

State of the Gaza Strip's border crossings 01– 31 December 2015

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 December 2015:

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 9 days (29%). As a result:

- Israeli forces prevented the entry of cooking gas for 9 days. During the days the crossing was open, Israeli forces allowed the entry of only 4,922 tons of cooking gas; a daily average of 158.7 tons. This amount represents 45.3% 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 190 truckloads to the West Bank; 145 truckloads of agricultural products (tomatoes, cucumbers, hot peppers, sweet peppers, garlic, eggplants, summer squash and mint), 3 truckloads of stationery, 3 truckloads of spices and 3 truckloads of fish; a truckload of furniture; 3 truckloads of cloths; and 32 truckloads of scraps. The rate of the Gaza Strip exports for December constitutes 4.5% of the exports before June 2007.

Movement of persons

During the reporting period, Israeli forces imposed restrictions on the movement of Gaza population at BeitHanoun (Erez) crossing, the only crossing for the movement of persons to the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and/or Israel. As a result, 1.8 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; Arabs holding Israeli ID's; international journalists; workers of international humanitarian organizations; businesspeople; persons travelling via al-Karama crossing on the Jordanian border; 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 for patients for 8 days. However, during the days it was open, Israel allowed the travel of 1,097 patients permitted to get some medical treatment at the Israeli hospitals or at hospitals in the West Bank, and 1,009 persons accompanying them. Israeli forces obstructed the travel of dozens of other patients 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 December, Israeli authorities allowed 261 family members of prisoners divided into 4 groups to visit 187 of their relatives in Israeli prisons. The number of visits during the reporting period (December) 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. With 380 prisoners in Israeli prisons, the number of visits should reach 760 monthly (24.6%), while the number of visitor should reach 1,480 (19.2%).
- During the reporting period, Rafah International Crossing Point was closed for 29 days as a result of the Egyptian internal situation and the deteriorating security situation in north Sinai .Exceptionally, the crossing point was opened for only 2 days on varying periods. During the days it was open, 1526 Palestinians travelled abroad. 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 BeitHanoun crossing. The number of Palestinians, who registered for traveling via the crossing and are waiting for their turn to travel, was over 25,000, including hundreds of patients, university students and holders of residence visas in countries abroad, according to the Ministry of Interior in Gaza.

Commercial crossings

Commercial crossings were established to provide the Gaza Strip with manufactured or raw materials and to export the products of the Gaza Strip to Israel, the West Bank or abroad. The closure of al-Mentar (Karni) crossing, the demolition of its facilities in early January 2012 and using Karm Abu Salem instead 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.¹

Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) Crossing

During the reporting period, Israel closed Karm Abu Salem, which is the sole commercial crossing, for 9 days (29% of the total period). On the days it was open, Israel allowed the entry of 18,485 truckloads, an average of 596 truckloads daily.

- **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, 190 truckloads were allowed for exportation to the West Bank, including 145 truckloads of agricultural products (tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet and hot peppers, garlic, eggplants, summer squash and mints), 3 truckloads of stationery, 3 truckloads of spices and 3 truckloads of fish; a truckload of furniture; 3 truckloads of cloths; and 32 truckloads of scraps. The rate of the Gaza Strip exports for December constitutes 4.5% of the exports before June 2007.

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¹The 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.

