

State of the Gaza Strip's border crossings 01– 31 March 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 March 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 9 days (29%). As a result:

- The Gaza Strip witnessed a significant rise in prices of all construction materials and lack of some of them in the markets due to restrictions imposed on their entry on the one hand and the failure of the UN Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism on the other hand. During the reporting period, Israeli forces allowed the entry of limited quantities of construction materials. They allowed 56,560 tons of cement; tons of 279,430 aggregates; and 14,550 tons of construction steel. These quantities do not respectively exceed 3.7%, 9.3% and 2.9 % of needs for Gaza reconstruction.
- In a later step, 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.

- 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 5,203 tons of cooking gas; a daily average of 167.8 tons. This amount represents 47.9% 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 100 truckloads to the West Bank; 87 truckloads of which were agricultural products (strawberries, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, cabbages, dates, cauliflower, lemons, oranges, hot peppers, sweet peppers, garlicks, eggplants, squashes and mint), a truckload of fish, 4 truckloads of furniture, 3 truckloads of clothes and 5 truckloads of scrap. The rate of the Gaza Strip exports for March constitutes 2.2% 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 8 days (4 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 1,440 and 1,330 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 March, Israeli forces arrested 3 patients while crossing Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing. Those patients suffer from serious diseases and could not find the necessary treatment in the Gaza Strip hospitals.

- In March, Israeli authorities allowed 244 family members of prisoners divided into 4 groups to visit 135 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 (17.7%), while the number of visitor should reach 1,480 (16.4%).
- During the reporting period, Israeli forces allowed 8,477 businesspeople, 2,070 people with special needs, 828 workers of international humanitarian organizations and 204 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 595 elderly people to cross BeitHanoun (Erez) crossing and perform prayers in al-Aqsa Mosque and 415 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 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 During March

Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) Crossing

In light of their plan to strangle 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 Strip¹ During the reporting period, Israel closed Karm Abu Salem crossing, for

¹ -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

9days (29% of the total period). On the days it was open, Israel allowed the entry of 17,241 truckloads, an average of 556 truckloads daily².

- **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, 100 truckloads were allowed for exportation to the West Bank, including 87 truckloads of agricultural products (strawberries, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, cabbages, dates, cauliflowers, lemons, oranges, sweet and hot peppers, garlicks, eggplants, squashes and mints), a truckload of fish, 4 truckloads of furniture, 3 truckloads of clothes and 5 truckloads of scrap. The rate of the Gaza Strip exports for March constitutes 2.2% of the exports before June 2007.

- **Imports**

- **Construction Materials**

During the reporting period, construction materials, which were allowed to enter into the Gaza Strip according to the UN's Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and before the ban imposed on the materials for private sector, international organizations and Qatari projects, were limited and did not meet the minimal level of the Gaza Strip actual needs. Israel allowed 56,560 tons of cement, 14,550 tons of construction steel and 279,430 tons of aggregate according to the Ministry of National Economy in Gaza. These quantities do not respectively exceed 3.7%, 2.9 % and 9.3% 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.

In a later step, Israeli forces prevented the entry of construction materials for the private sector in Gaza city.³ 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

commercial crossing. 75% of the Gaza Strip supplies used to enter via Karni crossing that had the capacity of around 400 truckloads daily.

² -According to the Ministry of National Economy in Gaza.

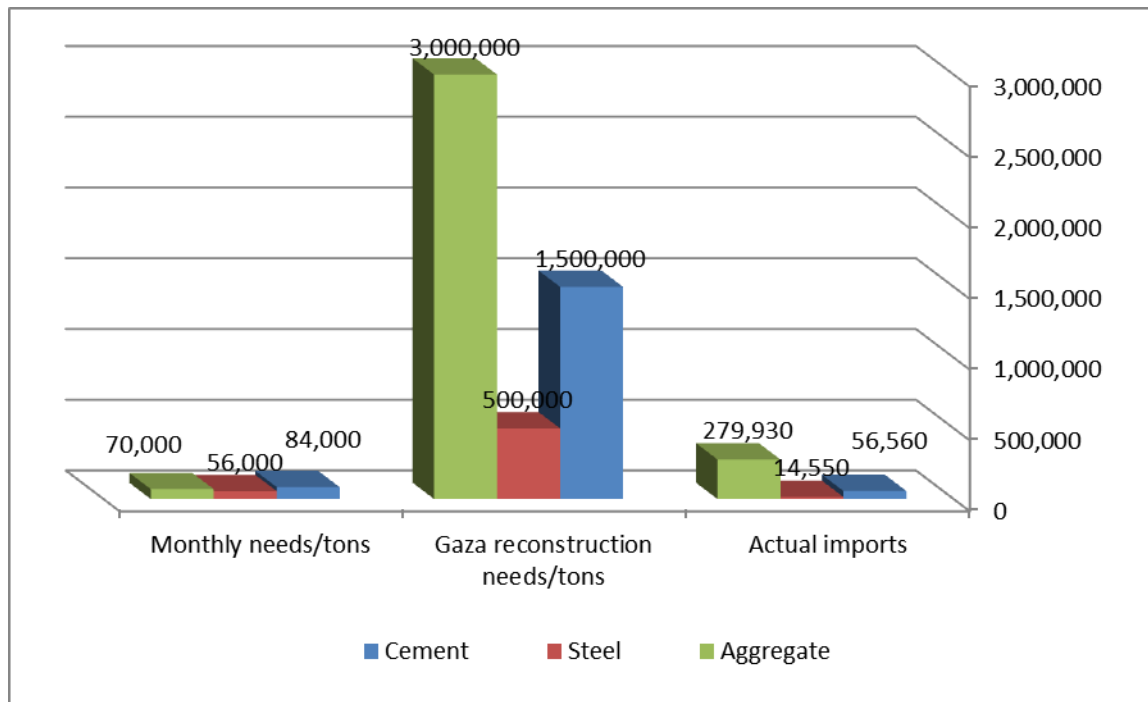
³ On 03 April 2016, Israeli authorities officially banned the entry of construction materials for the private sector in Gaza city.

