



Palestinians from Gaza board special buses at Cairo airport that transport them directly to Rafah border crossing

The long journey home

Since Rafah border crossing opened on February 18th, 2,535 Palestinians have entered Gaza via Rafah. However, when Egyptian authorities closed Rafah on January 25 due to the events in Egypt, 5,000 Palestinians from Gaza were registered as being abroad. Even with Rafah now open, many Palestinians trapped abroad during Rafah's closure are still finding it difficult to make their way back home.

Zaina Lababidi, a finance officer with Oxfam in Gaza, had traveled to Oxford for training on January 22nd, just 3 days before the Rafah border crossing closed. Since the Egyptian authorities closed Rafah the mother of two has been stuck in Oxford.

With Rafah closed, Zaina looked for alternate ways to get home. Oxfam helped Zaina apply for a visa for Jordan and an Israeli permit to enter Gaza via Erez crossing, but neither the Jordanian nor Israeli officials have yet replied.

When Rafah opened last week, Zaina was relieved that she could finally get back home. "I was quite happy to go back to my two children after more than a month of being away. I booked my ticket and went straight to Heathrow airport," Zaina said.

At the airport, however, Zaina was turned away. To avoid Palestinians being stuck in airport detention in Cairo during Rafah's closure, the Egyptian authorities issued a request not to let them fly. Travelers from Gaza are only given transit permits for Egypt, which allow them to use Cairo airport as a transit point for Rafah. Once Palestinians from Gaza disembark in Cairo airport, they are escorted by security to a special bus that goes direct to Rafah, where their paperwork is processed to cross back to Gaza.

"At the airport, they informed me that I cannot fly to Egypt because the Egyptian government still has not notified Heathrow airport about allowing Palestinians to resume flying to Cairo," Zaina explained. Although Zaina has contacted both the Palestinian and Egyptian embassies in London, they were unable to tell her when she may be cleared for landing in Cairo.

Oxfam partner Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) in Gaza has issued a statement asking that the relevant Egyptian authorities and Palestinian embassies abroad take immediate steps to allow Palestinians from Gaza stranded abroad freedom of movement to return home. Hamdi Shaqurra, PCHR's Deputy Director of Program Affairs says that there are hundreds of people in the same situation as Zaina, among them patients who underwent surgery and children who need to attend school.

1. Headlines

- **Mortars/rockets/casualties/incursions:** Palestinian armed groups reportedly fired 6 mortars, 1 IED, 8 homemade rockets (HMR), 1 Qassam rocket and 1 Grad rocket towards Israeli forces this week. The Grad rocket fired from Gaza this week was reported to have struck a house in Beersheba. Following the incident, 10 people were reportedly transferred to the hospital for treatment for shock but no injuries were reported.

There were reports of 3 incursions, 2 shells, and 17 airstrikes carried out by Israeli forces this week. 1 militant and 1 civilian, a 10-year-old girl, were reportedly killed as a result of the airstrikes. An additional 33 Palestinians were reported injured as a result of Israeli military operations this week.

Last week, there were reports of 2 incursions and 3 HMR fired by Palestinian armed groups. There were reports of 3 Palestinian civilians killed and 3 injured as a result of Israeli military operations last week.

- **Fishermen:** For the fourth consecutive week, there was 1 report of an Israeli naval vessel firing at Palestinian fisherman. Since January 2009, Israeli naval forces have restricted the access of Palestinian fishing boats to three nautical miles from the coast; in practice, access is sometimes restricted to as little as one nautical mile, banning access to around 85% of Gaza's fishing water.
- **Tunnel related fatalities:** There were two incidents reported this week of tunnels beneath the border between Gaza and Egypt collapsing, resulting in injuries to six Palestinians. Last week, three Palestinian workers were reported injured when a tunnel beneath the border between Gaza and Egypt collapsed.
- **Palestinians in the access restricted area (the so-called "buffer zone"):** There were 5 reports of Israeli troops firing at Palestinians in the access restricted area inside Gaza's perimeter this week, resulting in the reported injury of 4 Palestinian civilians. Last week, there were 4 reports of Israeli troops firing at Palestinians in this area, with 3 civilians reported killed and 3 others reported injured.

In 2010, 52 Palestinians were reported killed and 189 others were reported injured by Israeli troops while in the so-called buffer zone. Israel first imposed a 150 metre-wide security 'buffer' within Gaza's perimeter in 2000. In certain areas along the northern and eastern perimeters, this official buffer extends up to 500 metres into Gaza. In practice, Israel restricts access to agricultural land up to 1,000-1,500 metres from the fence, which accounts for more than 30% of Gaza's agricultural land and a significant number of water wells. Most of the Gaza Strip's animal production is also concentrated in this area.

- **Rafah border crossing:** On Tuesday, February 22nd the Rafah border crossing opened fully to allow Palestinians to cross both into and from Egypt. The week before, Rafah border crossing opened to allow Palestinians trapped in Egypt and abroad to enter Gaza, but did not yet permit people in Gaza to travel out. With Rafah border now fully functioning in both directions, there were reports this week of 1,435 Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt, 931 leaving Gaza for Egypt, and 57 who were denied entry into Egypt. Last week, 1,100 Palestinians entered Gaza from Egypt via Rafah.

