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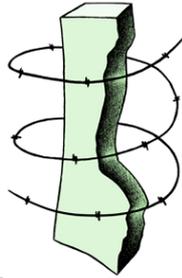
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The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.
Edmund Burke

End Gaza Siege



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Introduction

The Palestinian International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza has proclaimed 26 January the international day of action against the Gaza siege. Peace and Solidarity Organizations, civil society bodies, and human rights advocates have organized numerous actions and events in support of Palestine around the world.

Palestinians, Israelis and people around the world held events to mark the World Social Forum's Day of Global Action by declaring the 26th of January an International action day of solidarity with the population of Gaza.

'Save Gaza', 'End the siege on Gaza', 'Candles for Gaza', 'We are all Gaza', 'End the occupation' were the voices of free people. Our event has communicated a message that Gaza has not been left alone.

Solidarity with Gaza

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM'S DAY OF GLOBAL ACTION

The World Social Forum (WSF) movement brings together people and movements all over the world to push forward a global agenda of progressive change for democracy, human rights and social justice. Gaza has been on the agenda for this year after The Campaign to end the Siege called for it.

GAZA STRIP

The Palestinian International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza organized a

demonstration in Gaza City, drawing several hundred protesters.



Eyad Sarraj, head of the campaign said "The aim of the demonstration is to join the hands of Israeli and Palestinian peace activists who want to end the siege and all forms of violence". "The most decisive factor in breaking the siege will be Israeli public opinion."

Human rights activists, academics and businesspeople from Gaza formed a human circle of banners that read,

"No movement, no life," and "Humanity, not humiliation; peace, not punishment."

"Together We build the bridges of Peace, not the walls of siege and deprivation"

Mustafa Masoud, owner of two major construction companies in Gaza and board member of the Palestinian Businessmen's Association, stood in the circle. His factory doors have been closed since June because of the lack of raw materials.



Farmer Saed Dahdouh, a father of seven, attended, representing the Committee to Protect the Trees. "There are no seeds, no fertilizer, since farming materials are not

allowed to enter Gaza," he said. "The siege has devastated my family."¹

RELIEF CONVOY, EREZ CROSSINGS + ISRAEL



In protest of the Israeli continuous siege on Gaza, Israeli peace groups led by Gush Shalom and in coordination with End the Siege campaign, initiated a Relief Convoy to Gaza on Saturday, January 26, 2008.

Jewish and Arab protesters, assembled in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Nazareth and other places. The relief convoy approached the Erez crossing filled with 3 tons of food and medical supplies. A separate truck hauled 25 water-purification systems to be installed in schools. Demonstrators brought family-relief packages containing powered milk and school supplies, many enclosed with a personal letter.

The Israeli authorities did not permit the relief aid to reach the Palestinian side. The supplies are being stored in a warehouse at a kibbutz near the Gaza border while the groups prepare to petition the Israeli Supreme Court to gain the permission to get them into Gaza.



Left-wing activist Uri Avnery made a speech during the rally in which he said: *"Three days ago, a wall fell here, like the Berlin Wall fell, like the separation wall and all walls and fences will fall. But the inhumane closure that has been imposed on one and a half million*

Gaza residents by our government and by our army in our name – this closure will continue with all its cruelty.

"As Israelis who came here with basic supplies, in our desire to tell the Israeli public and the whole world: We won't be part of this crime. We're ashamed of this siege," Avnery said. Avnery added that: "Our hearts are with our Palestinian brothers who are demonstrating with us on the other side of the fence. Don't lose hope that one day we will meet without fences and walls, without weapons and violence, as two nations living together in peace, in friendship, in partnership.

Speaking by phone to the demonstrators on the Israeli side, Dr. Eyad al-Sarraj, head of the Palestinian International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza, said:

"We are joining hands today in the pursuit of peace, justice and security for all - security for Palestine, security for Israel, security for Gaza and security for Sderot."

Sarraj said: *"Every drop of blood on either side is sacred. Jewish blood is the same as Arab blood. I hope that very quickly people on both sides will be allowed to live in peace."*

Participating organizations: Gush Shalom, Combatants for Peace, Coalition of Women for Peace, ICAHD - The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Bat Shalom, Bat Tzafon for Peace & Equality, Balad, Hadash, Adalah, Tarabut-Hithabrut, Physicians for Human Rights, Alternative Information Center, Psychoactive - Mental Health Professionals for Human Rights, ActiveStills, Student Coalition (Tel-Aviv University), New Profile, Machsom Watch, PCATI (Public Committee Against Torture).

WEST BANK

Bethlehem

Protest of the Israeli imposed Siege of the Gaza Strip in front of the Nativity church Tuesday January 22 evening, organized by Al Ruwwad cultural center in Aida Refugee Camp, Al Khader Popular Committee, Mithaq center, the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People, the mother organization of IMEMC, Al Fineeq Center, and Sirage center.

Ramallah

Demonstration organized jointly by the Palestinian National Initiative and the Stop

¹ The Washington Times

the Wall Campaign on January 26. Protesters marched through Ramallah's central square carrying banners reading "Stop Israeli War Crimes in Gaza" and "Boycott Israeli Apartheid"



More than one hundred people marched in central Ramallah

At 16:00 in Ramallah, the "Gaza 3ala Bali" (Gaza on my Mind) campaign marched through central Ramallah carrying a coffin with the names of the 83 Palestinians who have died from the siege on Gaza written on it.

HAIFA

Joint protest organized by the Israeli Communist Party and the Democratic Front for Peace and Justice Thursday 24 January in Haifa city with participation of Arab residents of Israel and Jews.

Jerusalem

Protest in Jerusalem organized by the Al Aqsa Foundation for Rebuilding Muslim Holy Sites. Dozens of Palestinian residents, and peace activists, participated on the protest held on Thursday.



Kafer Kanna Arab town in solidarity

Kafer kanna

Candle procession in Kafer Kanna Arab town in solidarity with the Gaza Strip on Friday evening. It was organized by national and Islamic factions in Israel

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



San Francisco

Protests were held in a number of US cities and towns calling on Israel to end the imprisonment of 1.5 million Palestinians inside Gaza. Some of the cities participating in the protest actions included San Francisco; Boston; Seattle; St. Petersburg, Florida; Washington, DC; Los Angeles; Portland, Oregon; Eugene, Oregon; Houston, Texas and a number of other cities.