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.

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

Description	Actual imports	Gaza reconstruction needs/tons	Percentage	Monthly needs/tons	Percentage
Cement	56,560	1,500,000	3.7%	84,000	67.3%
Steel	14,550	500,000	2.9%	56,000	25.9%
Aggregate	279,930	3,000,000	9.3%	70,000	39.9%

Source: Ministry of National Economy in the Gaza Strip.



- Fuel**

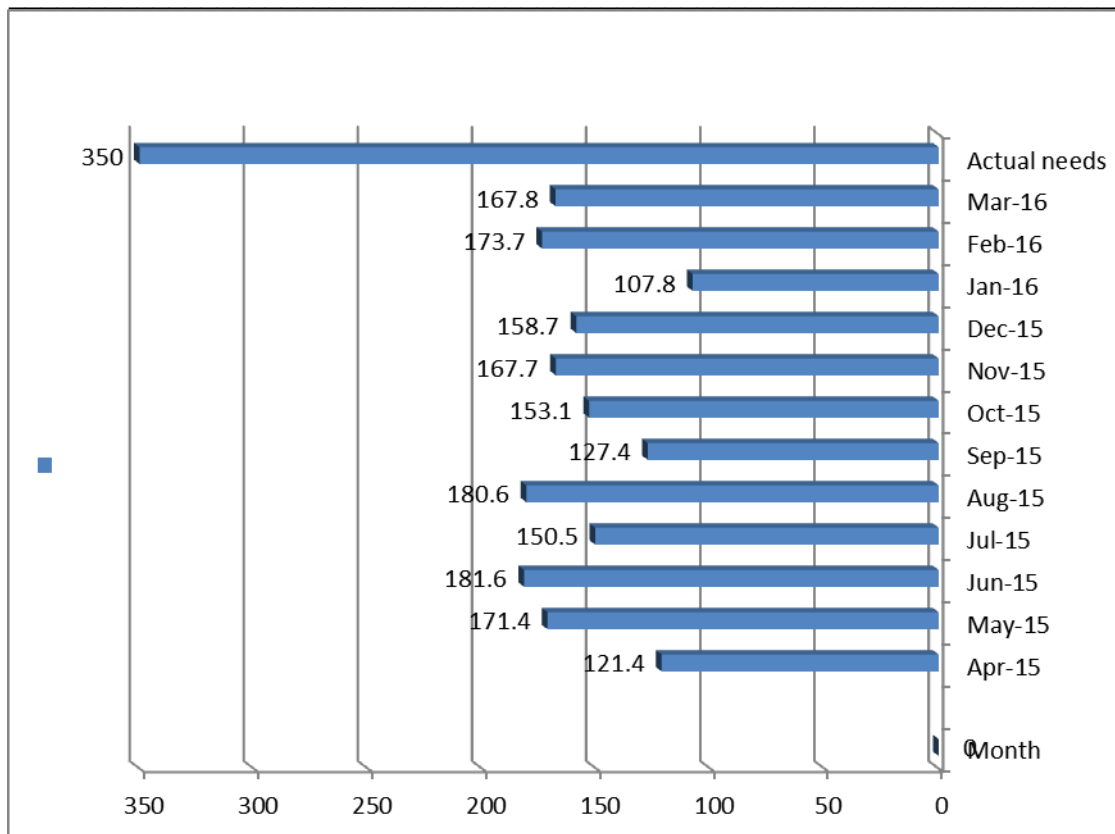
During the reporting period, Israel allowed the entry of 16,085,000 liters of diesel; 4,927,000 liters of benzene and 6,976,000 liters of industrial fuel to operate the power plant in the

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 5,203 tons of cooking gas; a daily average of 167.8 tons. This amount represents 47.9% 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
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%
January 2016	107.8	35.9%
February 2016	173.7	49.6%
March 2016	167.8	47.9%
Actual needs	350	100%

Source: EGPC.



