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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

20-26 August 2008

Military activities affecting civilians

The IDF injured eleven Palestinians in the West Bank this week, including four children. Among the children, two were injured in anti-Barrier demonstrations, and two during an IDF search and arrest campaign in Tammun village in the governorate of Tubas. All four children were shot with rubber coated metal bullets (see also *Barrier Demonstrations*).

In the West Bank, 110 IDF search operations and 77 arrests/detentions of Palestinians were reported. On 25 August, the IDF conducted a search campaign in Misilya and Az Zababida villages of the Jenin governorate, forcibly entering agricultural storage rooms, allegedly to find chemical fertilizers. In a separate search and arrest campaign, IDF soldiers placed the village of Dar Salah (Bethlehem) under curfew for eight hours, during which three Palestinians were arrested.

According to Israeli media reports, two Qassam rockets were fired on 25 August from the northern Gaza Strip, with one landing in open area in the western Negev, and the other near a kibbutz in the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council area. Two additional Qassam rockets were fired on 26 August from east of Shejayeh Quarter towards the Western Negev area (not reported in media sources). No injuries or damages were reported. On the same day, Israel closed the border crossings with the Gaza Strip in response to the Palestinian rocket fire.

Barrier Demonstrations

Two Palestinian children (ages 16 and 17 years) and six adults were injured with rubber-coated metal bullets shot by Israeli Security Forces during an anti-Barrier demonstration in Ni'lin village (Ramallah). One Israeli activist was arrested. Following one of the demonstrations, on 21 August, a 20 year old Palestinian male was handcuffed and beaten by the IDF with batons and machine guns. Eyewitnesses at the site reported to OCHA that while handcuffed, the IDF shot the man in the head with a rubber coated metal bullet. Ramallah hospital confirmed that the Ni'lin resident regained consciousness on 25 August and is receiving treatment for a fractured skull.

Also on 22 August, during the weekly anti-Barrier demonstration at Bil'in village (Ramallah), tens of cases of tear gas related asphyxia were reported, as well as cases of vomiting and nausea among Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists when the Border Police sprayed the crowd with chemically treated foul-smelling liquid.

Access Incidents in the West Bank

On 21 August 2008, the IDF dismantled Rafat-Masyoun checkpoint, which controlled access between Ramallah city and the Bir Nabala and Biddu areas. The dismantling of the checkpoint eases movement restrictions on more than 40,000 residents.

The IDF closed Beit Iba checkpoint for one hour and arrested two Palestinians for allegedly carrying explosive devices. The IDF enforced closures along the northern side of road 585 near Ya'bad—changing earth mounds into earth walls. The closure forces Palestinians to take long detours and go through the Mevo Dotan checkpoint to reach their homes and the charcoal factories located in the area of the closure.

In the West Bank, a total of 71 flying checkpoints were reported this week, approximately 18% fewer than the previous week. The highest numbers of flying checkpoints were seen in Qalqiliya and Bethlehem governorates. Long delays and queues continued at checkpoints on major access roads to Qalqiliya City (Qalqiliya DCO), Nablus City (Huwara and Beit Iba), the northern West Bank (Tappuah), the northern Jordan Valley (Tayasir and Hamra), Jerusalem (Qalandiya and Jaba'), and the central and southern West Bank (Jericho DC).

Gaza access: Fuel crisis continues

During the reporting period, Palestinian families continued to face an increased shortage of cooking gas. Long queues at cooking gas stations reappeared this week in many parts of the Gaza Strip. Transportation continued to be one of Gaza's major problems, with more than 231 commercial petrol stations closed since October 07. Only a few stations opened irregularly to implement the Gaza authorities' coupon rationing system, which was first implemented in April 08 to cope with the fuel shortage. Due to the lack of cooking gas and petrol, some Gaza households have resorted to using wood ovens for food preparation, and access to health, education, employment and social facilities remains difficult.

