

## State of the Gaza Strip's border crossings 01– 31 May 2016

This report documents the impact of the ongoing Israel-imposed siege on Palestinian civilians, which affects their economic and social conditions. This report also reveals the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Thus, this report exposes the real conditions of the Gaza Strip's population and the Israeli closure imposed on all Gaza's crossings for 9 years. It refutes Israel's claims that it has eased the closure of the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, the report highlights that the continuing Israeli measures which are aimed to institutionalize of the closure and make the illegal restrictions imposed on the movement of persons and goods acceptable at the international level although they violate the international law, including the international humanitarian and human rights laws. The report shows that the Israeli closure is main obstacle for any development or reconstruction process in the Gaza Strip and the main cause of the humanitarian crisis and deterioration on the economic and social levels. The following are the most significant developments relevant to Gaza's border crossings during the reporting period 01– 31 June 2016:

### **Movement of commodities**

During the reporting period, no remarkable change was witnessed on the movement of goods. An almost complete ban continued on the exportation of goods to the West Bank, Israel and abroad, including industrial and agricultural goods. Restrictions were also imposed on the entry of a number of basic goods, especially materials needed for Gaza reconstruction, infrastructure projects and materials for manufacturing and production. However, Israeli forces allowed the entry of certain types of goods, the majority of which were foodstuffs and consumables, under complicated procedures, including the frequent closure of the only commercial crossing in the Gaza Strip, Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom); the crossing was closed for 10 days (32.2%). As a result:

- During the last week of May, Israeli forces allowed the entry of construction materials for the Strip according to the "UN Mechanism to Reconstruct Gaza" after they prevented the entry of construction materials for the private sector in Gaza city for 40 days. As a result, hundreds of private under-construction housing projects stopped in addition to other Reconstruction projects carried out by the private sector.
- In a limited exception, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of very limited quantities of construction materials for the intentional organizations and Qatari projects. According to the National Ministry of Economy, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 37,520 tons of cement, 5,040 tons of construction steel and 227,600 tons of aggregate (2.5%, 1% and 7.5% of the total construction materials needed for the Gaza Reconstruction.)

- During the reporting period, Israeli forces prevented the entry of cooking gas for 10 days. During the days the crossing was open, Israeli forces allowed the entry of only 5,697 tons of cooking gas; a daily average of 183.7 tons. This amount represents 61.2% of the actual daily needs of the population, which is 350 tons according to General Petroleum Corporation in Gaza (EGPC).
- Israeli forces continued to impose an almost complete ban on the Gaza Strip's exports to the West Bank, Israel and abroad, but exceptionally allowed the exportation of 193 truckloads to the West Bank; 133 truckloads of which were agricultural products, 3 truckloads of fish, 4 truckloads of furniture, 2 truckloads of clothes, 3 truckloads of scrap and a truckload of stationary. The rate of the Gaza Strip exports for April constitutes 2.9% of the exports before June 2007.

### **Movement of persons**

During the reporting period, Israeli forces imposed restrictions on the movement of Gaza population at Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing, the only crossing for the movement of persons to the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and/or Israel. As a result, 2 million people were denied their right to travel to hospitals, universities, holy places and family visitation in the West Bank. Besides, they were prevented from travelling abroad. However, Israeli forces allowed limited categories to travel via Beit Hanoun crossing: patients suffering from serious diseases; businesspeople; family members of prisoners in the Israeli jails; workers of international humanitarian organizations; persons travelling via al-Karama crossing on the Jordanian border; some individuals for personal needs; and elderly people to perform prayers in al-Aqsa Mosque. These categories travel through the crossing under very complicated procedures. PCHR documented the following in this regard:

- During the reporting period, Israel closed Beit Hanoun crossing before patients for 10 days (5 days of which were partially open only to urgent cases). However, during the rest of the days it was open, Israel allowed the travel of 1,551 patients and 1,403 persons accompanying them. Israeli forces obstructed the travel of dozens of other patients referred for medical treatment in the Israeli and/or West Bank hospitals under different pretexts such as prevention due to security reasons, changing the companions, being forced to wait for a new appointment or awaiting an Israeli reply following security interviews.
- In May, Israeli forces arrested a patient while crossing the Beit Hanoun "Erez" crossing when he was on his way back along with his mother from "Barzilai" Hospital where he received medical treatment. It should be noted that the patient is still under arrest.
- In May, Israeli authorities allowed 312 family members of prisoners divided into 5 groups to visit 177 of their relatives in Israeli prisons. During the reporting period, the number of visits was limited compared to the number allowed under the agreement reached between the detainees and Israeli forces in May 2012. According to the agreement, each prisoner

has the right to two family visits a month. The number of visits should reach 760 monthly (23.8%), while the number of visitor should reach 1,480 (21%).