- **Imports**

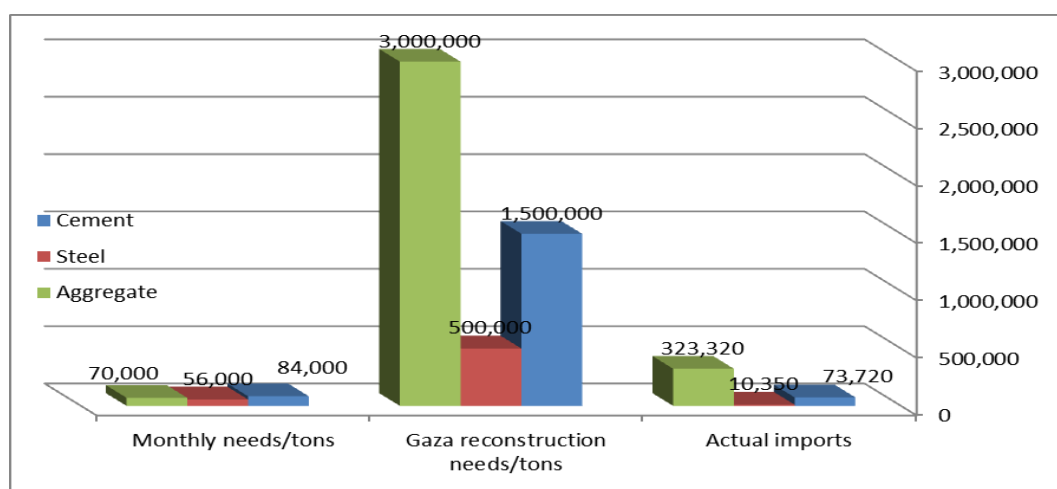
- **Construction Materials**

During the reporting period, construction materials allowed into the Gaza Strip were limited and do not meet the minimal level of the Gaza Strip actual needs. Israel allowed 76,720 tons of cement and 10,350 tons of construction steel according to the Ministry of National Economy in Gaza. These quantities do not respectively exceed 87.8% and 18.4% of Gaza monthly needs in normal conditions and do not respectively exceed 4.9% and 2% of needs for Gaza reconstruction. The majority of these quantities were entered for international organizations or Palestinian companies under strict monitoring mechanism under which Gaza reconstruction can be impossible. This data proves that UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has failed to fulfill the minimum level of Gaza reconstruction needs as one year has passed since this Mechanism entered into force.

Table comparing the quantities of construction materials allowed into the Gaza Strip in December 2015, the actual needs and the Gaza Reconstruction Needs

Description	Actual imports	Gaza reconstruction needs/tons	Percentage	Monthly needs/tons	Percentage
Cement	73,720	1,500,000	4.9%	84,000	87.8%
Steel	10,350	500,000	2 %	56,000	18.4%
Aggregate	323,320	3,000,000	10.7%	70,000	461%

Source: Ministry of National Economy in the Gaza Strip.



