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Humanitarian Monitoring Report – May 2004

The Humanitarian Monitoring Report is produced monthly by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It draws on information from the Access, Closure and Information System (ACIS), among other data sources that humanitarian agencies have submitted to OCHA. The report is provided to the Task Force on Project Implementation (TFPI) as a basis for discussions with the government of Israel. It is available on the website (www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt).

Context

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Ms Catherine Bertini as his Personal Humanitarian Envoy to address the humanitarian needs arising from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict since September 2000. Ms Bertini was requested to assess the nature and scale of the humanitarian needs, and to clarify the respective responsibilities of all actors with regard to humanitarian needs.

This report monitors the humanitarian commitments made by the government of Israel to Ms Bertini during a mission to the region from 12-19 August 2002. It concluded that there were serious humanitarian problems linked to the ongoing conflict and, specifically, to the measures implemented by the government of Israel to safeguard its citizens from Palestinian attacks.

These security measures, including curfews, closures and roadblocks, led to a crisis of access and mobility, instigating a drastic decline in the Palestinian economy. A large part of the Palestinian population has difficulty accessing basic services such as health and education. Humanitarian service providers such as UN agencies, NGOs, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and Palestinian Ministry of Health ambulances, have experienced problems providing assistance and services to beneficiaries.

Commitments

Health

- Ambulances will wait no more than 30 minutes at checkpoints.
- Mechanisms will be set in place to ensure patients seeking critical medical services (child delivery, dialysis, chemotherapy) can pass all checkpoints quickly.

Water

- Problems relating to water deliveries in Palestinian towns and villages will be addressed to ensure that daily provision of adequate volume can be supplied by Palestinian water tankers.

Facilitation of International Humanitarian Organisations

- The government of Israel will fully facilitate the activities of international organisations, with particular reference to UNRWA.
- The government of Israel agreed to review and strengthen the liaison arrangements between international agencies and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Additional Commitments

On previous occasions, the government of Israel has made the following commitments, which were confirmed to the mission:

- The fishing zone for Palestinian boats off the Gaza coast will be extended to 12 nautical miles
- Olive farmers will be allowed to access to their fields
- Increased shipments will be enabled at Karni crossing in the Gaza Strip
- The number of permits for Palestinian workers in Israel will be increased.

Executive Summary

Health

In the West Bank and Gaza, ambulance operators reported 93 incidents of access delay or denial by the Israeli Defense Forces in May. In April, there were 52 reported incidents. Thirty-seven of the recorded incidents involved denials of access and 21 involved situations where medics reportedly came under physical attack by the IDF.

On 16 April, the Rafah Terminal was closed to all Palestinians between 16 and 35 years of age, a situation that is ongoing. However, restrictions were eased on emergency medical cases for treatment in Israel. At the Rafah Terminal, ambulances must transfer patients through the “back-to-back” method, in which patients are transferred from the rear of one vehicle to the rear of another. Due to closures and other restrictions imposed at the Rafah Terminal, the number of patients crossing there has reduced significantly.

Water

In May, an IDF incursion into Gaza caused heavy damage to buildings and infrastructure, certain areas sustained substantial damage to their water network. For example, according to Rafah Municipality of the total sewerage network of 20km in Tal es Sultan district of Rafah, 15km was damaged. Of the 15km of sewerage network for the Rafah neighbourhoods of Brasil and Salam, 12km was damaged.

Facilitation of International Humanitarian Organisations

In May, international relief agencies filed some 151 incident reports in which the delivery of aid and/or the movement of personnel were obstructed by the IDF or Israeli Border Police. Most incidents reported included access delays or denials by the IDF of international organisations’ mandates, privileges and immunities. In 29 cases (compared to 53 in April), humanitarian access was denied.

