

Last supper

Palestinian Christians from Gaza are seen here lining up at the Erez terminal to travel to Jerusalem for Easter – the most important holy celebration for Christians worldwide at the site where Jesus is believed to have been crucified.

It is only a relative few out of a 3,000-strong Christian community in the blockaded Gaza Strip who are granted limited permits by Israel to travel out. While pilgrims from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem freely to participate in the yearly celebrations, many



Palestinians were prevented from traveling to their sites of worship.

For 15-year-old Madelaine, this will be the last time she will be granted a permit by Israel to get out of Gaza for holidays in the next two decades of her life. Beyond the regular security restrictions that limit Palestinians movement into or out of Gaza, the Israeli government places a blanket ban on all Palestinians from Gaza aged 16 to 35 from traveling for the purpose of worship.

“I can’t describe how it feels, knowing I won’t be seeing Jerusalem and Bethlehem again in 20 years,” Madelaine said as she and her mother waited at the military terminal to be frisked, x-rayed and questioned. “Next year, my mother will be traveling alone, if she manages to get the permit. It’s sad because I already know that this is my last mental picture of the West Bank and Jerusalem.”

“One of our concerns about travelling for Gaza’s Christians during religious holidays is that it is completely banned for 16 to 35-year-olds,” said Sari Bashi, the Executive Director of Oxfam partner Gisha Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement. “This means that many people outside that age bracket will still not leave even if eligible, as they won’t want to celebrate Easter away from their families.”

While permits for Palestinians in Gaza to travel to Jerusalem are difficult to get at all times of the year, Easter coincides with the Jewish Passover holiday when Israel imposes an almost total closure of the occupied territory, effectively extending the blockade of Gaza to the West Bank as well. Palestinian Muslims from Gaza face even stricter restrictions on traveling to their holy sites in Jerusalem, with many finding it easier to travel to Mecca via Rafah than to travel within their own country.

“It’s easier for us to go all the way to Saudi Arabia to perform the Haj than to access Al Aqsa, which is so much closer to us,” said Kareema Ahrawat, a 43-year-old mother of four from Gaza. Ahrawat is one of seven Muslim women from Gaza represented by Gisha in a petition filed in an Israeli court asking to be allowed access to Jerusalem for spiritual reasons.

“Israel’s policies discriminate against Muslims, who are never allowed travel to Jerusalem on their religious festivities,” Gisha’s Sari Bashi said. “These women, some of them quite elderly and posing no security threat, wanted to go on a spiritual retreat to Al Aqsa. They devoted their lives to their families and wanted to do something for themselves. Israel’s control over sites that are holy to the three religions brings with it the obligation to facilitate access to people of all religions, subject to individual policy checks.”

1. Headlines

- **Mortars/rockets/casualties/incursions:** There were reports this week of Israeli forces carrying out 4 incursions and 2 shellings. Last week, there were reports of 2 incursions and 2 airstrikes by the Israeli armed forces.

There were reports this week of Palestinian armed groups firing 1 Qassam rocket, and 2 mortars towards Israel or Israeli forces. Last week, 2 home made rockets (HMR), 2 Grad rockets, 3 Qassam rockets, and 10 mortars were reported to be fired towards Israel or Israeli forces.

1 Palestinian civilian was reported injured this week as a result of Israeli military activity. Last week no civilians were reported injured. No Palestinian militants were reported injured this week, whereas last week 1 Hamas officer was reported to have died as a result of injuries sustained the week before.

A 16 year-old Israeli boy reportedly injured April 7th when a rocket struck the bus he was travelling on in the Sdot Negev Regional Council was reported to have died as a result of his injuries this week. There were no reports of casualties or injuries to Israeli civilians or soldiers the week before.

- **Fishermen:** There were no reports of Israeli naval vessels opening fire on Palestinian fishermen this week, as compared to 3 incidents 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 tunnel related injuries or fatalities reported this week. Last week, there was 1 report of a tunnel collapsing beneath the border between Gaza and Egypt, resulting in the death of 4 Palestinian workers.
- **Palestinians in the access restricted area (the so-called "buffer zone"):** There were 3 reports this week of the Israeli military opening fire in the access restricted area, resulting in injury to 1 Palestinian farmer. Last week, there was 1 report of the Israeli military opening fire on a group of farmers, with no injuries reported.

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 1,412 Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt, 1,573 Palestinians leaving Gaza for Egypt, and 268 Palestinians denied entry to Egypt. Last week, the Rafah border crossing was also open 5 out of 7 days, with reports of 1,196 Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt, 1,356 Palestinians leaving Gaza for Egypt, and 227 denied entry to Egypt.

Rafah border crossing remains the primary gateway to the outside world for the majority of Palestinians in Gaza, most of whom are not allowed to use Erez border crossing. While Erez

border crossing remains open, very few Palestinians from Gaza are permitted to cross from Erez into Israel for medical treatment or emergencies. An estimated 500 people instead 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 was a report this week of damage caused to a Switch Station in the Karni Industrial Zone as a result of an Israeli military incursion. According to the report, the damage to the Switch Station resulted in interruption to sanitation, electricity, and water supplies. No reports of additional disruptions to power supplies due to blockade related issues or Israeli military activity were reported 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:** 497 tons of cooking gas reportedly entered Gaza this week via the Kerem Shalom crossing, as compared to 607 tons of cooking gas reported to have entered Gaza the week before. The 497 tons of cooking gas entering Gaza this week represent 28 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.
- **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:** For the third week in a row, 1 truckload of flowers was reported to have left Gaza this week, representing .002 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average of all exports leaving Gaza.*

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.

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.

**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:** Due to the Passover holiday, the Kerem Shalom crossing was only open 3 out of 7 days this week. During the three days that Kerem Shalom was open this week, there were reports of 540 truckloads of supplies entering Gaza, representing 19 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average. Last week, the Kerem Shalom crossing was also only open 3 out of 7 days due to security concerns, with a total of 689 truckloads of supplies entering Gaza, representing 25 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.

The Israeli authorities have recently installed a conveyor belt at Kerem Shalom crossing to handle the bulk transfer of wheat and animal grain. While the belt is said to have the capacity to transfer 50 truckloads of bulk wheat and animal grains a day, the maximum amount the belt was able to handle in a day remained limited to 29 truckloads this week. This belt is also not yet equipped to handle the bulk transfer of construction materials. The Sufa crossing has therefore been opened temporarily to allow for the transfer of construction materials (aggregates) to humanitarian agencies involved in building projects, such as UNRWA and UNDP. However, the Sufa crossing has now remained closed since March 30th. Therefore, no aggregates entered Gaza via the Sufa crossing this week, which further delays rehabilitation and building projects, already behind schedule. Last week, 10,953 MT of aggregates entered Gaza via Sufa crossing.

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 17 April- 23 April
Bulk grains (human and animal)	118
UNRWA	59
Gaza institutions	9
WFP	2
Commercial	352
Total trucks for the week	540

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Percentage of pre blockade average (first 5 months of 2007)	19 %
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3. Fuel deliveries (week)

		Diesel	Petrol	Cooking Gas
17 April- 23 April		0	0	497 MT
	Percentage of need *	0		28 %
Previous week		0	0	607 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	17 April- 23 April
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	17 April- 23 April
	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

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

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