



المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

State of the Gaza Strip Border Crossings

01 – 31 January 2021

During January, the Israeli authorities continued its illegal and inhuman 14-year closure on the Gaza Strip. The consequences of the closure are most evident in the Gaza Strip's weathered humanitarian conditions, exhausted health system and fragile economic situation, which hampered the ability of the authorities in the Gaza Strip to combat the spread of Covid-19. Furthermore, the Israeli closure impacted the provision of basic services to at least 2 million Palestinians, who live in dire conditions in the most overpopulated area in the whole world.

During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities banned the entry of Covid-19 vaccines to the Gaza Strip, which threatens local efforts to control the spread of the virus. The capacities of healthcare facilities in the Gaza Strip have diminished greatly under the Israeli closure, which rendered them fragile and in chronic shortage of basic medicines, medical devices and specialized medical personnel, making the healthcare system unable to meet the Gaza Strip's basic health needs in regular times, let alone in the midst of a pandemic. Gaza's medical facilities struggled to operate after the outbreak of Covid-19 in the Gaza Strip, as they had shortage in coronavirus testing kits, intensive care units (ICU), respirators, and coronavirus diagnostic equipment, medicines, medical consumables and protective gear necessary to combat the coronavirus. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and dozens of human rights organizations confirmed that the primary responsibility for providing medical supplies to the Gaza Strip population, including Covid-19 vaccine, lies with Israel in accordance with Articles 55 and 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The Gaza Strip economy has incurred heavy losses due to the 14-year long Israeli closure. Economic facilities have suffered from tight restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities on the entry of goods classified as "dual-use¹." The dual-use items are essential to the life of the population; hence, the restrictions on their entry contribute to the deterioration of infrastructure and the deterioration of economic, health and education sectors.

Also, the Israeli closure caused a true humanitarian crisis and a catastrophic situation, as it is the direct cause of high unemployment, poverty and food insecurity rates, as the Gaza unemployment rate is 46% (i.e. 211,300 are unemployed), 63% of which is among youth. Also, the poverty rate reached 53%, and more than 62.2% of the Gaza population suffers from food insecurity according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

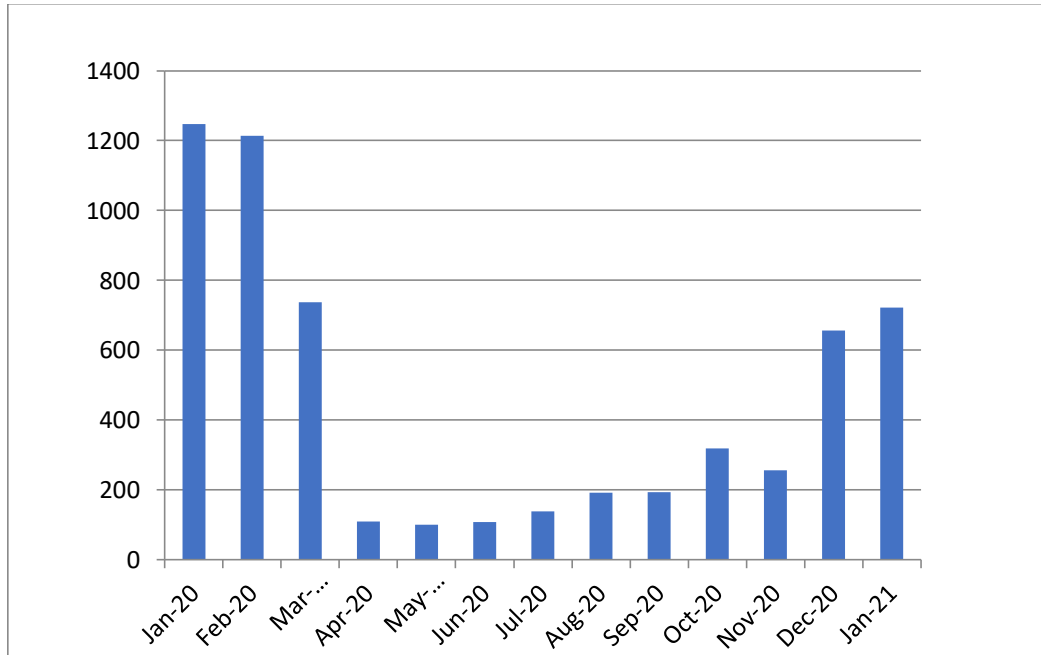
¹ Israeli authorities claim that these items, although used for civilian purposes, could be used to develop the combat capabilities of the Palestinian armed groups.



