



Gaza Strip Situation Report (1-8 November 2006) 9 November

INCREASED VIOLENCE AND HIGH RATE OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

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Casualties

Since the beginning of the latest Israeli military incursion into Beit Hanoun which began on 1. November, the IDF have killed 82 Palestinians and injured more than 260 in northern Gaza. This includes casualties from an artillery attack that hit an apartment building on 8. November in the north-west part of the town. Almost half of all fatalities have been civilian - at least 39 civilians have been killed, including 18 children (aged 18 years and under) and ten women. During the same period, one IDF soldier was killed in Beit Hanoun and another wounded. The stated aim of the Israeli incursion, which the IDF codenamed Operation Autumn Clouds was to halt the firing of home made rockets into Israel by Palestinian militants.

In the attack on 8. November, Israeli artillery shelling killed 18 Palestinian civilians and injured 55. All but one of the fatalities were from one family and included women and children. Reports indicate that the shelling began at approximately 5:30 am and continued for up to 30 minutes during which time the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired approximately 12 shells hitting five homes. IDF had withdrawn from Beit Hanoun 24 hours earlier, following a six day operation in the area.

The UN Special Coordinator, Alvaro de Soto, condemned today's attack and called upon "the Israeli government to call off these and other military operations without delay. The Palestinian

side should cease attacks against Israeli targets." He added that "our hearts go out today to the victims of this deed and to those they have left behind."

Figures on Palestinian Qassam rockets and Israeli artillery shells and missiles:

- Since the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip in September 2005, at least 1,700 Qassam rockets have been fired into Israel by Palestinian militants¹
- 41 Israelis have been injured by Qassam rockets during this period.²
- The IDF have fired approximately 15,000 artillery shells and more than 550 air strikes into the Gaza Strip since disengagement.³
- Approximately 525 Palestinians have been killed and 1,527 injured in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli military attacks since September 2005.⁴
- In spite of the latest incursion, 78 homemade rockets and nine anti-tank missiles were fired towards Israel between 1 and 7 November. One homemade rocket landed in a school in Ashqelon on 7 November, with no injuries reported.
- During this incursion, the IDF fired 239 artillery shells and launched 66 air to ground missiles into Gaza.



Summary of the IDF incursion into Beit Hanoun:

Up to 70 Israeli armored vehicles entered Beit Hanoun in north eastern Gaza on 1 November, establishing control over all movement in and out of the town and imposing a strict curfew on the entire population of 35,000 Palestinians. This curfew was lifted every second day – on 4 November, for women only - for three to four hours, effectively confining the entire population in their homes for nearly 6 days.

The IDF continues to hold positions inside the Gaza Strip in eastern Jabalia near the former Israeli civil administration building to the east of Salah ed Din street, while the IDF was also present earlier in the day near Karni industrial estate. Palestinian Border Guards at Karni were ordered to leave their positions by the IDF earlier in the morning 8. November and the commercial crossing is now closed.

Until 8. November, Karni and Erez crossings had remained open for the movement of international humanitarian staff and supplies. Rafah crossing was opened by the IDF in the afternoon for the passage of 50 wounded from Beit Hanoun to Egypt.

Overview of the Humanitarian Situation in northern Gaza Strip

During the six-day incursion, most of Beit Hanoun was without electricity and water. There has been extensive infrastructure damage, particularly to roads. The primary health care service effectively ceased to operate as health staff were unable to leave their homes.

Similarly, education services were shut down for one week, including UNRWA schools serving nearly 10,500 pupils.

The Israeli DCL informed OCHA on 2 November that a “humanitarian corridor” would be provided along Khalil Al Wazir street, the main southern entrance to Beit Hanoun. All movement along the corridor required coordination with the DCL and this was the only entry point for UN agencies and ICRC.

The curfew generated a reliance on international relief agencies for the provision of food, water, powdered milk, fuel and hygiene kits. Agencies, overwhelmed by the desperation of people to receive supplies, experienced difficulties in distributing relief during the periods when the curfew was relaxed.

An assessment by the Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights found that 18 housing units were completely destroyed, along with the 850 year old Al Nasser mosque and an office belonging to the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC). There was partial damage to approximately 150 housing units and nine commercial premises; and 130 dunums of land, including citrus fields, were levelled by the IDF.