The protests took place at several different venues, including in front of the White House in Washington, DC, the Israeli consulates in New York, Los Angeles and Houston, and in a public square in Portland, Oregon and along a road in Eugene, Oregon. Among those who participated in the various rallies were Palestinian-Americans, human rights activists, Jewish supporters of Palestinian rights and many others.

Among the groups represented at the rallies were Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights, Jews for Justice, Jews for Peace, Women in Black, US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, ANSWER Coalition, United for Peace and Justice and others.



Stop war crime banner - Houston

According to the press release sent out by one of the protest organizers, the reason for the protests is as follows:

"Israel is continuing to escalate its attacks on Gaza, killing more than 40 Palestinians just this past week and wounding scores more,

and has placed the already besieged territory under complete lockdown. More than 1.5 million Palestinian people living in Gaza are suffering from life-threatening shortages of food, medicines, fuel and other vital necessities, caused by the Israeli military's sealing-off of one of the most densely populated areas of the world."

UNITED KINGDOM

Palestine Solidarity Campaign



Protest organized with the British Muslim Initiative, the Palestinian Return Centre, the Palestinian Forum in Britain, Friends of Al Aqsa, Stop the War Coalition, Jews for Justice for Palestinians and others.

EUROPE

EU Campaign to Lift the Siege on the Gaza Strip

'Light off', Several European cities scores of Palestinian, Arab and European families shutdown the lights in their homes as a Solidarity move with the residents of Gaza for 20 mints Friday night in a move was organized by the.



Protest in the Belgium capital Brussels, in front of the EU headquarters Friday 25th January.

Protest organized by "The European Campaign for Ending Gaza Siege in front of the European Parliament and the European

Union headquarters in the Belgian capital. This protest was held as European Union's foreign ministers have been holding their meeting in Brussels on Monday, Jan, 28th, 2008.

Demonstrations, European cities, 25th Jan

Rome - Action for Peace, an organization including women's groups, Women in Black, non-governmental organizations and trade unions held a support public meeting titled "The will to resist and the courage to refuse."

Moscow - Protest against Israel's siege over the Gaza Strip in Moscow on Tuesday 29th January. Protesters also alled for another protest in front of the US Embassy in Moscow on February 5.

Barcelona



Geneva



Geneva

CANADA



Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR)

Protest organized by, Trade union members, politicians and human rights activists, through downtown Montreal city, Canada. 'End Israel's inhumane and collective punishment'.

Coalition For Justice and Peace in Palestine

Vigil Against Gaza Siege, Wednesday, Downtown area in Montreal

Vigil, Saturday starting from Concordia University, in coordination with the Solidarity For Palestine in Human Rights (www.sphr.org)



MONTREAL, jan26

Protest in front of the Human Rights monument on Elgin Street, OTTAWA 27th January.

January 25, demonstration along St Catherine Street, Montreal's busiest downtown shopping corridor to a rally at Phillips Square.

ARTICLES

This brutal siege of Gaza can only breed violence

Karen Koning AbuZayd in Gaza City
Wednesday January 23, 2008
The Guardian

Palestinian suffering has reached new depths. Peace cannot be built by reducing 1.5m people to a state of abject destitution

Gaza is on the threshold of becoming the first territory to be intentionally reduced to a state of abject destitution, with the knowledge, acquiescence and - some would say - encouragement of the international community. this to happen.

Across this tiny territory, 25 miles long and no more than 6 miles wide, a deep darkness descended at 8pm on January 21, as the lights went out for each of its 1.5 million Palestinian residents. A new hallmark of Palestinian suffering had been reached.

There have been three turns of the screw on the people of Gaza, triggered in turn by the outcome of elections in January 2006, the assumption by Hamas of de facto control last June, and the Israeli decision in September to declare Gaza a "hostile territory". Each instance has prompted ever tighter restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza.

Gaza's border closures are without precedent. Palestinians are effectively incarcerated. The overwhelming majority cannot leave or enter Gaza. Without fuel and spare parts, public health conditions are declining steeply as water and sanitation services struggle to function. The electricity supply is sporadic and has been reduced further along with fuel supply in these past days. Unicef reports that the partial functioning of Gaza City's main pumping station is affecting the supply of safe water to some 600,000 Palestinians.

Medication is in short supply, and hospitals are paralysed by power failures and the shortage of fuel for generators. Hospital infrastructure and essential pieces of equipment are breaking down at an alarming rate, with limited possibility of repair or maintenance as spare parts are not available.

It is distressing to see the impact of closures on patients who need to travel outside Gaza to get medical treatment. Many have had their treatment delayed or denied, worsening their medical conditions and causing preventable deaths.

Concrete is in such short supply that people are unable to make graves for their dead. Hospitals are handing out sheets as funeral shrouds.

As the head of a humanitarian and human development agency for Palestinian refugees, I am deeply concerned by the stark inhumanity of Gaza's closure.

In discharging its mandate, UNRWA delivers a variety of services to improve living conditions and prospects for self-reliance. It is impossible to sustain our operations when the occupying power adopts an "on, off",

"here today, gone tomorrow" policy towards Gaza's borders.

What we should be doing now is nurturing moderation and empowering those who believe that Gaza's rightful future lies in peaceful co-existence with its neighbours.

There has never been a more urgent need for the international community to act to restore normality in Gaza. Hungry, unhealthy, angry communities do not make good partners for peace.

- *Karen Koning AbuZayd is commissioner general for Unrwa, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East www.un.org/unrwa*

Defusing the Gaza time bomb

By Robert Malley
January 20, 2008
The Boston Globe

THE GAZA STRIP suffers from sky-rocketing unemployment and poverty, and lacks medicine, fuel, electricity, food, and other essential commodities. It is virtually cut off. It also is the most likely trigger for the next Arab-Israeli war.

In the past few weeks, Palestinian militant groups have fired rockets and mortars into Israel. Israeli incursions and aerial attacks have resulted in Palestinian casualties, including one that killed the son of one of Hamas's senior leaders. The situation is untenable, and both sides know it.

Over recent weeks, Hamas officials in Gaza made clear they were prepared for a mutual cease-fire, entailing an end to rocket launches. Since Hamas's takeover of Gaza last June and the Islamists' intensified conflict with President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, their principal goals have been to consolidate their hold over the territory, reestablish law and order, and prove that they can govern. A severe conflict with Israel would threaten the first two objectives; maintenance of the border closures imperils the third.

Israeli officials appear torn. They are not eager to reenter a territory from which they recently withdrew; know the risks of a ground operation; and are unsure that even an extensive military campaign can stop the rockets.