- During the reporting period, Israeli forces allowed 8,211 businesspeople, 1,431 people with special needs, 761 workers of international humanitarian organizations and 207 persons travelling via al-Karama crossing. It should be noted that these estimations do not emphasize the number of persons allowed to travel which is much less than times of travel. Those who have permits are allowed to travel more than one time a month. They also allowed 1,307 persons to visit holy sites in the West Bank, including 1,114 elderly people to cross BeitHanoun (Erez) crossing and perform prayers in al-Aqsa Mosque and 193 Christian citizens under complicated security measures and created obstacles in front of them for many days before allowing them to enter the Strip.
- During the reporting period, Rafah International Crossing Point was closed for 31 days. This unveiled the reality of the situation in the Gaza Strip under the policy of collective punishment and the Israeli closure imposed over all border crossings, especially Beit Hanoun crossing. The number of Palestinians, who registered for traveling via the crossing and are waiting for their turn to travel, was over 30,000 including 5,000 patients, university students and holders of residence visas in countries abroad, according to the Ministry of Interior in Gaza.

## **Commercial crossings During May**

### **Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) Crossing**

In light of their plan to strangulate the Gaza Strip, Israeli authorities closed all commercial crossings in addition to allowing the use of the only commercial crossing in the Gaza Strip, Karm Abu Salem. As a result, the suffering of the Gaza population aggravated and created more obstacles for the limited movement of imports and exports. In addition, the expenses of transportation increased causing a rise in the prices of imports. It was also an extra financial burden for the Gaza exporters because of the location of the crossing in the far southeast of the Gaza Strip<sup>1</sup> During the reporting period, Israel closed Karm Abu Salem crossing, for 10 days (32.2% of the total period). On the days it was open, Israel allowed the entry of 14,464 truckloads, an average of 466 truckloads daily<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> -The Israeli authorities have tightened the closure over the Gaza Strip to make Karm Abu Salem crossing the main and only crossing in the Gaza Strip in spite of its low operational capacity. Moreover, the Israeli authorities closed Sofa crossing, which was designated to the entry of construction materials in November 2008 and transferred the limited quantities of construction materials to be entered into Gaza also via Karm Abu Salem crossing. On 04 January 2010, the Israeli authorities closed Nahal Oz crossing, which was designated for the entry of fuel into Gaza, and transferred that fuel to be entered via Karm Abu Salem crossing as well. On 02 March 2011, the Israeli authorities closed al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, which was the largest and best equipped commercial crossing. 75% of the Gaza Strip supplies used to enter via Karni crossing that had the capacity of around 400 truckloads daily.

<sup>2</sup> -According to the Ministry of National Economy in Gaza.

## • Exports

Israeli forces continued to impose a ban on the Gaza Strip exports to the West Bank, Israel and abroad with exception of limited quantities. During the reporting period, 193 truckloads were allowed for exportation to the West Bank, including 133 truckloads of agricultural products (strawberries, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, cabbages, dates, cauliflowers, lemons, oranges, sweet and hot peppers, garlics, eggplants, squashes and mints), 3 truckloads of fish, 4 truckloads of furniture, 2 truckloads of clothes, 3 truckloads of scrap and a truckload of stationary. The rate of the Gaza Strip exports for April constitutes 2.9% of the exports before June 2007.

