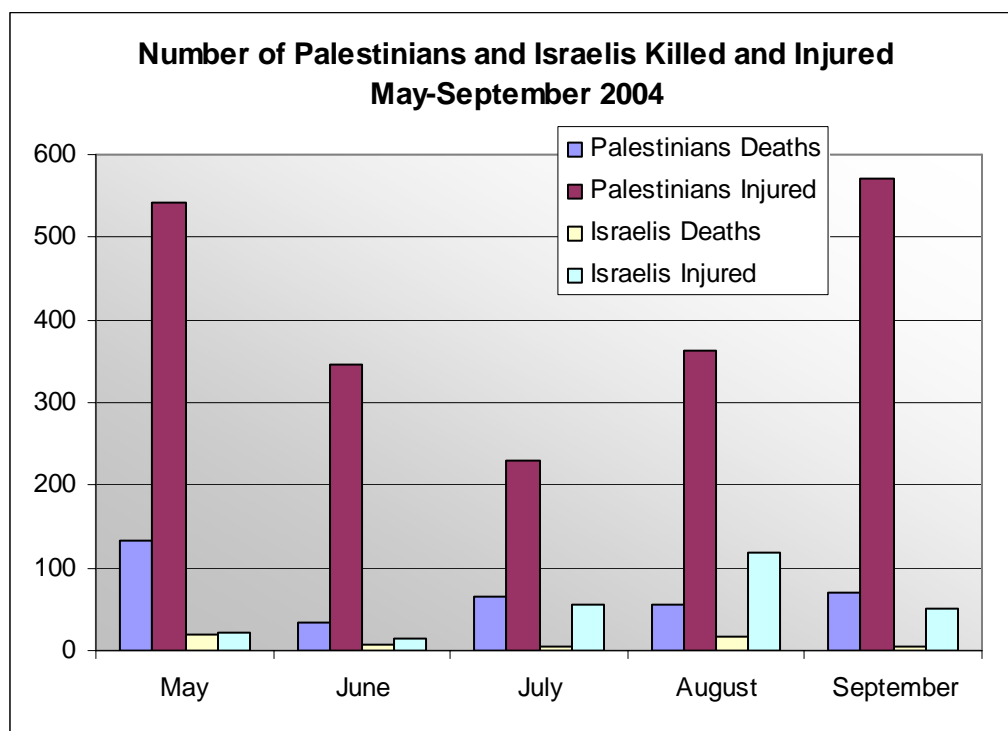
Movement restrictions have resulted in a 67% reduction in numbers of Palestinians employed in Israel and Israeli settlements since 2000.

As the humanitarian situation has deteriorated, Palestinian dependence on donor aid has deepened. At \$242 *per capita* per annum, aid to Palestinians is already the highest in the world. Donor aid of almost \$1 billion every year since

2000 has prevented soaring malnutrition or the spread of infectious diseases. Today, 39% of the population receives food aid, and a large proportion of the population is supported by the approximately 150,000 people whose salaries are funded by international donors.

### Monthly Snapshot of Humanitarian Monitoring Issues

**Casualties** – Between 1 and 28 September, 70 Palestinians were killed, approximately another 570 were injured. (The total number of casualties for the entire month, 1 September to 30 September, is higher due to casualties sustained during the latest IDF operation in Gaza detailed above). Six Israelis were killed and 51 injured in the same period. In addition, nine internationals were reported injured.



**Incidents involving ambulances/medical teams** – There were 10 incidents of ambulances or medical teams being denied access, and 25 incidents of delays. In six cases, shooting or damage to an ambulance was reported, which includes a 23 September incident where a PRCs ambulance attempting to evacuate injured Palestinians in the area of an IDF operation into Al-Namsawi, Khan Younis came under IDF gunfire. One bullet hit the gas tank causing severe damages. The ambulance crew returned back.

**Curfews** – There were 18 incidents of curfew reported between 1 and 28 September, ranging in duration from three hours to two-and-a-half days. The average duration of curfews was approximately one day.

**Demolitions/people displaced** – During this reporting period, at least 108 structures were reported demolished. However, some of those structure were multi-storey buildings. One such example being the Namsawi housing project in Khan Younis, two five-storey buildings totaling 38 apartments were demolished on 1 September. The number of demolished structures also includes a workshop, a water well and five green houses. In addition to the 108 structures reported demolished, 30 Bedouin tents were removed by the IDF in the western part of Salfit town.

Furthermore, at least 46 structures were partially destroyed, which includes 30 refugee shelters in Gaza.

**Land reports** – At least 885 dunums (88.5 hectares) of land were levelled between 1 and 28 September, the majority of which was agricultural land. In addition, at least 600 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/>]

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