A cease-fire goes against today's prevailing theory. But it is the theory itself that goes

against logic. Gazans, grateful to Hamas for having significantly improved their security, will say they are distressed by the economic hardships and angry at the Islamists' brutal behavior. To the extent the movement has lost popularity the attempt to enfeeble Hamas by squeezing Gaza is working. Yet the success is meaningless. Hamas's losses are not necessarily Fatah's gains; Gazans blame the Islamists for being unable to end the siege but they also blame Israel (for imposing it), the West (for supporting it), and Fatah (for acquiescing in it).

The private sector is collapsing, increasing the dependence of ordinary citizens on those who govern. Hamas finds ways to finance its rule and invokes the siege to justify its practices.

The more the siege continues and the pressure on Hamas intensifies, the more the Islamists will be tempted to heighten the confrontation with Israel. When that happens, how long before the peace process collapses? Israel will be unable to continue negotiating with Abbas while its citizens are under assault. Abbas will be unable to keep negotiating with Israel while its counteroffensive in Gaza leaves a trail of death and destruction. The gravest threat to diplomatic progress comes not from Palestinian unity but division; it comes not when Hamas has something to gain, but when Hamas concludes it has nothing to lose.

The most persuasive argument is that Hamas will use a cease-fire to bolster its firepower. Admittedly, the quasi-blockade and Israel's military operations have hardly stemmed the flow of arms, as Israeli anxieties about the Islamists' rising power attest. But things could get worse. A cease-fire deal therefore should be accompanied by Israeli red lines as to what might enter Gaza combined with more effective arrangements with Cairo - perhaps involving a third party presence - to minimize the flow of arms across Egypt's border.

In conversations with Israeli and Hamas leaders, it becomes apparent that all-out military confrontation is neither side's first choice. But events, inexorably, are fast leading there. On humanitarian grounds alone, reaching a cease-fire and lifting the collective punishment imposed on Gaza's population would be the right thing to achieve. If humanitarian considerations have no place, perhaps common sense will do.

- *Robert Malley is Middle East program director at the International Crisis Group.*

Ending the stranglehold on Gaza

The Boston Globe

By Eyad al-Sarraj and Sara Roy

January 26, 2008

AN ISRAELI convoy of goods and peace activists will go today to Erez, Israel's border with Gaza, and many Palestinians will be on the other side waiting. They will not see one another, but Palestinians will know there are Jews who condemn the siege inflicted on the tiny territory by Israel's military establishment and want to see an end to the 40-year-old occupation.

Israel's minister of justice, Haim Ramon, had pushed for cutting off Gaza's "infrastructural oxygen" - water, electricity, and fuel - as a response to the firing of Qassam rockets into Israel. Food and humanitarian aid were also denied entry. Although international pressure forced Israel to let in some supplies two days later, and the situation further eased when Palestinians breached the border wall with Egypt, the worst may be yet to come.

The Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, agrees with Ramon's strategy. The rapid and deepening desperation of Gaza's sick and hungry is of no moral concern to her. For Livni, like Ramon, the siege is a tactical measure, a human experiment to stop the rockets and bring down a duly elected government.

This collective punishment resulted in a steady deterioration of Palestinian life, in growing lawlessness, and a violent confrontation between Fatah and Hamas, which escalated into a Hamas military takeover of Gaza in June 2007.

Since then, the siege has been tightened to an unprecedented level. Over 80 percent of the population of 1.5 million (compared to 63 percent in 2006) is dependent on international food assistance, which itself has been dramatically reduced.

In a November 2007 report, the Red Cross stated about the food allowed into Gaza that people are getting "enough to survive, not enough to live."

2007, 87 percent of Gazans lived below the poverty line, more than a tripling of the percentage in 2000.

The reduction in fuel supplies that the Israeli government first approved in October not only threatens the provision of health and medical services but the stock of medicines, which is rapidly being depleted. This has forced the critically ill to seek treatment outside the Gaza Strip.

However, according to Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, many patients are being denied permission to leave. The organization has also accused the Israeli intelligence service of forcing some patients to inform on others in order to be granted passage.

Since June, Israel has limited its exports to Gaza to nine basic materials. Out of 9,000 commodities (including foodstuffs) that were entering Gaza before the siege began two years ago, only 20 commodities have been permitted entry since. Not surprisingly, there has been a sharp increase in the prices of foodstuffs.

Gaza also suffers from the ongoing destruction of its agriculture and physical infrastructure. With the remainder to homes, public buildings, roads, water and sewage pipes, electricity infrastructure, and phone lines.

The psychological damage of living in a war zone may surpass the physical. According to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, between Sept. 1, 2005, and July 25, 2007, 668 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli security forces. During the same period, Qassam rockets and mortar shells killed eight Israelis, half of them civilians.

Gaza is no longer approaching economic collapse. It has collapsed. If that happens, we shall all suffer the consequences for generations to come.

Eyad al-Sarraj is founder of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program. Sara Roy is senior research scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. ■

Economic Warfare in Gaza

by Yossi Wolfson
Challenge-Magazine

NO MORE LIES or twisted tongues. Israel is saying at last what, in the past, it always refused to acknowledge: its war is against the Palestinian population.

Until now, in discussions about the separation wall, closures, blockades, house demolition, and other sorts of collective punishment, the State Attorney's Office lacked the gumption to admit in court that the aim of such measures is to harm civilians. Harm to the population was described as a regrettable side effect.

This happened after ten human-rights organizations petitioned the High Court on October 28, 2007 against cuts in the supply of electricity and gasoline to Gaza. The petitioners claimed that the cuts amount to collective punishment, which is forbidden under international law. The State might have answered that the cuts are a necessary military measure aimed at stopping the production of Qassam rockets. But no. In their response to the petition, Dana Briskman and Gilad Shirman from the State Attorney's Office announced openly, without blinking an eye, that the cuts' main purpose is to exert pressure on the economy as a way of influencing Hamas.

Here it infringes a basic principle of the international laws concerning warfare, which distinguish between the civilian population and the armed forces. One main purpose of these laws is to shield civilians from the battlefield and mitigate the effects war can have on them. Cutting the supply of electricity or gasoline is not a strictly military operation. Following this logic to its absurd conclusion, we find that it is forbidden to blow up a civilian installation, but it is permissible to disable it by cutting off raw materials. It is forbidden to blow up a power plant, but it's OK to turn off the electricity.

