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OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS  
occupied Palestinian territory

## The Gaza Strip: Access Report

April 2005

This report monitors monthly access and movement in the Gaza Strip. <sup>1</sup>

### Overview

During March and the first half of April movement in and out of the Gaza Strip steadily improved. However, the situation deteriorated during the latter part of April following restrictions on Palestinian movement through Erez and periodic closing of Abu Houli junction. Access problems remain with the internal Gaza Strip enclaves, most notably Al Mawasi and As Siafa while a fourth enclave has now been created at Abu Nahiya. In the last four weeks, the Israeli authorities have not allowed United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to import petrol into the Gaza Strip.

### 1. Gaza Strip Crossing Points:

#### A. Erez crossing and industrial estate

Until the end of the third week in April, there was a steady increase in the number of Palestinian workers and merchants entering Israel and the Erez industrial zone. In the **beginning of March, less than 1,000 workers a day** were entering Israel, but by 31 March this figure tripled to 3,700 workers. On 21 April 4,500 workers entered Israel. With the onset of the Jewish Passover Holiday, **Erez crossing closed to most Palestinians on 25 April** while the industrial estate closed earlier on 22 April. Both the crossing and industrial estate remain closed as of publication of the report. This closure has been imposed by the Israeli authorities on the grounds that some workers have been submitting false documents while trying to leave the Gaza Strip.

The number of workers entering the Erez industrial estate also showed a steady rise prior to the closure on 22 April with daily figures regularly **over 650**. This compares to a **daily average of 562 workers throughout March**. Similarly, the number of merchants crossing into Israel increased throughout April, with daily figures reaching over 400 on some occasions compared to a March average of 155.

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### Key Dates

- 31 August 2004: Erez crossing was closed for almost three months following the discovery of explosives on a Palestinian worker trying to cross into Israel.
- 28 November 2004: A limited number of merchants and workers were able to re-enter Israel and the industrial estate.
- 14 January 2005: The crossing was again closed following an attack by Palestinian militants in Karni that killed six Israelis (see below).
- 13 February 2005: The crossing reopened and there was a steady and sustained increase in the number of workers entering Israel and industrial estate.
- 22 April 2005: Erez industrial estate closed.
- 25 April 2005: Erez crossing closed to all but the most senior PA officials.

## **B. Karni Cargo Crossing Point**

### **Imports and exports**

Increased security measures were introduced at Karni following its reopening on 7 February 2005. These security measures led to delays in the processing of cargo throughout most of February. In March, opening hours at the container section were extended to 11 pm (compared to 4 pm) and the continuation of these extended hours throughout April, has reduced the backlog and increased the number of containers entering and exiting Gaza.

Accurate figures on the movement of imports and exports through Karni remains problematic as there is inconsistency in the way in which the total volume of cargo is recorded by each source - Karni authority, the Israeli DCL and the Palestinian Ministry of Civil Affairs. In spite of this qualification, all sources show an increase in the total number of imports and exports between March and April.

### **Humanitarian supplies**

Movement of container traffic in and out of the Gaza Strip became extremely difficult following the suicide attack at Ashdod port on 14 March 2004 that killed 10 Israelis. By January 2005, UNRWA had more than 900 loaded containers waiting at Ashdod and 350 empty ones stuck inside the Gaza Strip.

From 27 February 2005, an agreement was reached between UNRWA and the Israeli authorities to allow **20 full containers to enter the Gaza Strip** daily (Sunday through Thursday) via Sufa checkpoint, and **40 empty containers to leave the Gaza Strip daily** (Monday through Thursday) via Karni Cargo Crossing Point. Sufa has been closed since 29 March with all incoming containers now passing through Karni.

Between 1 and 30 April, 240 containers- (twenty feet equivalent units- TFEUs) were received and 317 containers (TFEUs) were returned. In total, **331 laden containers remain in Ashdod port compared to 700 at the end of March.**

**In the last four weeks of April, the Israeli authorities**

have not allowed UNRWA to import petrol this is likely to have implications for UN field operations within the next three weeks, if this situation continues.

#### Key Dates

- 14 January: Karni Cargo Crossing Point was closed following an attack in the area that killed six Israelis.
- 7 February: Karni Cargo Crossing Point reopened for the passage of agricultural goods and humanitarian assistance.
- 29 March: Sufa crossing closed for incoming containers until further notice.

### C. Rafah crossing

#### Palestinian movement

A daily average of **285** Palestinians crossed **into** the Gaza Strip via Rafah crossing point throughout April compared to 265 people in March.

While the number of arrivals has increased in the last month, the **number of departures has fallen**. In **March**, an average of **360** people were crossing **daily** into Egypt from Rafah while in **April** the figure was down to **290**. There is no obvious reason for this reduction in the daily passage as there is no closures at the crossing point.

