

Not Spin -- Israel Intentionally Turned Off the Lights

As early as January 3, Israel was alerted to the severe shortage in industrial diesel - but refused to relent from its punitive measures.

Human Rights Groups Submitted an Urgent Request to the Supreme Court Demanding that the State Allow Gaza Residents to Receive the Industrial Diesel Necessary to Produce Electricity

Gisha: This is an Intentional Crisis, Well-Planned in Advance.

Mon., Jan. 21, 2008: Human rights groups submitted today an urgent request demanding that the Supreme Court issue an interim injunction preventing Israel's military from continuing to restrict the supply of industrial diesel to the Gaza Strip. The request was submitted after Gaza's power plant was forced to completely stop the production of electricity, on Sunday, January 20, 2008, at 20:00, due to the shortage in industrial diesel. Currently, the Gaza Strip is suffering a 43% deficit in electricity. There is only 120 megawatts supplied by Israel and 17 megawatts supplied by Egypt to Rafah. During the winter, the demand for electricity in the Gaza Strip is approximately 240 megawatts, or more, depending on the weather. The Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO) is unable to provide the electricity needed to operate hospitals, water pumps and schools.

Hospitals in Gaza have declared a state of emergency and have shut down operating rooms, the water system is struggling to operate, and power outages are scheduled for 16 hours a day or more.

According to Gisha: "This is an intentional crisis, well-planned in advance. For months, we have warned that Israel is not allowing Gaza residents to purchase the amount of industrial diesel they need in order to produce electricity. At the beginning of January, we warned that the reserves were depleted. The arithmetic is simple: if Israel prevents the power plant from obtaining the amount of diesel it requires, the plant cannot operate. This is an intentional decision designed to harm civilians, in flagrant violation of international law".

Chronicle of Deliberately Turning Out the Lights

* On January 3, 10 human rights groups submitted an urgent request to Israel's Supreme Court asking for an injunction against the industrial diesel cuts. The groups warned that fuel reserves had been exhausted in Gaza's power station, which serves Gaza City and the Middle area, home to 800,000 residents. The groups included an affidavit from utility officials in Gaza warning that Gaza's power plant would have to reduce production if the restrictions on its ability to obtain industrial diesel were not lifted. Israel controls Gaza's borders and does not permit supply except via Israeli-controlled crossings.

* On January 5, Gaza's power plant reduced electricity production by 30% because of the shortage in usable industrial diesel. Access to drinking water was interrupted, and the functioning of hospitals was compromised.

* On January 10, Israel announced that it would temporarily permit Gaza residents to purchase industrial diesel at the level they ordered prior the October 28, 2007 cut (2.2 million liters per week).

* On January 11, the human rights groups warned that 2.2 million liters/week is insufficient, because in the winter months, the power plant needs more fuel to run the turbines. The groups told the court that in order to operate properly, the power plant needs 3.5 million liters industrial diesel per week and approximately 2 million liters to replenish its exhausted reserves.

* On January 13, the court rejected the petitioner's request for an injunction against the

industrial diesel cuts, and on January 16, the court rejected their request for reconsideration.

* On January 16, the human rights groups warned the State Attorney's office that the amount of industrial diesel supplied to Gaza is insufficient and that the power plant risks shutting down one of its two turbines, for lack of fuel.

* On the morning of January 20, the human rights groups warned that one turbine had already shut down because of the shortage in industrial diesel, and that the second one would stop working, too, if the power plant was not permitted to receive additional industrial diesel immediately.

* On the evening of January 20, at 8 pm, Gaza's power plant ceased production.

* Despite Israel's commitment to allow Gaza residents to receive 2.2 million liters industrial diesel per week (insufficient in itself), the week of Jan. 13-Jan. 20, Israel permitted Gaza residents to receive only 1.975 million liters, and it has not allowed any diesel to be supplied January 20 and 21. Gaza's power plant needs 3.5 million liters industrial diesel per week plus 2 million liters reserves.