On 24 August, the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) in the Gaza Strip launched an appeal to international humanitarian agencies to provide 30 thousand litres of fuel for water pumping and waste water treatment. According to the CMWU, the utility has not received regular fuel supply since 1 August 2008 due to lack of payment by the Palestinian Water Authority in Ramallah. As a result, 250,000 inhabitants are facing severe water shortage. Currently,

approximately 20,000 cubic metres of raw sewage and 40,000 cubic metres of partially treated sewage are being released into the sea. On 25 August, UNRWA donated 20,000 litres of fuel to the CMWU to be distributed to the most urgently needed facilities.

On 23 August, two boats carrying 46 international activists from the “Free Gaza Movement” sailed into Gaza City's main fishing port, after leaving Cyprus the day before. The activists came from 17 countries (including Israel) delivering a symbolic shipment of hearing aids and balloons, and were greeted by thousands of Palestinians. The aim of the visit was to draw international attention to the closure of Gaza and its impact on the people.

PA teachers strike in the Gaza strip

The new school year for PA schools began on 24 August. However, the Teachers’ Union in Ramallah has called upon teachers in Gaza to strike for a period of one week to protest the Hamas de facto government decision to transfer approximately 30% of school head masters, and an unknown number of teachers, to schools in other areas. Approximately 40% of PA teachers adhered to the strike call. In response, the de facto government contracted more than 3000 unemployed teachers, as well as secretaries and school guards, for a period of four months to replace those on strike. The strike has disrupted many schools, and caused confusion among affected students.

Jerusalem school celebration raided and closed by Israeli Authorities

On 22 August, Israeli civil police, Israeli Border Police and IDF stormed St. George’s Boys School in Jerusalem and forced all students and teachers out of the school playground, where they gathered to celebrate the final results of the Tawjihi exam (end of high school exams). Israeli police detained one of the school teachers for three hours until the school was completely vacated, and all decorations dismantled. The Israeli Authorities claimed the celebration was operating under the auspices of the PA. In the past, the Israeli Minister of Internal Security had prohibited all PA activities in East Jerusalem. The celebration was organized by the Youth Union of Jerusalem, and the school confirmed that the celebration had no political affiliation. In the previous two months, there have reportedly been at least four such celebrations evacuated in the East Jerusalem area.

Settler related violence

On 22 August, a group of Israeli settlers entered the Historical Islamic cemetery (Ma’man Allah) in East Jerusalem and damaged over 20 graves, some of which were completely destroyed. According to Al Aqsa Organization (responsible for maintaining the cemetery), Israeli authorities

have prohibited them from conducting any maintenance of the cemetery for the last year. A fence around the cemetery has been erected, with a notice that any organisation attempting maintenance of the cemetery will face legal consequences.

In a separate incident on 22 August, Israeli settlers arrived at the Abu Tor neighborhood in East Jerusalem and attempted a takeover of a strip of Palestinian land. Palestinians from the area blocked the attempt, with no injuries or arrests reported. On the same day, Israeli settlers from the Mattityahu settlement set fire to a Palestinian house in Bil’in village (Ramallah), located in the agricultural area isolated by the Barrier. The house is used by the villagers to guard that area against attacks and theft carried out by settlers.

On 24 August, a group of Israeli settlers from Bracha settlement set fire to seven dunums of land belonging to Palestinian farmers from Burin village in the Nablus governorate. On the same day, another group of Israeli settlers from an outpost near Kedumim settlement threw stones at Palestinian vehicles passing on road 55 within the Qalqiliya governorate. The IDF arrived to the area and evacuated the settlers from the road. No damages were reported.

In the H2 section of Hebron city, in two separate incidents on 24 August, two Palestinian males were assaulted and injured by groups of Israeli settlers. On 25 August, Israeli settlers from the settlement of Susiya (Hebron) brought their sheep to an agricultural area close to the settlement. The sheep grazed and consumed the entire crop of (young) olive trees planted in the land. The owner of the property, a Palestinian farmer from As Samu’ village, contacted the Israeli authorities for help; no response was forthcoming.

Protection of Civilians Weekly Briefing Notes – New Format

As of 20 August 2008, please be informed that data on casualties are available in a searchable format on OCHA’s website (URL: <http://www.ochaopt.org/poc>). Detailed information on house demolitions, settler incidents, curfew, flying checkpoints, search and arrest operations, rockets, mortars and airstrikes, will be gradually made available in the near future.