The Foreign Relations Branch of the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) has stated in its most recent weekly report that a request has been made to the IDF **to increase opening hours at Rafah crossing from 5 pm until 9 pm**.

Serious concerns continue to be expressed by passengers and Palestinian officials based at Rafah crossing point over the use of an x-ray screening machine installed by the Israeli authorities earlier this year. Specifically, Palestinians have expressed fears over the level of radiation that is transmitted by the machine. There are also cultural sensitivities regarding the screening of women. The World Health Organisation at the request of the Palestinian Ministry of Health has been following up this issue with the Israeli Ministry of Health and is currently awaiting clarifications.

#### Key Dates

- 12 December 2004: Rafah crossing closed following the deaths of five Israeli soldiers during an attack by Palestinian militants.
- 21 January: The crossing reopened for arrivals from Egypt.
- 1 February: The crossing reopened for departures with the exception of Palestinian males aged 16 to 35. This group had been prevented from leaving the Gaza Strip since 17 April 2004, with all but a very few exceptions.
- 20 February: Palestinian males aged 16 to 35 were allowed to leave the Gaza Strip.

## **2. Internal Movement and Access within the Gaza Strip:**

### **A. Abu Houli junction**

As of 9 February, Abu Houli checkpoint has become operational 24 hours a day for vehicular traffic. Prior to this, the opening hours had been from 7 am until 6 pm. From 9 March, private vehicles were once again allowed to pass through the junction but with the requirement of four people per vehicle. Between 17 June 2004 and 9 March 2005, all travel across the junction had to be in service taxis or commercial vehicles. People are still not allowed to cross by foot.

**Periodic closures of the checkpoint were reinsituted by the IDF since 21 April.** On that date, the checkpoint closed at 3.30 pm and did not reopen until 22 April at 2.30 pm. The junction was totally closed on 27 April, and while it reopened at 6:00 am on 28 April it shut again at 8:00 am and did not reopen until 9:00 pm.

### **B. Palestinian enclaves.**

#### **1. Al Mawasi**

Situated within the Israeli Gush Katif settlement block in the southern Gaza Strip are approximately 5,800 Palestinians living in Al Mawasi. Movement in and out of the enclave has been tightly controlled over the last four years. Entry and exit at Al Mawasi is only possible on foot via the Tufah checkpoint in the west of Khan Younis camp while the southern entry-exit point at Tel es Sultan checkpoint has been closed since 14 June 2004.

The checkpoint opens twice daily from approximately 8am to 1pm, and 2:30pm to 5pm. Male Al Mawasi ID holders between 16 and 30 years of age require prior coordination with the IDF to pass through the checkpoint with similar conditions applying to females between 16 and 25. While international agencies have reported an improvement in their ability to obtain coordinated access into Al Mawasi in recent months, **residents still face long delays** in returning to the enclave. **Tufah** checkpoint was **completely closed on 18 and 27 April**, with limited access for residents also reported on 12 and 26 April.

#### **2. Siafa**

In the northern Israeli settlement block there are approximately 190 Palestinians living in Siafa. **Movement** into the enclave **remains tightly controlled** by the IDF. The opening hours in and out of the Siafa enclave are 7:30 am and 2:00 pm. The IDF controlled entry-exit gate is not open for a fixed time, and closes once people who have been waiting are allowed to pass. The limited number of hours has created persistent problems for school children who need to access nearby schools. Since 13 February, the IDF has permitted Palestinians aged 30 and older to pass in and out of the area on foot without prior coordination. Both males and females aged 16 to 29 require 48 hours prior coordination with the IDF.

#### **3. Al Ma'ani**

The Al Ma'ani, enclave is located inside the Kfar Darom settlement and is home to around 180 Palestinians. The situation here has not been as acute as in Al Mawasi and Siafa as the entry-exit gate generally opens four times daily. However, life inside the enclave remains problematic.

#### **4. Abu Nahiya**

A **fourth enclave has emerged since the end of March** with the erection of a new fence around the Abu Nahiya area, south of Kfar Darom settlement. Approximately 16 families reside in the area. No vehicles are allowed in and out of the area. An access point in the fence allows 24 hour passage for residents.

#### **3. Fishing**

Since the election of Mahmoud Abbas, the Israeli authorities are now permitting fishing up to 10 nautical miles from the Gaza Strip coast compared to 6 nautical miles previously. Fishing is still not permitted over most of the Al Mawasi coastline, since October 2003.

7 May 2005

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<sup>1</sup> During the Sharm El-Sheikh summit in February 2005, PM Sharon announced an easing in access restrictions for 1.4 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip.

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Contact us for more information at email: [ochaopt@un.org](mailto:ochaopt@un.org) | Address: P.O. Box 38712 Jerusalem |  
Phone: +972 (0)2 5829962 / 5825853 | Fax: +972 (0)2 5825841  
[www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org)