Electricity

- Power outages were experienced in most of Beit Hanoun during the initial incursion due to the destruction of electrical pylons and the electricity network in multiple locations. ICRC facilitated the passage of engineers from the Gaza Electrical Distribution Company (GEDCO) on 2 November to conduct repairs, restoring 40% of the network.
- Outages continued due to damage by Israeli tanks and APCs patrolling around the town. Beit Hanoun hospital became reliant on its generator and fuel supplied by ICRC.
- The electrical network is expected to be restored by the end of this week.

Water

- There was insufficient water to meet basic needs due to damage to the water network and the lack of electricity to power the water pumps.
- The population relied on tankered and potable water provided by international agencies. ICRC delivered 17,000 litres to six locations on 3 November while UNRWA provided 30,000 litres of tankered water. NGOs, including Islamic Relief and Save the Children (US), provided bottled water.



- Four of the five main water wells in Beit Hanoun were not working due to the absence of electricity. UNRWA provided one week's supply of fuel to one of these wells serving 20% of the population.
- The water network is expected to be restored to most areas of Beit Hanoun by the end of the week and in the meantime municipal water tankers continue to provide supplies.

Food

- Access to food was a significant problem. Given the difficult economic conditions, most families did not have reserve stocks of food.
- As the curfew was lifted every second day for a limited period, families were descending in large numbers on those shops and markets with available food supplies.
- Commercial suppliers from other parts of Gaza appeared unwilling to enter Beit Hanoun to provide replacement food supplies. They were concerned their stocks may be seized by residents.
- International agencies faced logistical problems devising an effective distribution mechanism.

Health

- The primary health care (PHC) system effectively ceased to function during the incursion as staff at the Ministry of Health, UNRWA and the Health Work Committee (HWC) clinics was unable to reach their places of work.
- UNRWA facilities were closed from 31 October with the exception of the health clinic that opened briefly during the lifting of the curfew on 6 November.
- All medical transfers out of Beit Hanoun required coordination via the IDF. There were significant delays in certain individual cases.
- There were shortages of specific medications, particularly for treatments of chronic diseases – hypertension, diabetes, cardiac and renal conditions.

- Up to 1,500 people sought refuge in Beit Hanoun hospital on 3 November, putting excessive demands on the hospital's ability to provide food and sleeping facilities.
- There were public health concerns arising from the destruction of sewage and water networks, creating the potential for contamination and the spread of communicable diseases.

Additional Protection of Civilians issues

- Israeli snipers took over a number of homes, where families were forced to stay in one room. No international agencies were able to gain access to them. One woman whose home was occupied went into labour and was only allowed to walk a 350 metre distance to the hospital after five hours.
- On 3 November, hundreds of Palestinian males aged between 16 to 40 were ordered from their homes and taken to an Israeli holding centre to the north of Beit Hanoun agricultural college for questioning. MSF reported that by 5 November up to 400 had been released and, unable to return to their homes, were staying at a Sports club near Kamal Adwan hospital.

Coordination

- International agencies found there was a reliable flow of information with the Israeli District Coordination Liaison (DCL) at Erez during the course of the incursion.
- Three humanitarian convoys, including UN agencies and the ICRC, delivered supplies on 3, 4 and 6 November.
- Regular coordination meetings encompassing UN agencies, ICRC and NGOs took place during the incursion.
- UNRWA and UNDP are both in the process of undertaking assessments in relation to the damage and its impact incurred during the 6-day incursion.



Background on Gaza closures and recent IDF operations

On 25 June, the IDF launched Operation 'Summer Rains' in response to the capturing of Corporal Shalit by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip. Since that time Palestinian access to and from the Gaza Strip has been severely restricted: Rafah crossing closed on 25th June for six weeks, opening for only two days in mid July. Since 10 August, Rafah has opened sporadically (16 out of 90 days).

All the commercial crossing points closed on 28 June although Karni crossing re-opened for 15 days in July for humanitarian imports only. Since the start of 'Summer Rains', Karni crossing has been open for only 29% of its scheduled operating hours. Erez crossing, the only crossing point into Israel for workers and businessmen, has been closed since 12 March.

Endnotes:

1. Reference to OCHA Weekly briefing notes over the period of time.
2. This excludes injuries from shock. In addition, two Israeli Bedouins in the Negev were killed handling an unexploded homemade rocket fired from the Gaza Strip.
3. Source: Palestinian District Coordination Office and OCHA Field Reports.
4. This is not including 7 deaths and 33 injuries from an explosion on a beach in north Gaza in June 2006, the cause of which remains disputed.