Before re-opening on February 18th, the Rafah border crossing had been officially closed by the Egyptian authorities since January 29th due to the events taking place in Egypt. This

closure of Rafah border crossing was the longest period Rafah had remained closed since a one month closure in mid 2008. The closing of the Rafah border has had a severe impact on humanitarian movement and access, as Egypt serves as the main transit point for medical cases and other people not approved to cross into Israel via the Erez crossing. There are approximately 500 medical cases registered with the authorities in Gaza who need to use Rafah to travel abroad for scheduled or ongoing medical treatment. While Rafah has been closed, these people have been unable to travel to reach medical treatment.

- **Power plant and electricity supply:** Since January 5th, Gaza's power plant has not placed an order for industrial fuel to be transferred from Israel. The fuel for Gaza's power plant is now being supplied through the tunnels underneath the Gaza-Egypt border in the form of Egyptian diesel, which has a much lower price than the industrial fuel supplied from Israel.

While there were reports of fuel shortages over the last two weeks as a result of the situation in Egypt, this week the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border are reported to be operating normally. OCHA estimates that the power plant is buying between 300,000 and 400,000 litres of diesel from the tunnels everyday.

In addition to what is procured daily from the tunnels, the power plant in Gaza reportedly has a two-week back up supply of fuel, capable of running the plant at an output of 60 Mw for 14 days.

- **Cooking gas:** 690 tons of cooking gas reportedly entered Gaza this week, representing 39 percent of the 1,750 tons of cooking gas needed weekly. Last week, 32 percent, or 574 tons of cooking gas reportedly entered Gaza. The overall cooking gas shortage has been a main concern for humanitarian agencies since November 2009. Shortages of cooking gas are hardest felt in the winter, when families rely on canisters of cooking gas to fuel space heaters during nightly electricity cuts. Cooking gas cannot safely be transported through the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border as it is highly combustible and requires a special pipeline to transport in bulk. The one tunnel equipped with a cooking gas pipeline was reportedly destroyed in an Israeli airstrike in December 2010.
- **Diesel/petrol:** No diesel or benzine was reported to have been delivered to the private sector this week or last week. A near total ban on fuel imports for public sale was put in place by the Government of Israel in October 2008. Around 600,000 litres of diesel and 200,000 litres of petrol for public sale are reported to enter Gaza every day through tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border (OCHA, January 2011).
- **Exports:** This week, there were 3 truckloads of flowers reported to have left Gaza. This small amount of exports represents .006 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average of all exports leaving Gaza.* Last week, 9 truckloads of exports were reported to have left. The limited exports are allowed as a result of an agreement between Israel and the Netherlands allowing limited exports of flowers and strawberries. The agreement resumed on 28 November 2010.

**Pre-blockade weekly average (490 truckloads) is calculated on the daily average of all truckloads that exited Gaza between January 2005 and mid June 2007, before Israel's imposition of the blockade.*

- **Truckloads of supplies:** A total of 1,081 truckloads of supplies reportedly entered Gaza from Israel this week. This number is 38 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average of all trucks

entering Gaza.* Last week, 1,030 truckloads of supplies were reportedly allowed entry into Gaza.

While imports remain limited, and raw materials severely restricted, exports remain banned almost entirely except for limited truckloads of strawberries and carnations exported to the Netherlands. As a result, the scale of economic activity remains heavily dependent on local demand in Gaza, which in turn is constrained by the low purchasing power of the population and the relatively small size of the local market. Until crossings are fully opened for export, the impact of the easing of the blockade on unemployment, poverty and food insecurity rates remains limited.

**Pre-blockade weekly average (2,807 truckloads) is calculated based on the monthly average of all truckloads that entered during the first five months of 2007, before Israel's imposition of the blockade.*

2. Humanitarian trucks (week):

Truck originator	Total for week 20- 26 February
UNRWA	126
CMWU	15
UNICEF	1
Gaza Institution	26
Commercial	726
ICRC	4
Islamic Relief	1
Karni conveyor (gravel, wheat, grain, animal feed)	162
WFP	8
ANERA	5
German Development Project	7
Total trucks for the week	1,081
Percentage of pre-blockade average (first five months of 2007)	38 %

3. Fuel deliveries (week)

		Diesel	Petrol	Cooking Gas
20- 26 February		0	0	690 tons
	Percentage of need *	0		39%
Previous week		0	0	574 tons
* Fuel association 2006 estimates - ** Imports of diesel and petrol for the general public and public sector in Gaza were exceptionally authorized on 6 occasions since October 2008				

This update is compiled by **Oxfam International** from the best available information drawn from reliable international sources. Some of the information is preliminary and may be updated in subsequent reports.

Request* of Industrial Fuel to the Power Plant via Israel (week):

Industrial diesel from Israel	Previous week	20- 26 February
0	0	0
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply capacity of 80 MW		0%

Estimates of fuel supplied to the power plant from the tunnels

Diesel from the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border	Previous week	20-26 February
	2.1- 2.8 million litres**	2.1- 2.8 million litres**
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply of 80 MW	60-80%	60-80%

**The power plant has not requested any industrial fuel to be transferred from Israel since January 5, 2010*

***based on OCHA estimates of 300,000- 400,000 litres of diesel per day*

4. Contact information

Willow Heske, Communication Officer in Jerusalem: +972 (0) 57 723 4126 – willow.heske@oxfamnovib.nl

Karl Schembri, Communication Officer in Gaza: +972 (0) 59 89 10 981 – kschembri@oxfam.org.uk