## • Imports

### - Construction Materials

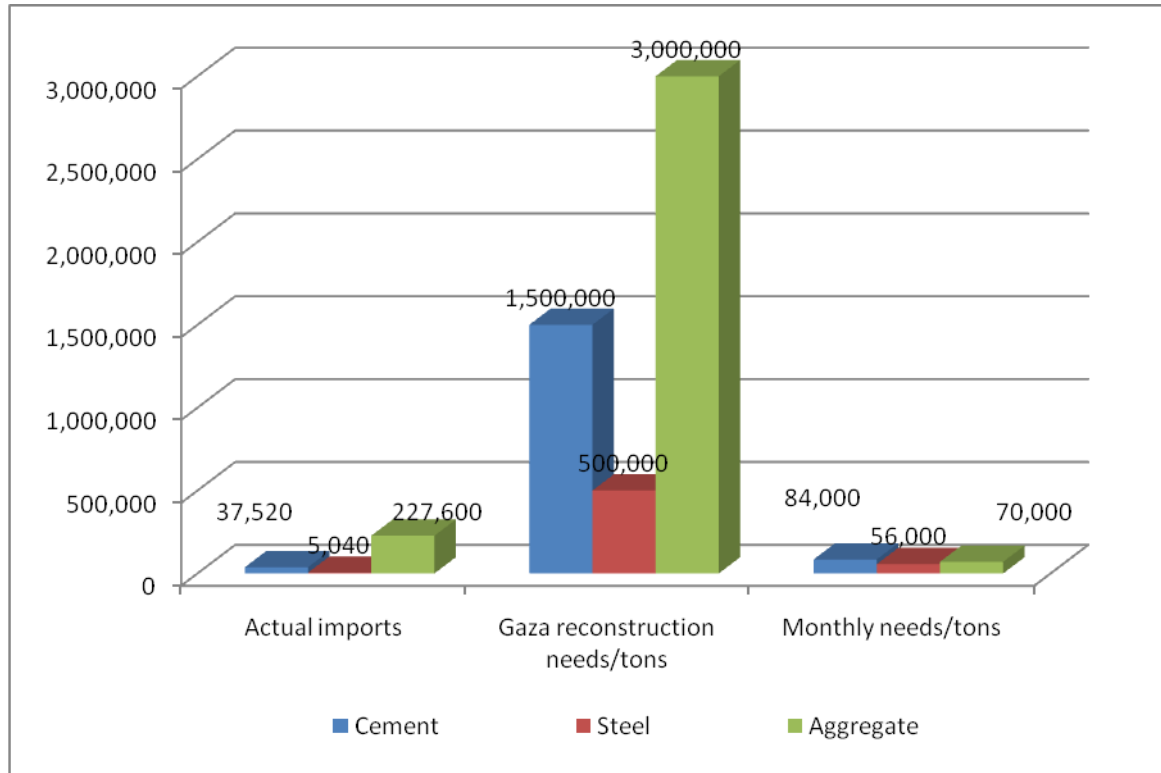
Israeli forces prevented the entry of construction materials for the private sector in Gaza city. As a result, hundreds of private under-construction housing projects stopped in addition to other Reconstruction projects carried out by the private sector for the same reason. Stopping construction works in these projects will aggravate the suffering of civilians who are desperate need of building their houses and facilities. This will also inflict heavy losses on the private sector's companies due to stoppage of work and increase the already high unemployment and poverty rates among the workers and their families.

In a limited exception, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of very limited quantities of construction materials for the intentional organizations and Qatari projects. According to the National Ministry of Economy, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 37,520 tons of cement, 5,040 tons of construction steel and 227,600 tons of aggregate ( 2.5%, 1% and 7.5% of the total construction materials needed for the Gaza Reconstruction.)

**Table comparing the quantities of construction materials allowed into the Gaza Strip in May 2016, the actual needs and the Gaza Reconstruction Needs**

Description	Actual imports	Gaza reconstruction needs/tons	Percentage	Monthly needs/tons	Percentage
Cement	37,520	1,500,000	2.5%	84,000	44.6%
Steel	5,040	500,000	1%	56,000	9%
Aggregate	227,600	3,000,000	7.5%	70,000	325.1%

Source: Ministry of National Economy in the Gaza Strip.