The state turns international law on its head. Various provisions regulate civilian supplies in wartime, with the aim of keeping the situation from reaching the threshold of a humanitarian crisis. Israel cites these provisions but interprets them as allowing it to harm civilians as long as it stops short of that threshold, defined by it.

Since Hamas ousted Fatah there in the summer of 2007, the shipment of goods to the Strip has been restricted almost totally to basic foods, medicines, medical equipment, cooking gas, gasoline and electricity. Karni, the main checkpoint for transfer of goods, earlier functioned in a spotty manner, but today it is completely shut. The code for importing goods to Gaza has been deleted from the computers of Israel's Customs Authority, which (according to the Paris Protocol) is supposed to collect the tariffs.

According to statistics from the summer of 2007 before Israel hardened its measures, 87% of Gazans lived beneath the poverty line, which was reckoned at \$2.40 per day. Already then there were perceived shortages in basic products, and food prices rose by tens of percentage points.

On November 1, Israel repeated its assurances to the Court that its measures are carefully weighed and considered. It promised to watch the situation closely to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Yet the government had on up-to-date figures on the likely effects of an electricity cut.

Israel claims in court that it has the right to choose the countries it trades with, as if Gaza were just one independent state among the many. It views a cut in electricity to Gaza as not essentially different from, say, a cut in the sale of diamonds to Spain. This claim conceals the self-righteous notion that Israel, having disengaged, is no longer responsible for the Strip. But who presides over Gaza's borders? Who rules its air space?

It turned the Gazans into a cheap labor force to serve Israeli industry—at first by having them commute into Israel and later by developing an industrial area at Checkpoint Erez. Israel also benefited from Gazan dependence on its products. When Karni was closed, among the loudest protestors were Israeli farmers. The cut in gasoline shipments also made a dent in the income of Dor-Alon, the Israeli energy company supplying Gaza.

Needless to say, no Justice cried in astonishment, "By what right do you intend to exploit the gas reserves of the Gaza Strip? This is against the provisions of international law, which forbid an occupying power from exploiting the natural resources of an occupied territory for its own use!"

Finally, we cannot ignore the similarities between Israel's policies in Gaza and in Lebanon. In southern Lebanon too (if to a lesser degree), Israel for years used the population as a cheap commuting workforce and as consumers of its products, all in the framework of the so-called "Good Fence" policy. Israel's interest in controlling the water that flows its way from southern Lebanon brings to mind its interest in Gaza's gas reserves. Its attack on Lebanon in 2006 also has its Gazan parallels. In both places Israel learned that it has no military answer to the threat of rockets in the hands of militias. With Hezbollah as with Hamas, Israel refused to negotiate.

In both cases, Gaza and Lebanon, Israel has made indiscriminate war from the air on civilians while hesitating to commit ground forces. By harming them, it was thought, you could get them to pressure their leaders and thus make political gains. The Israeli attacks amount to an expression of weakness, but the price will not be paid by

those who launch them, rather by civilians on both sides.■

**From Prison to Zoo:
Israel's "Humanitarian" Control of Gaza**
Adalah's Newsletter, Volume 44, January
2008

By Darryl Li²

The metaphor of the Gaza Strip as the world's largest prison is unfortunately outdated. Israel now treats the Strip more like a zoo. For running a prison is about constraining or repressing freedom; in a zoo, the question is rather how to keep those held inside alive, with an eye to how outsiders might see them. The question of freedom is never raised. The ongoing electricity crisis helps to illuminate this shift, so to speak.

Gaza has been experiencing a power crisis since June 2006, when Israeli helicopter gunships fired rockets at the power plant's transformers following the capture of an Israeli soldier, rendering it inoperable.³ Israel has subsequently hobbled repair efforts by blocking or delaying the entry of replacement parts and equipment into the Strip.

The interaction between the state and the court is telling as regards the post-disengagement management of Gaza and the mentality of zoo-keeping. In 2006, Israel decided that the best way to punish Gazans for the capture of one of its soldiers was a one-off, spectacular act of violence that would lead to widespread deprivation.⁴ Now it seeks similar results – the loss of electricity and the resulting disruption of everyday life – through more calibrated, long-term means.

This reorientation first required a clearing of the legal slate, hence the lack of any reference in the decision of 29 November to

legal precedents, treaties, or statutes, thus mirroring the state's view of post-disengagement Gaza as a zone devoid of any legal obligations on its part.

In place of any legal framework the state has proposed – and the court has now endorsed – a seemingly simple standard for policy: once "essential humanitarian needs" are met, all other deprivation is permissible. If it is possible to ration fuel for hospitals and the sewage network, then Gaza's economy need not play a role: "We do not accept the petitioners' argument that 'market forces' should be allowed to play their role in Gaza with regard to fuel consumption."⁵

This logic reflects the radical transformation of Israel's policy of blockade since the summer of 2007: from frequent and crippling closure to indefinite blockage of all but "essential humanitarian items." This policy has forced 90% of private industries in Gaza to shut down, frozen all construction works, and driven unemployment to record highs.⁶

In practice, the neat and simple distinction between vital needs and luxuries is often impossible to implement. Gaza's overstrained electrical grid can and does rotate distribution between areas, but hospitals and sewage pumps are too dispersed to be supplied with electricity separately from the rest of the population.⁷

And even if implemented in good faith and with the best of intentions, it promises nothing more than turning Gazans one and all into beggars – or rather, into well-fed animals – dependent on international money and Israeli fiat.

Stepping back, Gaza seems less like a zoo and more like an animal pen in the backyard of a larger manor, namely the State of Israel. The Gaza Strip is not its own separate world, but rather a holding area for a quarter of the Palestinian population living under Israel's control. Gazans are on the lowest rung in a hierarchy of legal exclusion that encompasses the half of the population of Israel/Palestine that is not Jewish, and which is fragmented into citizens of Israel, residents of East Jerusalem, and West Bankers (whether living under PNA administration or direct Israeli

² Darryl Li is a PhD Candidate in Anthropology & Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University and a JD Candidate at Yale Law School. He is also a consultant for Trócaire, the Irish Catholic overseas development charity. Most of this piece was written in Gaza between power outages; the views expressed in this essay reflect only his own. The article was written before the Supreme Court's decision in HCJ 9132/07, *Jaber al-Basyouni Ahmed v. The Prime Minister* of 30 January 2008.

³ For an overview of the effects of the strike and an assessment of its legality, see *Act of Vengeance: Israel's Bombing of the Gaza Power Plant and its Effects* (B'Tselem, September 2006).

