



Gaza Strip Situation Report - 30 January 2007, 9 am

Ceasefire between Palestinian factions enters into force after five days of intense inter-factional fighting

- Overview
- Recent internal violence
- Access
- Electricity supply

Overview

The ceasefire between Palestinian factions announced by Palestinian Foreign Minister, Mohammed al Zahar in the early hours of this morning is holding. The ceasefire follows the heaviest loss of life from inter-factional fighting recorded by OCHA with at least 34 deaths and 133 injuries (Palestinian Ministry of Health) between the evening of 25 January and the evening of 29 January.

Field reports at 7.15am today from UN area staff indicate that all fighting has ceased, Palestinian gunmen have withdrawn from the streets and unofficial checkpoints are no longer present. Negotiations are currently underway to secure the release of hostages that were seized by both sides over the previous five days. A number of roads remain closed in Gaza city notably around military installations including the Sarayia and Preventive Security Force Head Quarters in Tal al Hawa. Checkpoints are still in place under the control of the National Security Forces however traffic is moving freely.

Recent internal violence

On the evening of 25 January, Palestinian gunmen detonated a roadside bomb targeting a jeep carrying members of the Hamas-affiliated Executive Support Force (ESF) in Jabalia (northern Gaza Strip). Two ESF members were killed, triggering an escalation in internal violence which saw attacks and counter-attacks by members of Hamas and Fatah throughout the Gaza Strip with the exception of Rafah.

Fighting occurred in densely-populated areas leading to deaths and injuries among civilian bystanders. The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) reported that five of the 34 dead are children while 34 children and four women are among the 133 injured. The fiercest fighting took place in Jabalia and also in

the Tel al Hawwa area of Gaza city where the headquarters of the Preventive Security Force (PSF) are located.

Militias have laid siege to houses with heavy machine gunfire and rocket launchers while gunmen entered Al Heda'ya mosque in Tel al Hawwa during prayers last Friday evening. In the clashes that ensued five worshippers were killed and another four were injured. Kidnappings by both Fatah and Hamas were a regular occurrence with at least 31 such abductions reported. In five instances the abductees were shot in the legs before being released.



Against the backdrop of spiralling violence, Gazan families took refuge in their homes with significant disruption to their daily lives. A number of roads in central Gaza city were closed or subject to check point control by the National Security Forces (NSF). Elsewhere in the Gaza Strip, impromptu checkpoints were erected by masked militias. Movement of people and vehicles was minimal and many shops remained closed throughout the period of the conflict. Ministry of Education (MoE) and UNRWA schools are currently closed due to the annual winter vacation.

The Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights reported four separate attacks on ambulances and medical crews. Two MoH ambulances were hijacked by gunmen in Gaza city on the evening of 28 January for several hours and the drivers were reportedly beaten before being released along with their vehicles. In another incident on the evening of 28 January, an UNRWA ambulance was hit by a stray bullet while driving in Gaza city.

Throughout January to date 53 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip, including seven children, and 244 injured in Palestinian internal violence. This compares with 135 Palestinians killed throughout 2005 and 2006 during internal violence in the Gaza Strip, the majority since October 2006 when violence escalated.¹ Inter-factional violence has spiked over three periods since this time: October and December 2006 and January 2007.

Three Palestinians, including a 17 year-old boy, were killed and 15 injured by the IDF in January. The majority of casualties occurred in the northern Gaza Strip. One Israeli was injured by mortar shells fired by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip. A fragile ceasefire between the Israelis and Palestinians brokered on 26 November 2006 after five months of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) military operations largely continues to hold.

Access

Overall, Palestinian access in and out of the Gaza Strip remains severely restricted. Rafah crossing continues to fail to operate continuously as envisaged under the November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA). Travelers have not been able to exit the Gaza Strip through Rafah crossing since 8 January. The crossing has opened on only three days since this time and for arrivals only (365 people crossed into the Gaza Strip on 9 January and a further 2,546 on 22 and 23 of January according to EU BAM). In total, the crossing has only opened for eight days in 2007, almost exclusively for pilgrims. Regular planned movement by traders, workers, students and others is impossible.

Karni commercial crossing continues to operate on all scheduled days but for only half of the scheduled number of hours and not at full capacity (not all bays are used). Since the beginning of 2007 an average of 205 truckloads of goods (excluding aggregates) has been imported (compared to the daily average in 2006 of 156). An average of 43 trucks of exported goods has been recorded during the same period.

Erez crossing operates well for the few senior traders with permits (for example, 415 traders crossed on 23 January) but remains closed to Palestinian workers. Sufa crossing has been open for the import of aggregates on all scheduled days in 2007.

Electricity supply

Regular power outages lasting between two and 36 hours have occurred in the northern Gaza Strip and parts of Gaza city since the last week of December 2006. These cuts have come as a result of a seasonal increase in demand as temperatures fall and people turn to electrical heaters. In addition, the deteriorating security situation has meant that the number of illegal connections has increased and so the network has been short-circuiting on a more regular basis due to overloading.



The extent of the power outages during the 2006-2007 winter period is unprecedented and follows the bombing of the Gaza power plant on 28 June 2006 by the Israeli Air Force (IAF). The air strike targeted and destroyed all six transformers. While replacement transformers arrived in the Gaza Strip from Egypt in November 2006, the current capacity remains insufficient by approximately 40 Mega Watts (MW) or approximately 30% less of its original output. The south of the Gaza Strip, including Khan Younis and Rafah, which receive most of their power supply from Egypt and Israel have been unaffected.

The Palestinian Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MoENR) is considering three options which could run simultaneously to resolve the lack of capacity. The first option involves the purchase of five additional transformers and would take three to four months from sourcing to installation. The second and third options entail increased the capacity from Egypt and/or the Israel Electrical Company. The priority of the MoENR is to resolve this issue in the coming weeks to ensure sufficient capacity for the next seasonal peak during the summer months.

Endnote

- 1- Casualties resulting from internal violence have only been systematically reported since May 2006. Internal violence includes casualties caused by factional violence or family feuding and internal demonstrations (that are linked to the conflict/occupation).