



OCHA Closure Update

occupied Palestinian territory

October 2007

Movement within, and in and out of, the West Bank is controlled by numerous checkpoints, road blocks, earth mounds, trenches and gates. These physical obstacles, some staffed by soldiers and others unstaffed, combined with the Barrier, flying checkpoints and a complex system of permits, form an integrated and coherent system that restricts the movement of around 2.4 million Palestinians to their basic services, places of worship and even to their families in the West Bank.

The Israeli authorities state that these measures are necessary for the security of Israeli citizens, both in Israel and those living in settlements in the West Bank. The function of most obstacles, however, is to protect those civilians living as settlers in the West Bank by controlling Palestinians movement onto roads that are primarily used by them.

Closure Count (total number of roadblocks and checkpoints)

The numbers of physical obstacles fluctuates from month to month; some are removed by Palestinians, others are avoided by the development of rough roads around them and new ones are created by the Israeli Defence Forces. The graph below shows the trend in the number of physical closure objects reported by OCHA during the reporting period..

**Closure Count -- Monthly Average
(May - Oct 07)**

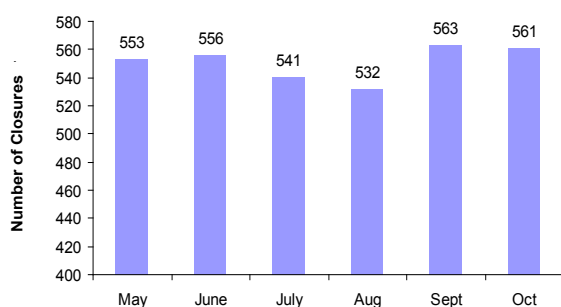


Figure 1 Data available to 26 October 2007- OCHA

**Number of Flying Checkpoints per week
(May- Oct 07)**

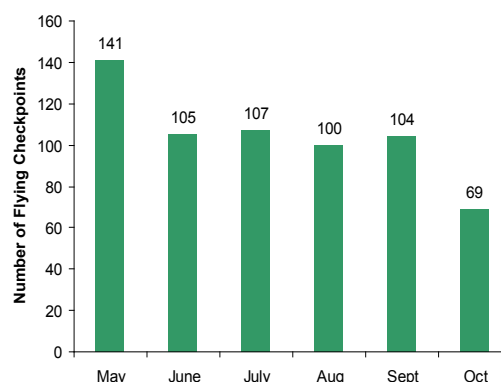


Figure 2 Data available to 26 October 2007- OCHA

Since April the changes reported by OCHA include the removal of 80 closures and the creation of 115 additional closures including earth mounds, concrete road blocks and the installation of three new fully-staffed checkpoints.

In October 2007 OCHA reported a total of 561¹ closures, a slight decrease compared to the September figure of 563.

The number of flying checkpoints has fallen from 141 on average in a week to 69 in the month of October (a decrease of 48.9 %). For the southern areas of the West Bank this has meant an improvement in movement for Palestinians, however in the northern areas 14 regular flying checkpoints were replaced by two permanent partial checkpoints controlling movement through two key bottlenecks.



Weekly Average of Search and Arrests Compared to Flying (Random) Checkpoints in the West Bank (May - Oct 07)

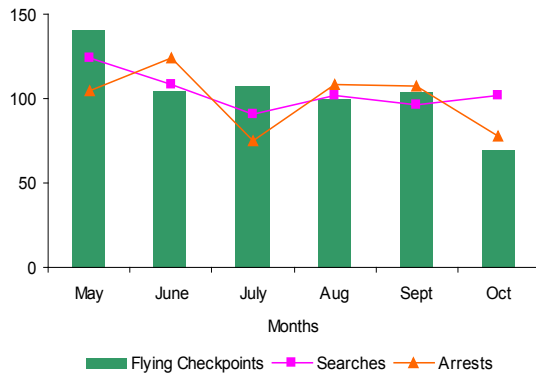


Figure 3 Data available until 26 October, 2007-OCHA

Closures by Region

East Jerusalem

Access for Palestinians

The four checkpoints through which Palestinians with permits may enter East Jerusalem, are Ras Abu Sbeitan, Qalandia, Shu'fat and Gilo. The authority for their management is in the process of being transferred from the IDF to civil control.

Any combination of Border Police, Civil Police or private security firms are currently staffing the checkpoints and the chain of command is often unclear. The checkpoints continue to have limited capacity resulting in long delays and uncertainty for Palestinians entering Jerusalem for work, medical appointments, education and worship. All movement of Palestinians with West Bank IDs to East Jerusalem must be via these checkpoints except for staff of recognized international organizations.

