

**Colouring Al Zarqa**

The children's brigade invaded the new public garden built by Oxfam in Al Zarqa (meaning blue in Arabic), a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Gaza City living under the poverty line and further impoverished by the blockade. Oxfam has been working with the local community over the last year, connecting households to the sewage and water networks, levelling

roads and improving the overall environmental situation while embarking on an intensive public health awareness campaign promoting safe hygiene behaviour in families, schools and local institutions. The relationship Oxfam built with the community in the early stages of the project funded by AusAid is also helping to mobilise residents to demand their right to water and basic infrastructure from local authorities. On Thursday 23 December, a public garden for use by children and their families was opened as part of the project.

"Working with the children and the community of Al Zarqa, we know how important it is for young people living here to have a safe place to play and a break from the hardships of daily life under the blockade," said Tracy Wise, Oxfam's Public Health Coordinator in Gaza. "Two years after the Israeli military operation against Gaza, these children are still suffering from trauma but they crave a normal childhood where streets, playgrounds and houses are safe, water is clean and planes flying above are simply carrying passengers."

Photo and text: Karl Schembri/Oxfam

1. Headlines

- **Mortars/rockets/casualties/incursions:** Palestinian armed groups reportedly fired 2 rockets and 31 mortar shells towards Israel or Israeli forces this week, as compared to 1 rocket and 3 mortar shells reportedly fired last week. One of the rockets landed in Ashkelon close to a kindergarten in Kibbutz Zikim, injuring a 14-year-old girl (see further down).

Israeli forces reportedly launched 15 airstrikes and carried out 1 incursion and 1 firefight this week, as compared to 1 airstrike reported last week.

No Palestinians were reported killed as a result of Israeli fire this week, as opposed to 6 reported last week, including one Palestinian boy killed at sea. Sixteen Palestinians were reported injured, including 1 fisherman and 5 workers in the so-called "buffer zone" along the Gaza perimeter (see Fishermen and Palestinians in the "Buffer Zone" further down). Last week, 9 Palestinians were reported injured by Israeli forces, including 5 in the buffer zone, and 2 16-year-old children were killed by an explosive object reported by local sources to be a remnant of an Israeli weapon.

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1 Israeli casualty was reported this week when a Qassam rocket fired from the vicinity of Al Waha resort landed in Ashkelon on the morning of 21 December, marking the second Israeli casualty from Palestinian fire since March 2010 (first casualty reported on 8 December 2010). No Israeli casualties were reported last week.

- **Fishermen:** 6 incidents of Israeli naval vessels firing at Palestinian fishermen were reported this week, resulting in the injury of one fisherman. Last week, 1 incident was reported which resulted in the death of a 15-year-old youth whose boat capsized after it was targeted by Israeli navy west of Rafah. 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
- **Tunnel related fatalities:** Three missiles were reported to have been fired by the Israeli airforce on tunnels located beneath the Gaza-Egypt border, causing no casualties. No casualties were reported last week.
- **Palestinians in the “buffer zone”:** 4 incidents of Israeli fire in the so-called “buffer zone” along the perimeter with Gaza were reported this week, resulting in 5 reported injuries of Palestinian workers: 3 of them gravel collectors, 1 farmer and 1 shepherd. Last week, 2 incidents were reported resulting in 4 injuries of Palestinian workers collecting scrap metal.

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.

- **Rafah border crossing:** The Rafah border crossing with Egypt was officially open 5 days this week for medical cases, students and those with visas to third countries. A total of 1,536 people were reported to have entered Gaza, 1,405 left and 215 were denied entry to Egypt through Rafah. Last week, 1,256 people were reported to have entered Gaza, 1,579 left and 174 were denied entry to Egypt through Rafah.

Since June 2010, there has been a significant rise in the number of people crossing weekly through Rafah: the week before the attack on the Gaza flotilla and the opening of the Rafah border 45 people left Gaza, 748 entered and 2 were refused entry to Egypt through Rafah.

- **Power plant and electricity supply:** A total of 694,025 litres of industrial fuel was delivered this week for Gaza’s power plant, which is only 20% of the 3.5 million litres of fuel needed weekly at the current maximum capacity of 80Mw. Last week, 909,664 litres of industrial fuel was transferred into Gaza from Israel.

Daily life, as well as the provision of essential services including regular water supply, sewage treatment and removal, and the functioning of health services, continues to be negatively affected by the chronic lack of electricity.

- **Cooking gas:** Only 542 tons of cooking gas entered Gaza this week, which is 31% of the normal weekly level of need of 1,750 tons. Last week, 453 tons of cooking gas were reported to have entered Gaza. The overall cooking gas shortage has been a main concern for humanitarian agencies since November 2009.
- **Diesel/petrol:** No diesel or benzine were 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 100,000 litres of diesel and 100,000 litres of petrol are reported to enter Gaza every day through tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border (OCHA, 4 May 2010).

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- **Truckloads of supplies:** A total of 729 truckloads of supplies were allowed entry into Gaza this week – 594 through Kerem Shalom crossing, 135 through Karni conveyor. This is the equivalent of 26% of the pre-blockade weekly average of all truckloads entering Gaza*. Last week, 865 truckloads were permitted entry.

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.*

- **Exports:** 17 truckloads of strawberries and 3 truckloads of carnations were allowed to be exported from Gaza this week. Last week, 26 truckloads of strawberries and 4 truckloads of carnations were allowed to be exported 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.

Since the increased blockade restrictions on Gaza commenced in June 2007, only 728 truckloads of exports have left Gaza, all of which were strawberries and cut flowers. This compares to a monthly average of 1,086 exported truckloads from Gaza in the first five months of 2007 before the blockade.

- **Internal violence:** Two injuries and two deaths were reported this week as a result of internal violence and related accidents. Two separate family disputes led to exchanges of gun fire and two persons reportedly killed, while an explosion in a house resulting in two injuries was attributed by local reports to an explosive device detonating prematurely while being handled by militants. There were no cases of internal violence reported last week.

2. Humanitarian trucks (week):

Truck originator	Total for week 19-25 Dec
UNRWA	48
ICRC	0
Water utility	0
Electrical company	0
Donations	2
Commercial	544
Karni conveyor (gravel, wheat grain, animal feed)	135
Total trucks for the week	729
Percentage of pre-blockade average first five months of 2007)	26%

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3. Fuel deliveries (week)

		Diesel	Petrol	Cooking Gas
19-25 December		0	0	542 tons
	Percentage of need *	0		31%
Previous week		0		453 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				

Delivery of Industrial Fuel to the Power Plant (week):

Industrial diesel	Previous week	19-25 December
	909,664 litres	694,025
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply capacity of 80 MW		20%

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