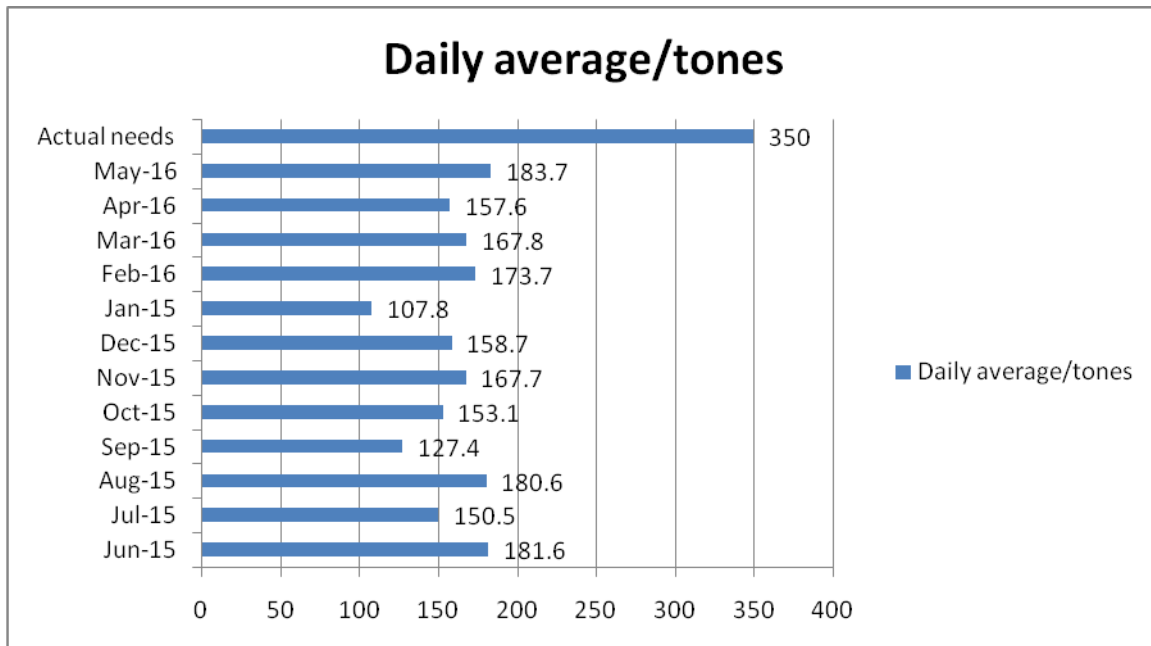
- **Fuel**

During the reporting period, Israel allowed the entry of 13,336,000 liters of diesel; 5,200,000 liters of benzene and 5,461,000 liters of industrial fuel to operate the power plant in the Gaza Strip. These limited quantities do not meet the needs of the Gaza Strip, and what deteriorates the conditions more is lack of fuel reserves in the petrol station in the Gaza Strip. During the reporting period, Israeli forces prevented the entry of cooking gas for 10 days. During the days the crossing was open, Israeli forces allowed the entry of only 5,697 tons of cooking gas; a daily average of 183,7 tons. This amount represents 61.2% of the actual daily needs of the population, which is 350 tons according to General Petroleum Corporation in Gaza (EGPC).

**Quantities of gas allowed during the last year compared with the actual needs of the population of the Gaza Strip**

Month	Daily average/tones	Percentage of needs met
June 2015	181.6	51.8%
July 2015	150.5	43%
August 2015	180.6	51.6%
September 2015	127.4	36.4%
October 2015	153.1	43.7%
November 2015	167.7	47.9%
December 2015	158.7	45.3%
January 2015	107.8	35.9%
February 2016	173.7	49.6%
March 2016	167.8	47.9%
April 2016	157.6	45%
May 2016	183.7	61.2%
Actual needs	350	100%

Source: EGPC.



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## **Crossings Designated to the Movement of Persons**

- **Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing**

Israel has closed the Beit Hanoun crossing to the movement of Palestinian civilians, with the exception of limited categories: patients suffering from serious illnesses; Arabs holding Israeli IDs; international journalists; workers of international humanitarian organizations; business people; and persons travelling via al-Karama crossing. These categories are allowed to travel through the crossing under very complicated procedures. According to the Civil Liaison Office at the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Israel closed the crossing completely for 10 days (during 5 days of which, only urgent cases were allowed to travel via the crossing) during the reporting period.

### **Patients**

During the reported period (May), Israel closed Beit Hanoun crossing for patients for 10 days (5 days of which cases open to patients). During days it was open, Israel allowed the travel of 1,553 patients and 1,403 companions. Israeli forces obstructed the travel of dozens of other patients under various pretexts, including security reasons, changing the companions, waiting for a new appointment and awaiting an Israeli reply following security interviews.

### **A Patient was arrested at Beit Hanoun crossing (Erez)**

At approximately 13:00 on Wednesday, 04 May 2016, Israeli soldiers stationed at Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing in the northern Gaza Strip arrested Mohammed ‘Awadallah ‘Omer al-Buheisi (23) from Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip when he was with his mother on his way back from his first medical revision in “Birzilay” Hospital in Israel. Al-Buhaisi sustains a cut-nerve in his right leg due to being shot by Israeli forces while participating in demonstrations in solidarity with Jerusalem in the eastern side of al-Bureij on 06 November 2015. His wounds were classified as serious, and he was transferred to the aforementioned hospital after three days from his injury. According to his brother, ‘Amr (24), he talked with his brother, Mohammed, after the Israeli Intelligence officer allowed him. He told ‘Amr that he was under arrest at the crossing and his phone and mother’s phone were confiscated. Mohammed added that Israeli forces were questioning him about taking photos of natural views on his way to the hospital while his mother was waiting for him in the hall.

## Prisoners' Visits

In May, Israeli authorities allowed 312 family members of prisoners divided into 5 groups to visit 177 of their relatives in Israeli prisons.