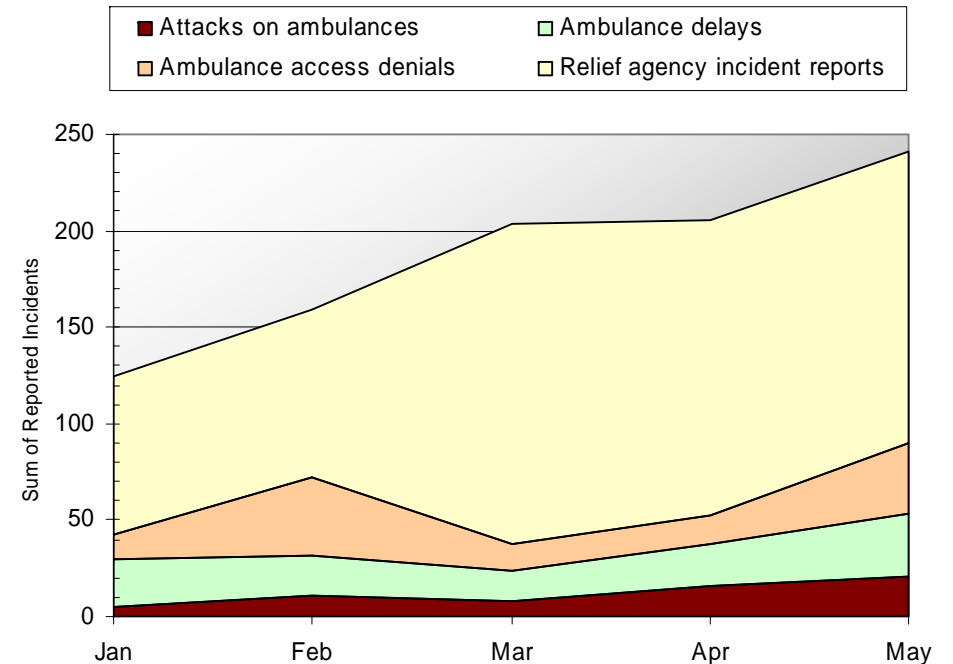
The most problematic checkpoints were those around the West Bank city of Nablus and in Gaza. IDF incursions in the Rafah, Khan Younis and Zaitoun areas resulted in continued extended closures of crossing points between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Additional Commitments

In Gaza, due to closures and new security measures after the suicide attack on 14 March in Ashdod, in which ten people were killed and 16 wounded, the volume of imports in May fell by 57% and exports by 78%. The reduction in trade is far greater in comparison to earlier months in 2004. The sharp decline in the flow of commercial traffic was not only reflected in shortages of supplies in Gaza shops, but represents a significant loss of income to the local economy.

In addition, the movement of Gaza fishermen remained subject to strict restrictions.

