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## **Israel Gaza blockade must be completely lifted**

Amnesty International today urged Israel to completely lift without delay its blockade on Gaza, which imposes a collective punishment on 1.4 million Palestinians in clear violation of international law.

On Thursday, the Israel cabinet announced that the blockade would be eased, allowing more of what it terms “civilian goods” into the impoverished territory where 4 out of 5 people are dependent on international aid.

“This announcement makes it clear that Israel is not intending to end its collective punishment of Gaza’s civilian population, but only ease it. This is not enough,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Any step that will help reduce the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza is to be welcomed, but Israel must now comply with its obligations as the occupying power under international law and immediately lift the blockade.”

“Just as important as allowing goods into Gaza is allowing exports to leave Gaza, yet there is no mention of this in today’s announcement. Banning the vast majority of exports, raw materials and the movement of people has destroyed the economy of Gaza, and pushed its population into unemployment, poverty and dependency on aid agencies for survival. These problems will not be solved while the blockade continues.”

According to media reports, Israel is to move from allowing only listed products into Gaza, to using a list of products that will be specifically prohibited.

It is not yet clear which products will remain prohibited and there is also no mention of allowing the free movement of people, also a human right under international law.

The current Israeli restrictions prevent the movement of Palestinians through the crossing points from Gaza into Israel in all but a handful of cases, generally in exceptional humanitarian cases.

This closure makes it extremely difficult for Palestinians in Gaza to exit even to receive necessary medical treatment and virtually impossible to leave for reasons such as visiting close family members or taking up university places and jobs.

The Israeli authorities have previously put forward a range of justifications for the blockade - saying that it is a response to attacks from Palestinian armed groups, a reaction to the continued holding of the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and a means to pressure the Hamas de facto administration.

Amnesty International has strongly condemned the firing of indiscriminate weapons by Palestinian armed

groups into southern Israel as a violation of international law, but measures limiting civilian goods, the movement of people and virtually banning export, target the civilian population as a whole not the armed groups in particular.

“Any restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods into or out of Gaza must be proportionate and non-discriminatory”, said Malcolm Smart.

“Israel may need to carry out monitoring of entry points to Gaza for security purposes, but that monitoring must be targeted at those suspected of posing a security threat – not to the whole population”

## **Background**

The Gaza Strip, along with East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, was occupied by Israel in 1967. Israel has imposed increasingly severe restrictions on Palestinian movement into and out of Gaza since the early 1990s, including on their movement to other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This contradicts the principle, accepted by international community, that the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip comprise one territorial unit and violates the occupying power’s duty to ensure the welfare of the occupied population, as stipulated under Articles 27 and 47 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Despite the withdrawal of Israeli settlers living illegally in Gaza in 2005 (the process referred to by Israel as “disengagement”) the Israeli authorities have retained control of Gaza’s airspace, its land border with Israel and its territorial waters – as shown by its recent military action against the humanitarian flotilla bound for Gaza in which nine international activists were killed.

After Hamas took control in Gaza in June 2007, the existing Israeli policy of closure was tightened to a blockade restricting the entry of food, fuel, and other basic goods. Movement of medical cases in and out of the area became restricted and delayed. Gazan families are not allowed to visit relatives in Israeli jails. This situation was made worse by the general closure of the Rafah crossing (Gaza’s single crossing point with Egypt) to daily use by the Egyptian authorities. After 2007 Rafah was opened only intermittently to allow some occasional movement.

Following Israel’s military action on 31 May 2010 against the aid flotilla in international waters outside Gaza, the Egyptian authorities announced they were opening the Rafah crossing point ‘indefinitely’. However, Egypt has yet to permit fully free passage of Palestinians into its territory, allowing entry only to Palestinians with specially obtained permits.

As the occupying power, Israel bears the foremost responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the inhabitants of Gaza.