Restrictions on the Movement of Persons:

- In January, Israeli authorities maintained tightened restrictions on the movement of the Gaza Strip population through Beit Hanoun "Erez" Crossing; the restrictions were intensified in early March 2020 due to measures imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities and the Palestinian Authority to combat the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19).
- **Patients:** the Palestinian Ministry of Health reduced the number of patients referred for medical treatment in the hospitals in Israel or the West Bank to the maximum extent possible. MOH only grants referrals to patients with serious conditions and whose treatment is unavailable in the Gaza Strip. Despite this, Israeli authorities obstructed the travel of 231 patients out of 953 patients (i.e. 24.2% of the total permit applications), who were referred for treatment in Israeli hospitals or in West Bank hospitals, including occupied East Jerusalem. The Israeli authorities rejected 3 permits for security reasons (0.3%), did not reply to 28 applications (2.9%); delayed replies (allegedly for security check) to 162 permits (16.9%); asked 12 patients to change their companions (1.2%); and delayed the travel of 26 patients (2.7%) under several pretexts.

Patients Referred for Treatment Abroad Feb 2020 – Jan 2021



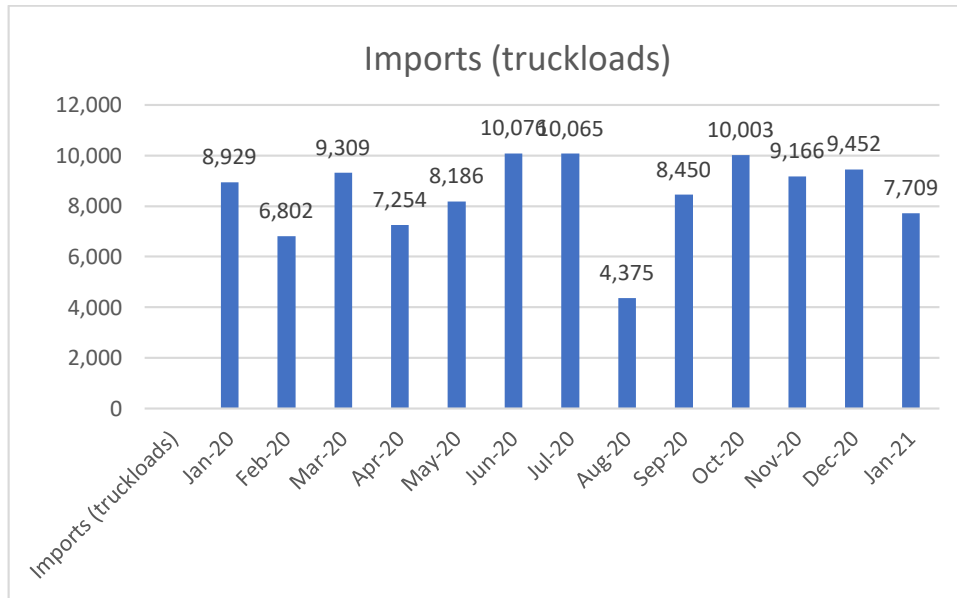


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- The Israeli authorities also imposed restrictions on items that can be carried by travelers via Erez, primarily no electronic and electric devices, food, and cosmetics are allowed, as well as wheeled luggage.
- According to GACA January data, Israeli authorities allowed 1207 Palestinians to exit the Gaza Strip via “Erez” Crossing, including 45 for personal needs; 128 foreign international organizations’ staff; and 60 Arabs holding Israeli ID cards. Meanwhile, 1567 were allowed entry to the Gaza Strip, including 39 for personal needs, 137 foreign international organizations’ staff, 70 Arabs holding Israeli ID cards, and 7 released prisoners.
- **Prisoners’ Visits:** In January, the Israeli authorities banned family visits to Palestinians in Israeli prisons. This violates the right of detainees to be in contact with their families through family visits, which is a fundamental right under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Restrictions on Movement of Goods

- Israel maintained tightened restrictions on the entry of goods into the Gaza Strip. In January, Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 7,709 truckloads. The border closed for 8 days during January which constitute 25.8% of the reporting period.