⁴ According to Yoav Gallant, head of the Israeli military's Southern Command, the alternative of cutting direct electricity supplies was also considered but rejected due to opposition from the Israel Electric Company, presumably for contractual or revenue-related reasons. *Act of Vengeance*, p. 27.

⁵ HCJ 9132/07, *Jaber al-Basyouni Ahmed v. The Prime Minister*, para. I.4.

⁶ "The Closure of the Gaza Strip: The Economic and Humanitarian Consequences" (OCHA-oPt, 13 December 2007).

⁷ Attachment A to affidavit submitted by Usama Dabbour, director of external relations for the Gaza Electrical Distribution Company (GEDCO) to the Supreme Court in the case of HCJ 9132/07, *Jaber al-Basyouni Ahmed v. The Prime Minister*, 9 January 2008.

military jurisdiction). Gaza's tomorrow is inextricably linked to that of Israel, and Gaza's today provides the most urgent example of the need to define a more just political dispensation and legal framework for the state that has de facto spanned the territory from the river to the sea for four decades.

REPORTS

No light, no heat, no bread: stark reality for the powerless in Gaza

Rory McCarthy in Khan Yunis, Gaza
Tuesday January 22, 2008
The Guardian

Besieged civilians pay the price for Israel's hardline response to rocket attacks



A Palestinian boy waits to pump air by hand into his bedbound brother's lungs in case his respirator cuts out during blackouts. Photograph: Suhaib Salem/Reuters

When it opened its doors seven years ago, the European Gaza hospital was one of the biggest foreign investments in the long-troubled Gaza Strip and one of the leading medical centres in the Palestinian territories. Yesterday, the 250-bed hospital was sliding rapidly into crisis, turning away patients for routine operations and struggling to manage emergency cases, as the sole power plant in Gaza halted electricity production after Israel stopped all fuel supplies.

Israel said its closure of the Gaza strip was intended to halt the firing of makeshift rockets by Palestinian militants into southern Israel.

Osama Nahal, a paediatric doctor in the European hospital's special care baby unit, looked resigned. "Politics is politics, but the care of human beings must be away from politics," he said. His unit now has 10 newly-born patients, of whom two are on ventilators.

The hospital in Khan Yunis, which was built with European and UN funding, takes most

of its electricity from the power plant, so it was largely without any yesterday. The hospital's own fuel reserves, normally 120,000 litres, are down to 10,000 litres following Israel's economic boycott of Gaza over the past two years.

The UN sent emergency fuel supplies from its depot inside Gaza. It was enough to power the hospital's smallest generator and to provide electricity for the intensive care units and emergency operations. But when those last reserves run dry, the power will stop. "If new supplies don't come, we'll have to put the patients on manual ventilation. All of us will have to work at it non-stop, 24-hours a day," said Nahal.

"It's a very serious situation. If it continues, we will stop being able to give our service," said Mohammad Abu Shahla, the hospital director. "Do you think we have anywhere else to move the patients? There is nowhere."

Even with Gaza's power plant, which supplies around a quarter of the strip's electricity, closed, Israel yesterday at first appeared intent on holding to its closure policy. "As far as I'm concerned, all the residents of Gaza can walk and have no fuel for their cars, because they have a murderous terrorist regime that doesn't allow people in the south of Israel to live in peace," said the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert.

Last night, however, the defence minister, Ehud Barak, decided to allow one-off shipments of diesel and medicine into Gaza beginning today.

"We think Hamas got the message," said Arye Mekel, a foreign ministry spokesman. "When they want to stop the rockets they can." It was not clear how much fuel would be allowed in, or how regular the shipments would be.

The case of the increasingly desperate humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip has been often told and often ignored in the two years since the Islamist movement Hamas won the Palestinian elections and then seized full control of Gaza last summer. But never before have the warnings of the fragility of the strip's 1.5 million people been so stark.

Yesterday, the UN Relief and Works Agency, which works with Palestinian refugees and provides crucial food aid to 870,000 Gazans, warned that it would have to stop distributing its food support by tomorrow or Thursday because it could not import the bags or the fuel to deliver the food.

Israeli officials have said they believe officials in Gaza had shut down the power plant unnecessarily.

However, John Ging, the director of UNRWA's operations in Gaza, said the crisis was acutely real. "The representative of the government of Israel making such a statement is obviously misinformed about the reality here," he said. "It is a matter of fact that the power plant has run out of fuel. The government of Israel knows very well to the last litre what comes into Gaza. They control everything."

Ging said the rocket fire from Gaza, though illegal, did not justify such punitive measures against the civilian population, and the Israeli civilian population hit by the rockets, notably in Sderot near the boundary with Gaza, also deserved protection.

"Firing rockets from Gaza is not supported by the population here," he said. "One's actions must be measured against the rule of law. We should look at each action and hold accountable those who are actually committing them."

Israeli military incursions and air strikes have killed nearly 40 Palestinians in Gaza in the past week, at least 10 of them civilians. Palestinian militants shot dead an Ecuadorian kibbutz volunteer last week and fired more than a 160 rockets into southern Israel, although the number fell after the closure.

As night fell yesterday a crowd of shoppers crammed into Samir Khadr's bakery in Gaza City, one of the few shops with the luxury of its own generator. Khadr had enough fuel to last just one more day. "Israel is the one responsible for this. We're more fed up with the rockets than they are," he said. "We have no electricity, no fuel, no cooking gas, just candles. It's going to be miserable."

Backstory:

Gaza has only one power plant, supplying around a quarter of the electricity used by the strip's 1.5 million people. The rest is bought mostly from Israel, and from Egypt. When Israel imposed a full closure on Gaza's crossings on Friday, all fuel supplies to the power plant were stopped. On Sunday evening the plant halted production. Both of its 10,000-cubic-metre storage tanks are now empty. Even before the latest closure, Israel was limiting fuel supplies, which kept production down to around 55 megawatts, a long way short of the 140MW that the plant was built to produce.

STATEMENTS

Israeli Blockade Unlawful Despite Gaza Border Breach

Indiscriminate Palestinian Rocket Attacks Violate International Law
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

(New York, January 26, 2008) – This week's Gaza-Egypt border breach temporarily eased the humanitarian impact of Israel's blockade, but Israel as the occupying power remains responsible for the well-being of Gaza's 1.4 million residents, Human Rights Watch said today. Gazans remain almost completely dependent on Israel for fuel, electricity, medicine, food, and other essential commodities.