Graph: Humanitarian access problems - January to May 2004



Commitment	Benchmarks	Status	Remarks
<p>1. Health</p> <p>Palestinian ambulances will wait no more than 30 minutes at any checkpoints</p> <p>(Government of Israel to Bertini mission, 12-19 August 2002)</p> <p>Effective mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that Palestinians seeking critical medical services (child delivery, dialysis, chemotherapy, etc) can quickly pass all checkpoints</p> <p>(Government of Israel to Bertini mission, 12 – 19 August 2002)</p>	<p>Instructions issued to all checkpoint commanders concerning maximum time for ambulance delay at checkpoints;</p> <p>Palestinian Ministry of Health, PRCS, UNRWA and hospitals no longer report ambulance delays at checkpoints</p> <p>Mechanisms established and Palestinian public informed.</p> <p>Explicit instructions issued to all checkpoint commanders</p> <p>No more reported instances of Palestinians in need of critical medical services being denied passage at checkpoints</p>	<p><i>West Bank & Gaza: 93 incidents</i></p> <p>Palestinian and UNRWA ambulance operators reported a total of 93 humanitarian access incidents (compared to 52 in April 2004) in which the provision of first aid and/or medical evacuations were delayed, obstructed and/or prevented by the IDF.</p> <p><i>Ambulance Access Denials</i> Of the 93 incidents reported, 37 included humanitarian access denials. In two incidents, patients were evacuated from the ambulance before they were denied access.</p> <p>Abu Houli, 12-15 May: PRCS ambulances were denied access during the period it was closed.</p> <p><i>Ambulance Delays</i> 32 documented incidents, including delays considerably in excess of the 30-minutes, up to four hours.</p> <p><i>Other Reports</i> In May, 21 incidents were reported in which crews came under IDF attack (firing and physically abusing paramedics). In one incident, a medical crew was detained.</p> <p>Rafah area, 17-18 May: PRCS ambulances were subjected to random IDF gunfire thus restricting their ability to evacuate injured from the Rafah area.</p>	<p>On 16 April, the Rafah Terminal was closed to all Palestinians between 16 and 35 years of age, a situation that is ongoing. However, restrictions were eased on emergency medical cases for treatment in Israel. During May, cancer patients were allowed to enter Israel through Erez for treatment. The only alternative for patients in need of medical treatment, otherwise unavailable in the Gaza Strip, is to go to Cairo via the Rafah Terminal.</p> <p>At the Rafah Terminal, ambulances must transfer patients through the “back-to-back” method, in which patients are transferred from the rear of one vehicle to the rear of another. Due to closures and other imposed restrictions at the Rafah Terminal, the number of patients crossing there has reduced significantly.</p>

Commitment	Benchmarks	Status	Remarks
<p>2. Water</p> <p>Problems related to water deliveries to Palestinian towns and villages will be addressed to ensure that daily water deliveries in proper quantities can be supplied by Palestinian water tankers.</p> <p>(Government of Israel to Bertini Mission, 12-19 August 2002)</p>	<p>Instructions issued to all checkpoints allowing for the easy transfer of water tankers through all checkpoints</p> <p>The IDF removes barriers that prevent the access by water tankers to villages that rely on tankered water</p> <p>No reports on lack of water or delay/stoppage of water tankers at checkpoints</p>	<p>In May, an IDF incursion into Rafah caused heavy damage to buildings and infrastructure.</p> <p>According to the Rafah Municipality preliminary assessment, 17km of the 30km of water network in the Tal es Sultan district of Rafah was damaged during the incursions. Nineteen km of the 25km network was damaged in Brasil and Salam. Figures for the sewage system show an even higher proportion of damage. Of the total sewage network of 20km in Tal es Sultan, 15km was damaged. Of the 15km of sewerage network for the Rafah neighbourhoods Brasil and Salam, 12km was damaged.</p> <p>Between January 2003 and February 2004, up to 40% of length of the water network was damaged during various incursions, and up to 35% of the sewerage network was damaged in six different areas. The Municipality estimates that the cost of repairs of water pipes and installations destroyed during Israeli military activities amounts to approximately \$250,000 every six months.¹</p>	<p>Infrastructure in Rafah District was weak even before sustaining damage during recent military operations. In their 2002 Poverty Assessment, UNDP and the Ministry of Planning found that Rafah's public water supply network – which covers 85% of the District's houses – was already "old, worn and polluted." Water pollution caused approximately 70% of common illnesses in the district.</p> <p>Inadequate road and communications infrastructure add to the difficulties rural communities face in accessing markets, and contribute to rural poverty and unemployment.</p>

¹ Please refer to Rafah needs assessment submission to the Local Aid Co-ordination Committee.
http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/docs/UN/OCHA/UNRWA_OCHA_ReportRafahLACC0604.pdf

