

Crippling borders

Patients from Gaza who are only approved to use Rafah border crossing are forced to make lengthy trips to Egypt or abroad when they could often be better served if they were allowed to cross via Erez crossing into Israel. When sick people in Gaza are denied permits to cross via Erez, they are unable to reach treatment in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, where high quality, specialized health services are available in less than two hours driving time.



Last month, Israel allowed 746 patients to cross through the Erez crossing pictured here, refusing permits to 19 patients. Another 60 patients had their applications delayed by Israeli authorities, 19 of whom were called in for interrogation, further delaying the application process. Delayed patients often miss their hospital appointments, having to seek new ones and submit new applications, delaying their process further and in some cases endangering their lives. The majority of referred patients needed treatment for heart diseases, cancer, eye conditions, orthopaedics and neurosurgery.

“Many specialized treatments, for example for complex heart surgery and certain types of cancer, are not available in Gaza and patients are therefore referred for treatment to hospitals outside Gaza,” the World Health Organisation says. “But many patients have had their applications for exit permits denied or delayed by the Israeli Authorities and have missed their appointments. Some have died while waiting for referral.”

According to WHO, since 2009, a total of 36 patients from Gaza died before being allowed to access hospitals they had been referred to. In 2010, almost one out of five applications for patients to leave Gaza to go to hospitals in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel and Jordan was denied or delayed by the Israeli authorities.

According to Oxfam partner Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, a young man who had donated bone marrow to his sick sister was detained and arrested at the Erez terminal last February, even though he had prior permission to use the crossing and had accompanied her out for treatment 5 times before. In the same month, a 19-year-old suffering from serious kidney problems was detained and interrogated by Israeli intelligence at Erez. He was reportedly not given any reason for his detainment, and a lawyer from Al Mezan who was called to represent the patient says he was denied access to him. As Erez is generally closed to Palestinians, with few exceptions for humanitarian and medical cases, people in Gaza are also essentially blocked from visiting family or reaching work or education opportunities available to them in the West Bank.

The Erez crossing was the scene of a popular protest last week when thousands of civilians demonstrated there on what Palestinians call ‘Nakba Day’ (Day of the Catastrophe) on May 15th, which commemorates the mass displacement of Palestinians from their homes in Israel. There were reports of 104 civilians injured as they approached the Erez crossing when Israeli tanks reportedly fired 4 shells in their direction. An additional 60 people, including children, women and journalists, were reported to have suffered from tear gas inhalation. Oxfam partner Palestinian Centre for Human rights condemned the Israeli military’s use of “excessive force against peaceful demonstrations organised by Palestinian civilians”.

1. Headlines

- **Mortars/rockets/casualties/incursions:** There were 4 shells and 1 incursion by Israeli forces reported this week. There was 1 incursion by Israeli forces reported the week before.

There was 1 report this week of a Palestinian armed group firing a rocket towards Israel. No rockets were reported to have been fired the week before.

There were reports this week of 1 civilian killed and 106 civilians injured by Israeli military activity. 104 of the injuries were reported as a result of 4 tank shells that were reportedly fired on a large crowd of demonstrators marching towards Erez terminal on May 15th to commemorate what Palestinians call “Nakba Day.”(see photo story above.) Last week, there were no reports of injuries or fatalities to Palestinian civilians resulting from military activity.

No injuries or fatalities were reported amongst Palestinian militants this week or last week.

There were no reports of killings or injuries to Israeli civilians or soldiers this week or the week before.

- **Fishermen:** There was 1 report of an Israeli naval vessel opening fire on Palestinian fishermen this week. No incidents were reported the week before. Since January 2009, Israeli naval forces have restricted the access of Palestinian fishing boats to three nautical miles from the coast; in practice, access is sometimes restricted to as little as one nautical mile, banning access to around 85% of Gaza’s fishing water.
- **Tunnel related fatalities:** There were no reports of tunnel related injuries or fatalities this week. Last week, there were 2 reports of tunnels collapsing beneath the border between Egypt and Gaza, with 2 Palestinian workers reportedly killed.
- **Palestinians in the access restricted area (the so-called “buffer zone”):** There were 4 reports of the Israeli military opening fire in the access restricted area this week, resulting in the death of 1 civilian and injury to 2 others. There were no reports of the Israeli military opening fire in the access restricted area the week before.