"Israel's rightful self-defense against unlawful rocket attacks does not justify a blockade that denies civilians the food, fuel and medicine needed to survive, a policy amounting to collective punishment".

Joe Stork, acting director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East division

Human Rights Watch also called upon Palestinian armed groups in Gaza to stop their indiscriminate rocket attacks into populated areas in Israel in violation of international humanitarian law. The attacks have wounded 82 Israeli civilians in the past six months.

"Israel's rightful self-defense against unlawful rocket attacks does not justify a blockade that denies civilians the food, fuel and medicine needed to survive, a policy amounting to collective punishment," said Joe Stork, acting director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East division. "Gazans can't turn on the lights, get tap water, buy enough food, or earn a living without Israel's consent."

Some Israeli officials have suggested that the temporary breach in the Egypt-Gaza border means that Israel has relinquished all responsibility for Gaza. "We need to understand that when Gaza is open to the other side, we lose responsibility for it," said Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai on January 24, 2008. "So we want to disconnect from it."

Israel withdrew its military forces and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005, but it still controls Gaza's airspace, territorial waters, and land borders – with the exception this week of the Rafah border area with Egypt. Israel is Gaza's primary supplier of electricity, which is essential for water availability and sewage treatment. In

addition, Israel controls Gaza's telecommunications network, its population registry, and its customs and tax revenues. Israeli security forces have frequently re-entered Gaza at will.

"The sudden opening of Gaza's border with Egypt has changed, for the time being, only one of the many indices of Israel's control over essential aspects of life in Gaza," Stork said. "Israel remains responsible for the well-being of Gaza's civilians."

Aside from the fact that the irregular opening of Gaza's border with Egypt may be temporary, any end to Israel's legal responsibilities for the welfare of Gaza's inhabitants would require an end to its ineffective control over the Gaza Strip, including its territorial waters and airspace, and its tax and customs revenues, Human Rights Watch said. It would also require a new infrastructure so Gaza's residents can meet their requirements for fuel, electricity, cargo transshipment and the like through harbors, an airport, and over the 17-kilometer border with Egypt.

The border breach at Rafah began on January 23, after Hamas helped Palestinians break through sections of the wall and fence separating Gaza and Egypt, to the west of the official Rafah crossing, which remains closed. Tens of thousands of Palestinians – by some estimates hundreds of thousands – flooded into Egypt to acquire food, fuel, and essential supplies. Tens of thousands more entered Egypt the following day.

On January 25, Egyptian security forces attempted to control the entry of Palestinians from Gaza and re-seal the border, but Palestinians bulldozed a new opening. By the afternoon, the traffic was flowing unhindered again, with Palestinians driving into Egypt in their private cars.

Human Rights Watch on January 24 visited a makeshift market with Egyptian and Palestinian traders in the no-man's land at the border, known as the Philadelphi Corridor. Palestinians bought cigarettes, cement, fuel, electrical supplies, generators, car parts, farm animals, and other goods in short supply in Gaza due to Israel's drastic restrictions on imports dating back to June 2006.

Human Rights Watch observed four significant breaks in the border barriers. The largest of the breaches, near the former Israel Defense Forces post known as Salaheddin, was roughly 250 meters wide.

Egyptian border forces in riot gear have tried to maintain order on the Egyptian side. Additional Egyptian security forces manned checkpoints near the city of al-Arish, about 30 miles southwest of Rafah. The governor of northern Sinai, Gen. Ahmad `Abd al-Hamid, said Egypt would not allow Palestinians to travel beyond al-Arish.

On the Gaza side, Human Rights Watch saw uniformed Hamas-controlled security forces and members of the Qassam Brigades, the Hamas militia, in black uniforms and civilian clothes, randomly checking cars and individuals with goods purchased in Egypt. Members of the security forces told Human Rights Watch that they were primarily checking for illegal drugs.

Two Qassam Brigades members at the border told Human Rights Watch that they were not permitting arms to enter, but another said the restriction only applied to persons not known to be active in "the resistance." The heavy traffic and lack of controls made it impossible for Hamas forces to check the vast majority of individuals and vehicles.

Hamas security forces also established checkpoints at key intersections inside Gaza, checking cars. Human Rights Watch observed them arresting one man, apparently for drug possession.

Since Hamas took over the Palestinian Authority in March 2006, following its electoral victory the previous January, and especially after Hamas captured Israeli corporal Gilad Shalit that June, Israel has made it exceedingly difficult for Palestinians to leave Gaza. Following Hamas's violent seizure of power in Gaza from rival Fatah forces in June 2007, Israel has arbitrarily blocked, delayed and harassed people with emergency medical problems who need to leave Gaza for urgent care. Some Palestinian patients unable to reach hospitals in Israel or Egypt have died.

Approximately 6,000 people with foreign citizenship, permanent foreign residency, work permits, student visas, or university admissions abroad, have been trapped inside the territory and denied exit permits for unspecified "security reasons."

It remains unclear how many of these people left Gaza for Egypt in recent days and whether they will be able to travel beyond al-Arish to Cairo.

The border breach occurred five days after Israel imposed a complete blockade on the

entry of goods into Gaza in response to continued Palestinian rocket attacks. An earlier breach of the same border, at the time of Israel's military withdrawal in September 2005, was quickly repaired.

Israeli officials have said they would not allow the blockade to cause a humanitarian crisis. "We will not hit food supplies for children or medicines for the needy," Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said this week.

"Israeli leaders have been playing word games, claiming that each new turn of the screw would not create a humanitarian crisis," Stork said. "But the ordinary people of Gaza – those with no connection to militants – have been living such a crisis for more than a year as the economy collapses, the lights go out, and the sewage overflows."

Statements by Israeli officials this week appear to acknowledge that the blockade amounts to collective punishment. Olmert on January 24 said: "There is no justification for demanding we allow residents of Gaza to live normal lives while shells and rockets are fired from their streets and courtyards at Sderot and other communities in the south."

Defense Ministry spokesman Shlomo Dror said that, "If Palestinians don't stop the violence, I have a feeling the life of people in Gaza is not going to be easy."

Israel slightly eased the blockade on January 23 after a wave of international criticism, agreeing to supply one week's worth of fuel for Gaza's sole electric power plant, but it limited supplies again soon after the border breach.

Approximately 60 percent of Gaza's electricity is supplied commercially by an Israeli provider. Egypt supplies about 10 percent to southern Gaza, and Gaza's sole power plant produces about 25 percent.

