

PUBLIC  
UA 247/07  
ISRAEL/  
OCCUPIED  
PALESTINIAN  
TERRITORIES (OPT)

Fear for Safety

1.5 Million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip

AI Index: MDE 15/062/2007  
21 September 2007

Amnesty International is concerned that the implementation of the Israeli government decision of 19 September that "*Additional sanctions will be placed on the Hamas regime in order to restrict the passage of various goods to the Gaza Strip and reduce the supply of fuel and electricity. Restrictions will also be placed on the movement of people to and from the Gaza Strip*" would cause a further deterioration of the already dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and adversely affect the 1.5 million Palestinians who live there.

Drastically reducing the supply of basic necessities such as electricity and fuel to the entire population of Gaza in retaliation for rocket attacks carried out by members of armed groups would constitute collective punishment of Gaza's population in violation international humanitarian law, which categorically prohibits all forms of collective punishment. Gazans cannot obtain electricity, fuel or alternative sources of energy from elsewhere because of the blockades imposed by Israel.

Electricity and fuel, which have already been in short supply in the Gaza Strip for some time, are used to pump water and shortages have had negative consequences for the health and well-being of the population there. A further reduction in the availability of electricity and water would exacerbate existing problems - such as the insufficient supplies of clean water for drinking and personal hygiene, inadequate sewage treatment and waste disposal, and the spoiling of already scarce food and medicines, due to the inability to refrigerate them.

A further tightening of the already stringent blockade imposed by the Israeli authorities on the passage of goods into and out of Gaza would prolong and worsen the virtual paralysis of Gaza's economy, which has already forced most of Gaza's population to live below the poverty line and depend on international aid.

Similarly, the closure by Israel since early June of Gaza's border with Egypt, the Gaza Strip's only border crossing, has left the population effectively trapped and cut off from the outside world, preventing patients from travelling to other countries for medical care which is not available in Gaza, and denying traders and students the possibility to leave the Gaza Strip to take advantage of employment and education opportunities elsewhere.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

As the occupying power, Israel is ultimately responsible for ensuring the welfare of the Palestinians population in the OPT, including the 1.5 million Palestinians who live in the Gaza Strip, all of whom are protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israeli officials' contention that Israel is no longer bound by the laws of occupation since it redeployed its forces to the perimeter of the Gaza Strip in 2005 is a fallacy. Israel retains effective control of the Gaza Strip, by virtue of the full control it exercises over of the Gaza Strip's land border, its air space and territorial waters, and the movement of people and goods. Hence The Israeli authorities are bound by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to ensure the welfare of the Palestinian population in the OPT. According to Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention: "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited."

The Israeli authorities have stated that their decision to impose the above-mentioned additional restrictions on the Gaza Strip's population is in reaction to the frequent firing of so-called "qassam" rockets by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza into Israel. These indiscriminate rockets have killed some 10 Israeli civilians in the past four years in Sderot and have spread fear among the population and damaged the town's economy. The Israeli army has retaliated by launching frequent air bombardments and artillery strikes in which hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, including dozens of children, since last year. Three Palestinian children were killed last week in an Israeli air strike that the army initially claimed was against rocket launchers

but subsequently admitted it had mistakenly targeted children playing in fields. Palestinian armed groups responsible for the launching of rockets from Gaza into Israel include the armed wing of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the armed wing of President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party (the *al-aqsa martyrs' brigades*).

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Hebrew, or your own language:**

- expressing concern that further restrictions on the supply of electricity and fuel and on the passage of persons and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip would cause a further deterioration of already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and would constitute collective punishment - which is forbidden under international law;
- calling for the decision of the government to be rescinded;
- reminding the Israeli government of its obligation - as the occupying power - under international humanitarian and human rights law to ensure the welfare of the Palestinians population in the Gaza Strip, notably their obligation to ensure the supply of essential necessities and to allow the movement of people and goods;
- expressing concern for the residents of Gaza currently in the Strip who are unable to leave, including patients in need of medical care not available in the Gaza Strip;

**APPEALS TO:**

Tzipi Livni (Ms)  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
9 Yitzhak Rabin Boulevard, Kiryat Ben-Gurion  
Jerusalem 91035, Israel

**Fax:** + 972 2 530 3367

**email:** [sar@mfa.gov.il](mailto:sar@mfa.gov.il)

**Salutation:** Dear Minister

**Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, or your own language:**

- urging the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip to prevent the launching of "qassam" rockets into Israel by all Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip;
- urging the President of the Palestinian Authority to call on Fatah's armed wing, the *al-aqsa martyrs' brigades*, in the Gaza Strip to put an immediate end to the launching of "qassam" rockets into Israel;

**APPEALS TO:**

Mr Ismail Haniyeh and Dr Mahmoud Zahar  
Hamas leadership in Gaza

**Fax:** + 970 8 282 2159/ 284 5040/ 286 8971

**Email:** [ihaniyyeh@hotmail.com](mailto:ihaniyyeh@hotmail.com)

**Salutation:** Dear Mr Haniyeh and Dr Zahar

Mahmoud Abbas

President of the Palestinian Authority

**Fax:** +972 2 296 1370/ 2 298 1370/ 2 296 3179

**Salutation:** Dear President

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Authority accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 November 2007. \*\*\*\*\*