Commitment	Benchmarks	Status	Remarks
<p>3. Facilitation of International Humanitarian Organisations</p> <p>Israel will fully facilitate the assistance activities of international organisations with particular reference to UNRWA</p> <p>(Government of Israel to Bertini mission, 12-19 August 2002)</p> <p>Israel agrees to review and strengthen the liaison arrangements between international agencies and the IDF to facilitate assistance activities</p> <p>(Government of Israel to Bertini mission, 12-19 August 2002)</p> <p>Israel will improve the situation at checkpoints, including the deployment of more experienced IDF personnel</p>	<p>Free access for all international staff of international organisations throughout the West Bank and Gaza, and at international crossings, at all times</p> <p>Free access for all Palestinian staff of international organisations throughout the West Bank and Gaza at all times</p> <p>No delays/ stoppage of international organisations' transport of development and humanitarian goods at any point (that is, at international borders, borders between Israel and the West Bank or Gaza, within the West Bank or Gaza) at any time</p> <p>Palestinian drivers (with either Jerusalem or West Bank ID) allowed to drive humanitarian vehicles for international organisations, in particular UNRWA, WFP and ICRC</p> <p>Procedures will be established that provide direct access by international organisations to operational and command structures within the IDF</p>	<p>In May 2004, international relief agencies filed some 151 incident reports² in which the delivery of aid and/or the movement of personnel were obstructed by the IDF or Israeli Border Police. Most incidents reported included delays and disrespect by the IDF of international humanitarian organisations' mandates, privileges and immunities. In 29 cases (compared to 53 in April), humanitarian access was denied.</p> <p>UNRWA, the largest humanitarian organisation operating in the oPt, reported 127 incidents³ of delay or denial of passage at IDF checkpoints (compared to 139 in April), as well as 109 incidents of delay and 18 incidents in which staff members were denied. In one incident, a staff member was detained.</p> <p>Other UN agencies filed eight incidents in which staff members were delayed, denied or assaulted.</p> <p>International humanitarian NGOs reported 15 access incidents, where staff were delayed, denied access or assaulted.</p> <p><i>External Closures</i></p> <p>On 16 April, the Rafah Terminal was closed to all Palestinians between 16 and 35 years of age, a situation that is ongoing. However, restrictions were eased on emergency medical cases for treatment in Israel.</p> <p><i>Access by UNRWA staff</i></p> <p>Between 5 May and 31 May 2004, a number of field staff and students were delayed at Abu Houli checkpoint. The reported incidents varied from 30 to 545 students and the number of vehicles involved at any given time was between one and 15 buses.</p>	<p>The most problematic checkpoints were around Nablus and in Gaza.</p> <p>IDF incursions in the Rafah, Khan Younis and Zaitoun areas resulted in continued extended closures of crossing points between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Movement within the Gaza Strip was interrupted by simultaneous closure of both Netzarim/Coastal Road Junction and Abu Houli/Gush Qatif Junction.</p> <p>UNRWA vehicles and staff were still subjected to various degrees of searches by IDF personnel, particularly at the checkpoints into Al Mawasi and Dugit/Alai Sinai settlement (Seafa) restricted zones. UNRWA staff was not permitted to drive into the area between the Dugit and Alai Sinai settlements and were compelled to walk to village.</p> <p>UN staff members continued to report incidents where IDF soldiers at checkpoints refused to cooperate with the District Coordination Liaison Office (DCL), and/or accept the validity of UN ID cards, insisting instead that staff show national passports or other ID cards.</p>

² These figures apply only to the humanitarian aid organisations that reported incidents at checkpoints to OCHA.

³ These figures apply only to reported incidents involving UNRWA staff travelling in humanitarian agency vehicles, which is only a small fraction of UNRWA staff in the West Bank. Most staff members use their private or public transportation to report to duty.