On the evening of January 20, the power plant had to stop production entirely due to the lack of industrial diesel fuel allowed in from Israel. Kanaan Obeid, deputy director of the Palestinian Energy Authority, told Human Rights Watch that the power plant had only enough fuel to last through January 27.

Israel's calibrated restrictions on regular diesel, industrial diesel and benzene fuel began on October 28, 2007, in response to continued rocket attacks by Palestinian armed groups. In November, the Israeli Supreme Court approved the fuel cuts but ordered the state to halt proposed electricity

cuts until it could prove that such cuts would not harm medical and other services essential to the civilian population.

Intended to pressure Hamas to take action against the armed groups, the fuel cuts have had a direct impact on the well-being of the civilian population. Gaza residents are suffering increasingly serious disruptions to their daily lives from power cuts.

According to the United Nations, the electricity shortage caused at least 40 percent of Gazans being denied access to running water and a breakdown in the sewage system. Thirty million liters of raw sewage was released into the sea per day, a UN report said. Forced to rely on generators, Gaza hospitals reduced their services.

The UN World Food Program reported shortages of meat, wheat flour and frozen food. Between January 14 and 20, the humanitarian and commercial foods entering Gaza totaled only 31 percent of basic food needs.

Israel's decision to limit fuel, and potentially electricity, to Gaza in retaliation for rocket attacks violates a basic principle of international humanitarian law, which prohibits a government with effective control over a territory from attacking or withholding objects that are essential to the survival of the civilian population, Human Rights Watch said. It also violates Israel's duty as the occupying power to safeguard the health and welfare of the population under occupation.

On January 27, the Israeli Supreme Court will hear an appeal from Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups, asserting that the electricity cuts amount to collective punishment in violation of international humanitarian law.

Egypt shares some of the blame for the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, having largely kept its border with Rafah closed during the Israeli blockade, Human Rights Watch said. In the future, it should take steps to facilitate the flow of people and goods, especially humanitarian aid and emergency medical cases, while controlling the flow of arms and material used to attack Israeli civilians.

"The past three days prove that Egypt can contribute to alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Gaza," Stork said.

The breach is an act of freedom, and a strong warning

Luisa Morgantini - Vice-President of the European Parliament
Brussels, 23rd January 2008,

The thousands of Palestinians crossing the Rafah border point these last hours, the breach in the wall and the breaking of the siege decided by Israel against the civil population, are all true acts of resistance and an affirmation of the freedom of that people, not the Qassam rockets being fired at Israeli civilians that contravene international law, or the bloodshed inflicted on the Palestinian civil population perpetuated by Israeli raids.



When walls fall down there's always a sense of freedom. The images we are getting from southern Gaza, with men and women pouring into Egypt in order to buy essential supplies such as food and medicines that are nowhere to be found because of four days of total closure and black out in the Gaza Strip, are the natural result of the inhuman siege imposed by Israel: as rightly declared by President Mahmoud Abbas, the responsibility lies with Israeli policy, which has forced people who are completely worn out to cross the borders of the cage in which they are imprisoned and collectively punished with complete disregard for humanity and international law.

This is the predictable outcome of a policy of isolation, not only towards Hamas, but also the one and a half million Gaza inhabitants, a policy that the European Union has also supported by endorsing de facto the embargo decided by Israel. Hamas became stronger as a result of this situation, not weaker as can be seen by all the demonstrations that took place in the Islamic world during these cold and dark days in Gaza.

People pouring into Egypt and also people returning to Gaza after forced exile bringing any kinds of goods, show all of us the tragedy of a besieged but never resigned population, a population that has seen women in the front line of the demonstration struggling and being harshly repressed yesterday: these are the non-violent actions that should be supported and in which all Palestinians should gain renewed strength and unity. I hope they will not be used by anyone to apply a definitive separation of Gaza and the West Bank in what should be

the Palestinian State within the occupied territories of '67.

But for sure they are also a warning for the International Community as a whole, first and foremost the Quartet, the European Union and Egypt, which are responsible for the transit of goods and people through Rafah Crossing. Unfortunately, they have never been able to accomplish this task. I sincerely hope that Rafah border crossing with Egypt will be immediately opened and the legal freedom of movement for people and goods be established, not the arbitrary closures by Israel. Arms trafficking can be stopped without bombing and without enclosing the population in an open-air prison.

I hope that Olmert's government receives this message: only the end of the Gaza siege, the end of the raids and of the military occupation can guarantee security for both people and the coherence needed for the respect of all commitments to peace.

Urgent Joint Appeal 24 Jan 2008

Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, and the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme call for an immediate cessation of collective punitive measures against the civilian population in Gaza.

According to the most recent information collated by the World Health Organization and other UN agencies, Gaza crossing points Kerem Shalom, Sufa, Karni and Erez have remained closed since Friday, 19 January.

Despite the fact that since the 22nd of January a limited amount of supplies, including medical supplies, was permitted to enter the Gaza Strip, Israeli policy is to keep the crossings permanently closed except to answer emergency needs.

The Gaza-Egypt border remained open for the second day and Gazans are still going back and forth between Gaza and Al Arish, which is about 70Km south of Rafah, in the Sinai Peninsula. Since the way from Al Arish to the rest of Egypt is currently blocked, it is as yet unclear whether any patients have succeeded in accessing medical care in Cairo as a result.

Erez Crossing has been closed to all residents of Gaza except urgent humanitarian cases. In the past three days

the average number of patients to exit Gaza for care was fifteen.

Although Gaza's central power plant has resumed functioning after partial renewal of fuel supplies, electricity is still cut for several consecutive hours each day.

The Gaza European Hospital and Nasser hospital in southern Gaza have declared an emergency status due to depletion of their generators' fuel reserves; during electricity cuts all departments except the ICU and the operating room are closed. The 56 Primary Health Care facilities in Gaza also suffer as a result of the electricity cuts, 26 because they have no generators, and 19 others due to depletion of their generators' fuel reserves.

In addition, over the past ten days, over forty people have been killed by Israeli military operations. On January 18th, a government office was targeted near a wedding party, leading to dozens of injuries to innocent civilians, and the death of a woman inside her home.

This combination of siege and attack have led to a significant rise of burdens on Palestinian civilians and families, as well as an emergence of a new wave of feelings of panic, anger, suppression and helplessness.

Israeli government officials have declared that these collective measures are designed to exert political pressure on the civilian population of Gaza in order to end the rule of Hamas.

Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme

- Emphatically condemn the Israeli indiscriminate military attacks on Gaza, which cause death and harm to civilians.
- Emphatically condemn the intentional and collective denial of the most basic needs essential to life in Gaza, which has a punitive character contrary to Israel's obligations under international law.
- Emphatically condemn the exploitation by Israel of protected persons for political ends. The most recent declarations of the government indicate that its use of the term "security" as a justification for its acts is cynical and manipulative.
- Call urgently upon the international community to compel the State of Israel to desist immediately from these blatant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and to recognize and fulfill its responsibilities as an occupying power.

- Call upon Israel to immediately ensure reliable and permanent passage routes for goods and persons in order to re-activate all spheres of the Gaza economy, including the health system.
- Call for immediate withdrawal by Israel of its military forces and all aspects of effective control from the Gaza Strip.

Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme are deeply concerned at these humanitarian sanctions, which have rendered the Gaza Strip deeply vulnerable to any future measures. We call upon the International community to intervene for the consistent protection of the civilian population of Gaza in the long term.

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EDITORIAL

Gaza - A very temporary relief

By MIDDLE EAST TIMES

January 28, 2008

The crossing of nearly half of Gaza's population into Egypt last week in search of food and in defiance of Israel's blockade on the Strip brings into question Israel's policy of trying to contain – and marginalize – the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.

Indeed, the flow of 700,000 Palestinians over the course of two days through holes blasted in the barrier erected a few years ago by Israel, has also blasted apart the manner in which Israel, the United States, and the government of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, have so far dealt with Hamas.

What happened demonstrates that a new policy is badly needed. Last week's events bring proof that the measures applied to force Hamas into submission have been a complete failure. It shows that a military imposed solution is clearly not going to work. The forced containment of Gaza's population, which resulted in last week's exodus into Egypt, now only accentuates the crisis.

First, it brings Egypt back into the role of having to play policeman in Gaza, a role Cairo does not cherish. Israel placed the onus on Egypt, saying that Cairo was responsible for securing its side of the border. No doubt a phone call from Washington helped remind Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak of the millions of dollars the U.S. contributes every year, helping him remain in power. Cairo, however, faces its own problems with home-grown Islamist movements, and clearly does not need the complications of coming across as being the one obliged to enforce Israeli policy against fellow Arabs and Muslims. The last thing Mubarak needs now is to have the street mobilized in support of Hamas and giving way to an outcry against his regime.

Second, despite passing the ball to the Egyptians, saying that Egypt's border guards should have done a better job at preventing the Palestinians from crossing the border, the Gaza incident is a slap in the face to the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. It is a clear sign that Olmert, already one of the weakest prime ministers in the history of the Jewish state, has failed when it comes to dealing with Hamas.

And third, it is an embarrassment to the authority of Abbas who, after having lost control of the Gaza Strip to Hamas, has been unable to negotiate an agreement to ensure the well-being of the Palestinians in Gaza.

In retrospect, the Arab world and Israel got off easy last week and can breathe a sigh of relief; a very temporary relief however. The organizers of the 'march' into Egypt were quite confident that Egyptian border guards would not fire on fellow Arabs and Muslims. Had they done so and killed dozens of hungry Palestinians there would have been massive riots in Cairo and other Arab cities.

But now the leaders concerned by this precarious turn of events must act, and must act quickly, before the Gazans put on a repeat performance; next time deciding, perhaps, that they will march on an Israeli border post instead of the Egyptian one. Imagine the consequences then.

INTERVIEW

Interview with Head of Operations for the Middle East, International Committee Red cross (ICRC), Béatrice Megevand-Roggo
25-01-2008

Gaza: humanitarian situation remains critical

The crossing into Egypt of hundreds of thousands of Gazans desperate to stock up on basic supplies is a dramatic illustration of their deprivation over the last seven months according to the ICRC's Head of Operations for the Middle East, Béatrice Megevand-Roggo. The ICRC continues to insist that the basic needs of Gaza's population must be met in the long run to prevent more hardship.



How would you describe the current humanitarian situation in Gaza?

The humanitarian situation remains critical. Our delegates in Gaza say that the population's rush to stock up on food, fuel and medicines in Egypt is a dramatic illustration of the deprivation they've had to endure over the past seven months.

Gaza has been increasingly closed off from the outside world since June 2007, resulting in a severe shortage of basic supplies. Months of trade restrictions on imported goods have left the population highly vulnerable and recent events have threatened their humanitarian situation even further.

The infrastructure is close to collapse and humanitarian efforts are being severely hampered, and in some cases stopped altogether, by stringent rules and entry procedures imposed by the Israeli authorities at the few entry points to the territory.

What impact has the Rafah border opening had on conditions in the territory?

According to the United Nations (UNRWA), almost half of the population of Gaza has crossed into Egypt, via the Rafah border, since 23 January. The opening of the crossing has offered some breathing space for Gazans, who are also using this opportunity to seek medical care in hospitals in Cairo and organize meetings with family members in the region.

Our team on the ground says that there has been some improvement in access to electricity for homes, shops, water pumping

stations and hospitals in Gaza City, but private vehicles are rare on the city's streets because of fuel shortages, as well as a heavy flow of traffic between Gaza and Egypt. Children, who need transportation in order to get to school, have been unable to attend classes, with an absence rate of around 45 per cent reported on 24 January.

On 22 January, fuel shipments were allowed at Nahel Oz crossing point, but only 13 trucks carrying humanitarian food items were able to cross into Gaza at Kerem Shalom, which is significantly less than the daily authorized quota of 50 trucks. That crossing included one ICRC truck containing 40 m3 of urgently needed essential drugs and disposable items.

While it's been encouraging to see the partial re-opening of two crossing points controlled by Israel's Defense Forces, we're concerned that this will not be enough to ensure the regular supply of drugs and essential medical materials to Gaza's health care providers. Fuel shortages are also a continual concern for hospitals.

What needs to change, according to the ICRC?

We insist that the delivery of essential humanitarian goods must be secured in the long run to prevent more hardship for the population. We have called on all responsible authorities to open the crossing points in a consistent way to ensure that the basic needs of the Gaza population are met.

The full closure of the Strip from 17 to 22 January has added to what was already a dire situation. This is why the ICRC is reiterating the necessity to go back to the same levels of access for humanitarian goods and personnel, which existed before June 2007.

The ICRC is also reiterating its call for Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law, and for the Palestinian factions to stop targeting civilian areas and endangering the lives of civilians.