Israel first imposed a 150 metre-wide security ‘buffer’ within Gaza’s perimeter in 2000. In certain areas along the northern and eastern perimeters, this official buffer extends up to 500 metres into Gaza. In practice, Israel restricts access to agricultural land up to 1,000-1,500 metres from the fence, which accounts for more than 30% of Gaza’s agricultural land and a significant number of water wells. Most of the Gaza Strip’s animal production is also concentrated in this area,

- **Rafah border crossing:** The Rafah border crossing was open 5 out of 7 days this week, with reports of 1,411 Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt, 1,827 Palestinians leaving Gaza for Egypt, and 420 Palestinians denied entry to Egypt. Last week, the Rafah border crossing was open 5 out of 7 days, with reports of 1,719 Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt, 1,518 Palestinians leaving Gaza for Egypt, and 188 denied entry to Egypt.

Following the announcement on April 27th that Fatah and Hamas had reached an interim agreement for reconciliation, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil al-Arabi announced on April 29th that Egypt would soon be permanently opening the Rafah border crossing. While the

terms of the opening have yet to be announced, the permanent opening of Rafah could allow for freer movement of both goods and people between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

After Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the Palestinian Authority was made responsible for running the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing, with the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) designated to monitor both Palestinian and Egyptian management of the border crossing. However, citing security concerns, Israel ordered the crossing closed in 2006. As the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip officially started in 2007, Egyptian officials kept the Rafah border crossing closed. Since the border crossing has remained closed, only the limited movement of people- foreign passport holders and Palestinians from Gaza who have been cleared by Israeli security- has been allowed.

An estimated 500 people rely on the Rafah border crossing every month to reach scheduled or ongoing medical treatment in Egypt or abroad.

- **Power plant and electricity supply:** There were no reports of additional disruptions to power supplies in Gaza due to blockade related issues or Israeli military activity this week or last week.

Since January 5th, Gaza's power plant has not placed an order for industrial fuel to be transferred from Israel. The fuel for Gaza's power plant is now being supplied through the tunnels underneath the Gaza-Egypt border in the form of Egyptian diesel, at a much lower price than the industrial fuel supplied from Israel.

OCHA estimates that the power plant is buying between 300,000 and 400,000 litres of diesel from the tunnels every day. In addition to what is procured daily from the tunnels, the power plant in Gaza now reportedly has a back up supply of fuel, capable of running the plant at an output of 60 Mw for one month.

- **Cooking gas:** 826 tons of cooking gas reportedly entered Gaza this week via the Kerem Shalom crossing, as compared to 383 tons of cooking gas reported to have entered Gaza the week before. The 826 tons of cooking gas entering Gaza this week represent 47 percent of the 1,750 tons of cooking gas needed weekly. The overall cooking gas shortage has been a main concern for humanitarian agencies since November 2009. Cooking gas cannot safely be transported through the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border as it is highly combustible and requires a special pipeline to transport in bulk. The one tunnel equipped with a cooking gas pipeline was reportedly destroyed in an Israeli airstrike in December 2010. Although this tunnel started functioning again in February, it was damaged soon after and is now used irregularly to transport limited quantities of cooking gas. The Gas Station Owner's Association has indicated that of the 28 gas stations that supply cooking gas, only between 10 and 15 are operational due to the overall shortage. As gas stations are unable to meet the local demand for cooking gas, a rationing system remains in place.
- **Diesel/petrol:** No diesel or benzine was reported to have been delivered to the private sector this week or last week. A near total ban on fuel imports for public sale was put in place by the Government of Israel in October 2008. Around 600,000 litres of diesel and 200,000 litres of petrol for public sale are reported to enter Gaza every day through tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border (OCHA, January 2011).
- **Exports:** No exports were reported to have left Gaza this week. 1 truckload of flowers was reported to have left the week before. Since 2007, and despite Israeli government promises this past December to make additional efforts to increase exports from Gaza, exports have to date been entirely agricultural in nature, contributing to the de-development of Gaza's private

sector. According to UNRWA calculations, before the blockade, 90 percent of garments, 76 percent of furniture products and 20 percent of food products produced in Gaza were marketed to the West Bank and Israel.

The limited exports now leaving Gaza are allowed as a result of an agreement between Israel and the Netherlands permitting limited exports of seasonal agricultural items. The agreement resumed on 28 November 2010.