### Family visits to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons in April 2016

Day	Number of visitors	Number of children	Number of visited prisoners	Prison
02 May 2016	81	21	64	Nafha prison
09 May 2016	71	31	43	Ramon prison
16 May 2016	76	8	42	Nafha prison
23 May 2016	42	11	23	Nafha prison
30 May 2016	42	11	23	Nafha prison

### Source: Media statements by the Spokesperson of the International Red Cross

The above table shows that the number of visitors is limited compared to the number of visits allowed under the prisoners' deal. According to the agreement, each prisoner has the right to two family visits a month. With 380 prisoners in Israeli prisons, the number of visits should reach 760 monthly. However, the Israeli forces only allowed 177 visits (23.8%) in May. The same applies to the number of family members who are allowed to visit their relatives; the number of these members mounted to 312, in May whereas, the number should include 1,480 persons in case each prisoner is visited by 2 members of his family twice a month (21%).

The families were subjected to arbitrary practices, obstacles and immoral and degrading treatment. They also suffered from the Israeli provocative measures and the continuous threats to cancel their visits in the future if they did not obey Israeli orders.

It should be noted that the Israeli authorities determine a visitor who is allowed to visit a prisoner, and those authorized visitors are limited to the prisoners' father, mother or wife and one or two of them only. Furthermore, in case either one is incapable of visiting (due to sickness, old age or death), the Israeli authorities do not allow the change of the visitors' names; thus, the prisoner loses the right to his visit. Moreover, Israeli authorities continue to deprive children from visiting their fathers in Israeli prisons. Prisoners' families are not allowed to bring with them personal items, including clothes and food.

- **Other categories**

During the reporting period, Israel allowed the entry of 8,211 traders, 1,431 persons for personal needs, 761 workers of international organizations into the Gaza Strip, 207 travelers via al-Karama (Allenby) crossing, 1,307 persons to visit holy places in the West Bank, 1,114



elderly people of elderly people to perform prayers in al-Aqsa mosque and 193 Christian civilians, under some complicated security conditions. The procedures for entering the Gaza Strip are complicated, resulting in prolonged waiting periods, sometimes up to several days. It should be mentioned that these statistics do not represent the number of persons allowed to enter as the permit holders are far less than the passing times.

### **Rafah International Crossing Point**

- During the reporting period, Rafah International Crossing Point was closed during May for 31 days. This unveiled the reality of the situation in the Gaza Strip under the policy of collective punishment and the Israeli closure imposed over all border crossings, especially Beit Hanoun crossing. The number of Palestinians, who registered for traveling via the crossing and are waiting for their turn to travel, was over 30,000, including 5,000 patients, in addition to thousands of Palestinians who want to travel but did not registered for traveling according to the Ministry of Interior in Gaza.

## Recommendations

PCHR calls upon the international community, particularly the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, to:

- Exert effective pressure on Israel to compel it to open all of Gaza's crossings, both those used for commercial purposes and those used for the movement of civilians, to allow the civilian population of the Gaza Strip to reconstruct civilian property destroyed during Israel's latest offensive on Gaza and to enable them to enjoy their fundamental civil and political rights, as well as their economic, social and cultural rights;
- Promptly and urgently intervene to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to put an end to the deterioration of living conditions across the Gaza Strip;
- Compel Israel to put an end to measures of collective punishment against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, including the tightening of the closure of Gaza's border crossings;
- Cancel the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, as it failed to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, especially owners of houses and property that were completely destroyed, who have not received any compensations or construction materials to rebuild their destroyed houses and property;
- Remind the State of Israel, the Occupying Power, of its obligations towards the civilians of the Gaza Strip, under Article 55 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates that: "To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate. The Occupying Power may not requisition foodstuffs, articles or medical supplies available in the occupied territory, and then only if the requirements of the civilian population have been taken into account." The High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must fulfill their obligation under Article 1 of the Convention by ensuring the implementation of the Convention's provisions by the State of Israel, in order to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip; and
- Call on the Egyptian authorities to take more measures to facilitate movement at the Rafah International Crossing Point, in particular by increasing the number of travelers and opening hours, and to find a solution for the thousands of Palestinians wishing to travel via the crossing, particularly during the summer when the number of travellers doubles.
- Reminds that the Israeli-imposed closure on the Gaza Strip is one of the gravest violations and collective punishments committed by Israeli forces against Palestinians in the Israeli occupation history. This inhumane and illegal closure constitutes a man-made disaster and is a part of an ongoing war crime against the Palestinian civilians.