- **Ongoing ban on Gaza Strip exports:** Israeli authorities continued to ban the Gaza Strip exports. However, in a limited exception, they allowed the export of very limited types of goods; most of which are exported to the West Bank and the rest are exported to Israel and other countries. In January, the Israeli authorities allowed the export of 509

غزة - شارع جمال عبد الناصر "الثلاثيني" - مجمع الرويا - الطابق 12 - مقابل جامعة الأزهر ويجوار الهلال الأحمر - د. حيد عبد الشافي
ص. ب 1328 تليفون 2825893 / 08 2824776 فاكس 2835288

Gaza- Jamal ‘Abdel Nasser “al-Thalathini” Street - Al-Roya Building- Floor 12 - Opposite to al-Azhar University - Near
Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) -Dr. Haidar ‘Abdel Shafi
PO Box 1328 Tel/: 08 - 2824776 / 2825893 Fax 2835288 E-mail: pchr@pchgaza.org – Web page: www.pchgaza.org



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truckloads (361.5 to the West Bank, 143,5 to Israel, and 4 truckloads abroad). Those truckloads included agricultural products, fish, furniture, animal skin, aluminum scrap, clothes, and furniture. The exports during the reporting period constitute only 11.3% of Gaza's total monthly exports before closure was imposed in June 2007 (4500 truckloads/month).



- The Israeli authorities continued to impose tightened restrictions on the list of items classified as “dual-use.” The dual-use items include 62 types and hundreds of goods and commodities that are essential to the life of the population. Imposing these restrictions caused infrastructure, economy, healthcare, and education to deteriorate severely. These items include communications equipment, pumps, big generators, iron bars, iron pipes in all diameters, welding equipment and welding rods used in welding, various types of wood, UPS devices that protect the electric devices from breaking down when the electricity suddenly cuts off, X-ray machines, cranes and heavy vehicles, elevators, types of batteries and several types of fertilizers.

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- The process of submitting applications by the Gaza Strip residents to import goods classified by the Israeli authorities as “dual-use items” is very complex and ambiguous. A person from the Gaza Strip should send a request to the Palestinian Coordination Committee for the Entry of Goods, which refers the request to the Israeli Coordination and Liaison Office at “Erez” Crossing. Afterwards, the goods are classified and sent to the relevant Israeli officer to examine it. Moreover, the Palestinian merchant must complete the transaction with the Israeli seller or broker and pay for it in full as a first step towards submitting a request for import. If the response is positive, the coordination for the entry of goods is allowed through the Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) crossing. A number of merchants and contractors said to PCHR that the abovementioned measures are very complicated as the Israeli authorities deliberately delay responses to applications for months. Additionally, in many cases, the Israeli forces stationed at (Kerem Shalom) crossing return the goods that had been already approved entry. This inflicts heavy losses on merchants who pay large sums of money for the storage and demurrage charges and to contractors who are legally obliged to deliver their orders on time.

▪ Movement at Rafah Border Crossing:

In January, Rafah Border Crossing continued to be closed due to the state of emergency declared in the Gaza Strip to curb the spread of coronavirus. The Crossing was opened exceptionally for entering 3 dead bodies into the Gaza Strip from Egypt with 5 of their families. Meanwhile, thousands of Palestinians registered for travel at the Ministry of Interior remain unable to travel according to the Crossing and Borders Authority in Gaza².

Travelers returning to the Gaza Strip via Rafah Crossing suffer prolonged, recurrent and unjustified searches, extending the return journey from Cairo to Rafah Crossing for several days where travelers sleep in cars and restaurants despite the fact that the same journey used to last less than 6 hours via car.

هذا المشروع بدعم من



الاتحاد الأوروبي

² On 09 February 2021, the Egyptian Authorities announced the opening of Rafah Crossing exceptional for the humanitarian cases of students and indefinite residents for the first time since years. This coincided with the Egyptian hostility of 15 Palestinian bodies to discuss the preparations of the presidential and legislative elections in Palestine.



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