**Pre-blockade weekly average (490 truckloads) is calculated on the daily average of all truckloads that exited Gaza between January 2005 and mid June 2007, before Israel's imposition of the blockade.*

- **Truckloads of supplies:** The Kerem Shalom crossing was open 5 out of 7 days this week. During the 5 days that Kerem Shalom was open this week, there were reports of 1,198 truckloads of supplies entering Gaza, representing 42 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average. Last week, the Kerem Shalom crossing was open 3 out of 7 days, with a total of 590 truckloads of supplies entering Gaza, representing 21 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average.**

Following the permanent closure of Karni crossing in early March, Kerem Shalom is now the sole permanent crossing through which goods enter Gaza. While Karni could accommodate up to 1,000 trucks a day, Kerem Shalom can only accommodate up to 250 trucks per day. UNRWA has referred to the Kerem Shalom crossing, located in the deep south of Gaza, as an inefficient bottleneck that adds 20 percent in transport and labor costs to the price of humanitarian goods. Kerem Shalom crossing is also not equipped to handle the bulk transfer of large quantities of wheat and animal feed, while Karni is.

Kerem Shalom crossing is also not yet equipped to handle the bulk transfer of construction materials. While the Sufa crossing was initially opened temporarily to allow for the transfer of construction materials (aggregates) to humanitarian agencies involved in building projects, such as UNRWA and UNDP, the Sufa crossing has now remained closed since March 30th. Therefore, only limited amounts of aggregates have entered Gaza through Kerem Shalom, which further delays rehabilitation and building projects, already behind schedule.

While imports remain limited, and raw materials severely restricted, exports remain banned almost entirely except for limited truckloads of strawberries, carnations and cherry tomatoes exported to the Netherlands. As a result, the scale of economic activity remains heavily dependent on local demand in Gaza, which in turn is constrained by the low purchasing power of the population and the relatively small size of the local market. Until crossings are fully opened for export, the impact of the easing of the blockade on unemployment, poverty and food insecurity rates remains limited.

***Pre-blockade weekly average (2,807 truckloads) is calculated based on the monthly average of all truckloads that entered during the first five months of 2007, before Israel's imposition of the blockade.*

2. Humanitarian trucks (week):

Truck originator	Total for week 15- 21 May
Bulk grains (human and animal)	218
UNRWA	291
WFP	22
UNDP	5
ANERA	1
Water Utility	30
Electric Company	3
USAID	4
Islamic Relief	2
Commercial	642
Total trucks for the week	1198
Percentage of pre blockade average (first 5 months of 2007)	42 %

3. Fuel deliveries (week)

		Diesel	Petrol	Cooking Gas
15- 21 May		0	0	826 MT
	Percentage of need *	0		47 %
Previous week		0	0	383 MT

* Fuel association 2006 estimates - ** Imports of diesel and petrol for the general public and public sector in Gaza were exceptionally authorized on 6 occasions since October 2008

Request* of Industrial Fuel to the Power Plant via Israel (week):

Industrial diesel from Israel	Previous week	15- 21 May
0	0	0
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply capacity of 80 MW		0%

Estimates of fuel supplied to the power plant from the tunnels

Diesel from the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border	Previous week	15- 21 May
	2.1- 2.8 million litres**	2.1- 2.8 million litres**
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply of 80 MW	60-80%	60-80%

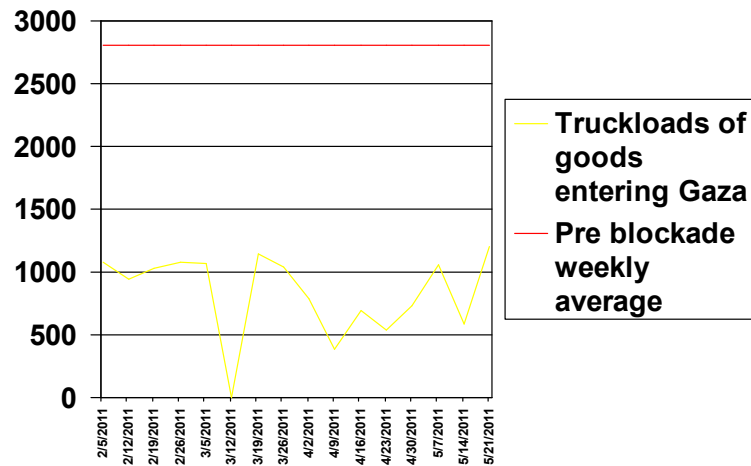
*The power plant has not requested any industrial fuel to be transferred from Israel since January 5, 2011

This update is compiled by **Oxfam International** from the best available information drawn from reliable international sources. Some of the information is preliminary and may be updated in subsequent reports.

****based on OCHA estimates of 300,000- 400,000 litres of diesel per day**

4. Charts

Weekly truckloads of goods



5. Contact information

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