



Gaza Strip Situation Report: 31 October 2005¹

Overview

Since the completion of Israeli disengagement on 12 September 2005 the humanitarian situation for residents of Gaza has deteriorated. Violence significantly escalated during two periods in the Gaza Strip - between **24 – 28 September** and since **24 October** during which time Palestinian militants fired at least 80 rockets towards Israel. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Israeli Air Force (IAF) launched aerial strikes throughout the Gaza Strip and fired artillery shells (into northern areas). IAF aircraft also caused series of ‘sonic booms’ over the Gaza Strip.

The escalation in the conflict during October followed the killing of two Islamic Jihad members in Tulkarm camp on 23 October and the suicide bombing in the Israeli town of Hadera on 26 October that killed five Israelis.

The Gaza Strip has effectively been closed for Palestinians wanting to enter or leave. Commercial flows have been minimal.

Israeli air strikes

During the times of heightened violence in the Gaza Strip there has been IAF air to ground missiles fired at various targets throughout the Gaza Strip and artillery shelling in the northern Gaza Strip on 26, 28, 29 October.² These resulted in Palestinian casualties and damaged buildings and infrastructure. In total 12 Palestinians, some of whom were civilians, were killed and 55 others injured.

Sonic booms

- There have been series of sonic booms reported over the Gaza Strip caused by IAF aircraft flying at low altitude and breaking the sound barrier. Between 24 – 28 September there were 29 sonic booms recorded and since 24 October until 14:00 hours 31 October a further 28 have been experienced (**total of 57**). These sonic booms were mostly caused during the evenings and early mornings when children were going to school and people beginning their workday.
- The use of sonic booms by the IDF has caused physical damage and had psychological effects on Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA reported that more than 350 windows and doors were destroyed or damaged in their facilities in the Gaza Strip as a result of shock waves associated with the sonic booms in September. Many private and public institutions, including schools, were also damaged. Provisional information from health clinics in the Gaza Strip report increased signs of psychological stress in the population, particularly amongst children.

¹ As at 14:00 hours.

² UNRWA Gaza Sit Rep of 27, 28 and 29 October.

Northern Gaza Strip

- In the northern Gaza Strip, the IDF has begun constructing a concrete wall north of **Beit Hanoun** and **Beit Lahia**. The 8 metre high wall is being constructed with concrete slabs and is under construction along parts of the northern border
- At approximately midnight on 25 October the IDF announced through the Palestinian DCO that areas in **north and northeast of Beit Hanoun** were now under Israeli control. It has not been confirmed by the IDF the exact area of control. However, limited Palestinian movement is again being reported in these areas.
- On 30 October at 16:00 hours one Palestinian was injured after the IDF opened fire into the **northern Gaza evacuated settlement area**.

Gaza Access

Erez crossing

- Since **24 September** Erez crossing has been closed to all Palestinian workers and traders crossing into Israel. This closure is in part because of a comprehensive closure imposed by the IDF across the oPt (Gaza Strip and the West Bank) during the Jewish holiday period. External movement from the West Bank for workers and traders has also been prohibited since 24 September.
- A limited number of Palestinian VIP officials and humanitarian cases with prior coordination have been allowed to cross through Erez crossing during this period.
- Between 24 - 25 September and 24 – 25 and 26 – 27 October access was denied for all internationals, including UN agencies and international diplomat passport holders.

Karni crossing

- Between **24 September – 9 October** Karni crossing was closed to all imported and exported goods. It reopened on 10 October but closed again on 12, 13, 17 (half day) and 24 October.
- Karni crossing was partially reopened on 26 October for both imported and exported goods. However on 27, 28, 30 and 31 October Karni crossing was only partially opened for imported goods (food supplies only). At 13:00 hours 31 October Karni crossing opened again for the transit of exported goods.

Rafah Passenger Terminal

Rafah has been closed since **7 September** with some periodic openings to allow predominately Mecca pilgrims to cross - it was reopened on 23 September and 3, 11, 12, 23, 24 (half day) and 30 October. Urgent medical referrals (humanitarian cases) are now being processed through Erez crossing.