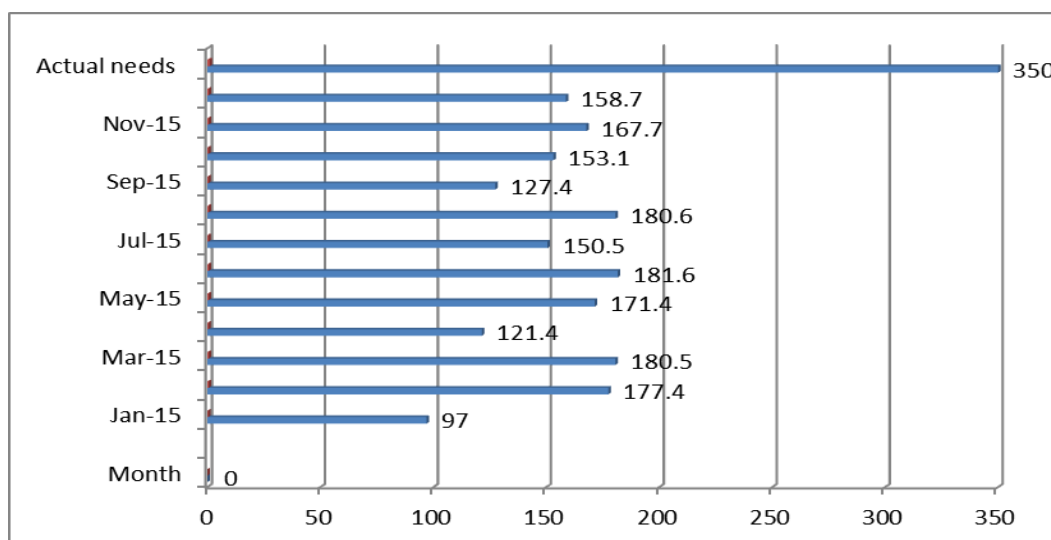
- **Fuel**

The Gaza Strip witnessed severe shortage of all types of fuel due to the frequent closure of the Karm Abu Salem crossing. As a result, Diesel and Benzene ran out from all the petrol stations in the Gaza Strip for few days. This negatively affected the transportation in Gaza as hundreds of vehicles stopped, and movement of transportation disordered, especially between the cities. During the reporting period, Israel allowed the entry of 12,896,000 liters of diesel; 3,436,000 liters of benzene and 8,224,000 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 9 days. During the days the crossing was open, Israeli forces allowed the entry of only 4,922 tons of cooking gas; a daily average of 158.7 tons. This amount represents 45.3% of the actual daily needs of the population, which is 350 tons according to General Petroleum Corporation in Gaza (EGPC).

Quantities of gas allowed since the beginning of 2015 compared with the actual needs of the population of the Gaza Strip

Month	Daily average/tones	Percentage of needs met
January 2015	97	27.7%
February 2015	177.4	50.7%
March 2015	180.5	51.7%
April 2015	121.4	34.7%
May 2015	171.4	48.9%
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%
Actual needs	350	100%

Source: EGPC.



Crossings Designated to the Movement of Persons

- **BeitHanoun (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 in the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Israel closed the crossing completely for 8 days (during 4 days of which, only urgent cases were allowed to travel via the crossing) during the reporting period.

Patients

Israel closed BeitHanoun crossing for patients for 8 days. During days it was open, Israel allowed the travel of 1,097 patients and 1,009 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.

Prisoners' Visits

In December, Israeli authorities allowed 261 family members of prisoners divided into 4 groups to visit 187 of their relatives in Israeli prisons.

Family visits to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons in December 2015

Day	Number of visitors	Number of children	Number of visited prisoners	Prison
07 December 2015	75	20	40	Negev prison
14 December 2015	97	31	47	Ramon prison
21 December 2015	57	16	47	Nafha prison
28 December 2015	32	3	23	Eshel 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 187 visits(24.6%) in December. The same applies to the number of family members who are allowed to visit their relatives; the number of these members mounted to 285, in December whereas, the number should include 1,480 persons in case each prisoner is visited by 2 members of his family twice a month (19.2%).

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 7,826 traders, 2,192 persons for personal needs, 811 workers of international organizations into the Gaza Strip, 750 of elderly people to perform prayers in al-Aqsa mosque and 286 travelers via al-Karama (Allenby) crossing under some complicated security conditions. The procedures for entering the Gaza Strip are complicated, resulting in prolonged waiting periods, sometimes up to several days.

Rafah International Crossing Point

- During the reporting period, Rafah International Crossing Point was closed for 29 days as a result of the Egyptian internal situation and the deteriorating security situation in north Sinai. Exceptionally, the crossing point was opened for only 2 days on varying periods. During the days it was open, 1526 Palestinians travelled abroad. 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 BeitHanoun crossing. The number of Palestinians, who registered for traveling via the crossing and are waiting for their turn to travel, was over 25,000, including hundreds of patients, university students and holders of residence visas in countries abroad, according to the Ministry of Interior in Gaza.
- The Palestinian Ministry of Interior in the Gaza Strip announced that the Egyptian authorities opened Rafah International Crossing Point during 2015 for only 21 days, while it was closed for 343 days. It should be mentioned that this is considered the worst statistic the Crossing has witnessed since 2009. According to this statistic, 21,295 persons were able to travel via Rafah International Crossing Point in 2015.

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.