

**PUBLIC**

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**21 January 2008**

**Further Information on: UA 247/07 (MDE 15/062/2007, 21 September 2007) Fear for Safety**

**ISRAEL/  
OCCUPIED  
PALESTINIAN  
TERRITORIES (OPT)**      **1.5 Million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip**

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Amnesty International is concerned that the further tightening by the Israeli government of its blockade on the Gaza Strip is causing a worsening of the humanitarian crisis there. Israel's decision to cut off the reduced supplies of fuel and electricity and to shut down the restricted passage of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip is making dire humanitarian situation desperate for the 1.5 million Palestinians who live there.

Gazans cannot obtain electricity, fuel or alternative sources of energy from elsewhere because of the blockades imposed by Israel. Preventing the supply of basic necessities such as electricity, fuel and humanitarian assistance to the entire population of Gaza in retaliation for rocket attacks carried out by Palestinian armed groups constitutes collective punishment – whereas international law categorically prohibits collective punishment and retaliation against the civilian population.

Electricity and fuel, which have already been in short supply in Gaza for some time due to the Israeli blockades, are used to pump water. Shortages have disastrous consequences for the health and well-being of a population already facing insufficient supplies of clean water for drinking and personal hygiene as well as inadequate sewage treatment and waste disposal. Scarce food and medicines are getting spoilt as they cannot be refrigerated without power.

Critically ill patients in urgent need of medical treatment which is not available in Gaza are prohibited from leaving Gaza and some 40 have died as a result. Traders and students are denied the possibility to leave Gaza to take advantage of employment and education opportunities elsewhere.

The Israeli authorities cite unspecified "security" reasons for the blockade, but have proposed no alternative, proportionate means of addressing security concerns. The closure by Israel since early June of Gaza's border with Egypt, Gaza's only border crossing, has left the population effectively trapped and cut off from the outside world. The further tightening of the already stringent Israeli blockade imposed on the passage of goods into and out of Gaza is prolonging and worsening the 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 which is not allowed to reach those that need it most in Gaza.

#### **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 repeatedly indicated that the restrictions on the Gaza Strip's population are 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. On 18 January an Israeli air strike against a disused Palestinian Authority (PA) building in Gaza City killed a woman bystander and injured dozens of other bystanders who were attending a wedding nearby. A few days earlier another Israeli air strike killed a woman outside her house in Beit Hanoun (north Gaza) and a 15-year-old child collecting wood nearby. On both occasions no armed militants were hit in the Israeli strikes, only unarmed Palestinian civilian bystanders. In the past week some 40 Palestinians have been killed and scores injured in Israeli attacks and one foreign worker in an Israeli farm was killed in a Palestinian attack

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

- expressing concern that the tightened restrictions imposed on the passage of fuel, electricity, humanitarian assistance and other basic necessities into the Gaza Strip are causing a worsening of the humanitarian crisis and are putting the health of the civilian population at risk;
- pointing out that such measures do not target those responsible for rocket attacks against Israel and constitute collective punishment against the civilians population of Gaza – which is categorically forbidden under international law;
- calling for the restrictions on the supply of fuel, electricity, humanitarian assistance, medical supplies and other crucial necessities to be lifted immediately;
- 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 who are unable to leave, including patients in need of medical care not available in the Gaza Strip and urging that they be promptly allowed passage out of Gaza.

**APPEALS TO:**

Professor Daniel Friedmann  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
29 Salah al-Din Street  
Jerusalem 91010, Israel

**Fax:** +972 2 628 7757 / +972 2 628 8618  
**email:** [sar@justice.gov.il](mailto:sar@justice.gov.il) / [tifereth@justice.gov.il](mailto:tifereth@justice.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 / 2 296 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 3 March 2008.