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 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

During the reported period(March), Israel closed Beit Hanoun crossing for patients for 8 days(4 days of which cases open to patients). During days it was open, Israel allowed the travel of 1,440 patients and 1,330 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.

3 Patients were arrested at Beit Hanoun crossing (Erez)

Israeli forces arrested 3 patients while crossing the Beit Hanoun crossing, as they suffer from serious diseases and could not find the necessary medical treatment in the Gaza Strip hospitals.

At approximately 15:00 on Thursday, 03 March 2016, Israeli forces at Beit Hanoun crossing, north of the Gaza Strip, arrested Fadi Nemer Mohammed al-Sharif (28) while returning to the Gaza Strip. According to the statement of his brother Mohammed al-Sharif, Fadi traveled from the Gaza Strip on 28 February 2016 to undergo a cruciate ligament operation at al-Maqased Hospital in occupied Jerusalem, because he was injured in a match (He is a footballer at al-Helal Sport Club). He was transferred to al-Maqased Hospital upon a medical referral from the Palestinian Ministry of Health and his father was his companion. Fadi underwent the operation on 01 March 2016 and on 03 March 2016, he and his father left the West Bank heading to the Gaza Strip. However, Israeli forces stationed at Beit Hanoun crossing detained him from 15:00 to 23:00, and then asked his father to go back to Gaza. They also told the father that his son was under arrest.

At approximately 06:00, on Thursday, 24 March 2016, Israeli forces stationed in Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing, arrested Hani Fathi Shurab Isleem (41) from al-Sabra neighborhood in Gaza City, while he was travelling via Beit Hanoun Crossing. Hani’s brother, Mohammed (40), said that his brother Hani needs to change a joint in his left leg every five years in al-Maqased Hospital in occupied Jerusalem. According to a medical reference from the Palestinian Ministry of Health, Israeli forces issued a medical permit for Hani. On Thursday morning, Hani headed to Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing, after which his family was surprised by a phone call from the Israeli forces at approximately 17:00 on the same day, telling them that their son was arrested.

At approximately 09:30, on Monday, 28 March 2016, Israeli forces stationed in Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing, arrested Mohamed Kamel Rajab Abu ‘Odah (33) from al-Mawasi area, west of Rafah, while he was travelling to the West Bank for medical treatment in Musallam Specialized Center for Eye Surgery in Ramallah. It should be mentioned that Mohammed suffers from herniated disc and clogged in the spinal cords. According to Mohammed’s father, Kamel Rajab Abu ‘Odah, who was accompanying him, at approximately 09:30, his son was taken by security members for a meeting after he arrived at Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing. Mohammed’s father said that he waited in the travelers hall until 17:30, after which security members came and told him that he should return to the Gaza Strip and his son will follow him half an hour later. The father left, but his son is still under arrest. Mohammed’s

father added that his son had a medical reference from the External Medical Treatment Department at the Palestinian Ministry of Health and also got a permit from the Palestinian Liaison to travel via Beit Hanoun “Erez” crossing.

Prisoners' Visits

In March, Israeli authorities allowed 244 family members of prisoners divided into 4 groups to visit 135 of their relatives in Israeli prisons.

Family visits to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons in March 2016

Day	Number of visitors	Number of children	Number of visited prisoners	Prison
07 March 2016	90	24	49	Ramon prison
14 March 2016	86	24	47	Nafha prison
21 March 2016	33	8	19	Eshel prison
28 March 2016	34	5	20	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 135 visits (17.7%) in March. The same applies to the number of family members who are allowed to visit their relatives; the number of these members mounted to 244, in March whereas, the number should include 1,480 persons in case each prisoner is visited by 2 members of his family twice a month (16.4%).

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 8,477 traders, 2,070 persons for personal needs, 828 workers of international organizations into the Gaza Strip, 595 of elderly people to perform prayers in al-Aqsa mosque, 415 Christian civilians and 204 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. 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.

Israeli authorities also allowed 595 elderly persons to cross the crossing for performing the Friday prayer in al-Aqsa Mosque in addition to 415 Christians in light of complicated security measures..

Rafah International Crossing Point

- During the reporting period, Rafah International Crossing Point was closed during March 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 25,000, 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.



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- 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.