Commitment	Benchmarks	Status	Remarks
<p>4. Additional Commitments</p> <p>The fishing zone for Palestinian fishing boats off the Gaza coast will be extended to 12 nautical miles</p>	<p>Extension of fishing zone fully implemented.</p> <p>No arrests of fishermen or confiscation of fishing boats within the 12 nautical mile zone</p>	<p>The Israeli Navy closed the waters off Gaza city and Deir El Balah from 12–18 May. A Palestinian fishing boat was sunk by the Israeli Navy on 28 May.</p> <p>On 19 October, the IDF issued an order prohibiting access to the Al Mawasi, Gaza Strip coastline by Palestinian fishermen for six months. The order has expired, but Palestinian fishermen are still not able to access the waters.</p>	<p>The movement of Gaza fishermen remained subject to strict restrictions, counter to the commitments made by the Israeli government to Ms Bertini (12 nautical miles) and the Oslo Accords (movement up to 20 nautical miles).</p>
<p>An increase in shipments at Karni crossing, Gaza strip</p>	<p>Quantifiable increase in humanitarian aid shipments permitted through the crossing</p>	<p>In May, there was a prolonged closure of Karni Terminal. Karni Terminal was closed between 11 and 30 May and was only open for nine days during the entire month. The closure coincided with heavy fighting in Gaza city and Rafah. Israeli forces entered the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza city on 11 May. One day later, a large operation began in Rafah, which lasted almost two weeks.</p> <p>Given such a long closure, the reduction in the volume of commercial traffic in May was enormous. The number of containers entering Gaza from the West Bank, Israel and overseas in May totalled only 1,626 units; 3,802 units entered in April. This compares to totals in excess of 4,700 containers for both the months of February and March and 6,826 for January.</p> <p>Export traffic from Gaza was even more adversely affected. The total number of containers that left the Strip in May was 239, compared to 1,073 in April. The massive drop in volume of exports is highlighted by comparison with February and March when, 1,258 and 1,340 units, respectively, were exported.</p> <p>The prolonged closure at Karni Terminal also had an impact on humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza. Both UNRWA and WFP faced considerable delays in getting their food containers out of Gaza via Karni. They were extremely reluctant to send additional containers into Gaza while this situation remained. In addition, the agencies were being charged demurrage fees, which are paid for the delay in returning containers, on account of the containers being held inside Gaza.</p> <p>Similarly, the ability of agencies to respond to damaged water and electrical systems, which were widespread in the Brasil and Tel es Sultan areas of Rafah, was delayed by the closures at Karni Terminal. The closures prevented much-needed supplies and materials from entering Gaza.</p>	<p>While periodic closures were imposed at Karni Terminal during March and April due to Jewish holidays and the killings of Hamas leaders Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Dr Abdel Aziz Rantisi, the closure in May was far more extensive.</p> <p>Combined with the introduction of new security measures after the suicide attack at Ashdod, the volume of imports fell by 57% in May and exports by 78%. The reduction in trade is far greater In comparison to earlier months in 2004.</p> <p>The sharp decline in the flow of commercial traffic was reflected in shortages of supplies in Gaza shops. It represents a significant loss of income to the local economy.</p> <p>Not only was commercial traffic affected by the closure at Karni, but international agencies experienced significant difficulties in providing humanitarian assistance. While the new security measures introduced by Israel can be seen as a means of deterring future attacks, provision should nevertheless be made for the timely access of humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations.</p>

Commitment	Benchmarks	Status (continued)	Remarks
<p>Increase in the number of work permits for workers in Israel</p>	<p>Quantifiable increase in the number of work permits being made available for workers in the West Bank and Gaza to work inside Israel</p>	<p>Erez Terminal closed on 18 April following a suicide attack at the industrial estate the previous day in which one border policeman was killed. Several hours later the Hamas leader in Gaza Dr Abdel Azizi Rantisi was assassinated. The closure remained in place throughout May. Erez reopened on 31 May.</p> <p>On 31 May, 79 traders were allowed to pass into Israel. However, they had to be at least 35 years old.</p> <p>On 31 May, 340 workers were able to enter the Erez industrial area.</p>	<p>In the wake of security incidents in March and April, whether Palestinian or Israeli initiated, the Israeli authorities imposed a 43-day closure between 18 April and 30 May.</p> <p>The loss of income to the Gaza economy from such a closure was immense. At the end of 2003, approximately 15,000 workers were moving daily into Israel and the Erez industrial area.</p>