Humanitarian Access

Humanitarian Access into Jerusalem has deteriorated since April with new demands for national staff with West Bank IDs to get out of their vehicles and pass on foot, requirements for UN vehicles to be searched², and for UN goods to be transferred by a back-to-back system³. UN staff who do not comply with search demands, on occasion, have had their access delayed or denied.

Jordan Valley

Access for Palestinians

Palestinians travelling to the Jordan Valley through Hamra and Tayasir checkpoints can do so without an Israeli issued permit but only as pedestrians or in public transportation. Vehicular crossing in private cars is subject to getting an Israeli permit, however, permits for private vehicles are very difficult to obtain. Agricultural goods from the Jordan Valley can cross both checkpoints to access markets in the West Bank. Bisan checkpoint into Israel at the north of the Valley continues to be available for the export of Jordan Valley agricultural goods produced in the Valley to Israel. Bisan is a back-to-back checkpoint. Long delays at Bisan, Hamra and Tayasir checkpoints can result in delays for farmers which, in many cases, results in the spoiling or devaluation of their produce.

A permanent checkpoint has been established on Road 1 to the Dead Sea preventing all Palestinians from traveling south to the Dead Sea even if they possess permits to enter Israel.

Humanitarian Access

Beyond the usual delays caused by checkpoints, access for staff of humanitarian agencies and for humanitarian goods has generally been smooth.

Northern Areas

Access for Palestinians

Periodic restrictions were imposed on West Bank residents aged between 16 and 35 years old exiting from Nablus, Jenin, Tubas and Tulkarm governorates preventing travel south. The estimated number of Palestinian males and females affected by age restrictions is approximately 269,000 (32% of the population of the four governorates).

Overall closure in Nablus City remained the main source of restrictions on movement in Nablus governorate. New closures were reported along road 557 connecting Huwwara checkpoint with the two settlements of Elon Moreh and Itamar, east of the city, to prevent Palestinian vehicles from accessing the road which is restricted for Israeli use only. The new closures will further restrict the access of Palestinian farmers from Salim and Deir Al Hatab villages to their land east of road.



New closures were also reported on road 55 near Sarra village and between Qusin and Beit Iba villages, and on road 505. 'Aqraba partial checkpoint was re-located to an urban road north of road 505 which will tighten further the closure on Nablus city. It will also further isolate the village of Qusin (1,600 people) from land and service centre and workers from factories across the checkpoint. At Beit Iba checkpoint, west of Nablus, a humanitarian vehicle lane has been added and the road resurfaced.

During the month of Ramadan, from 13th September to 12th October, movement through Nablus checkpoints improved when the IDF extended until midnight the opening hours of checkpoints around Nablus.

In Jenin and Tubas governorates the restrictions remained almost the same as in the previous reporting period. In Tulkarm governorate there are 9 new closures in rural areas further affecting the access of Palestinian farmers from the villages of Shura, Kafr al Labad, Izbat Abu Khameish and Izbat al Khilal (population 4,400) to their olive groves.

Qalqiliya is surrounded on all sides by the Barrier and access out of the city is only possible through an opening in the Barrier or through an underpass to Habla village. In August, access into Qalqiliya city became more restricted when the IDF erected two new partial checkpoints east and south of Qalqiliya controlling movement at the opening in the Barrier.

In Salfit Governorate, the IDF opened road 477 in August between Deir Ballut checkpoint and road 5 for Palestinian traffic which led to an improvement in access to Deir Ballut, Rafat and Az Zawya. However, the continuing closure of the entrances to Kafr ad Dik and Bruqin villages forces Palestinians to make a long detour, in excess of 20 kilometers, to their service centre in Salfit.

Humanitarian Access

The IDF closed 'Asira Ash Shamaliya checkpoint north of Nablus previously open for international organisations, on the 29 August to international organizations. This checkpoint is now open only for ambulances evacuating emergency cases. Access to nine communities north-west of Nablus (population of 26,000) has deteriorated as humanitarian organisations now have to make a substantial detour via Al Badhan. For example, the travelling distance between Nablus and the village of 'Asira ash Shamaliya increased from approximately five kilometres to about 25 kilometres,

Transportation of Goods

In general all checkpoints into Nablus city are open for goods with the exception of Huwwara and At Tur checkpoints. Trucks wanting to travel through these checkpoints into Nablus are diverted to either 'Awarta or Beit Iba checkpoints.

The movement of goods between the Northern West Bank and Israel is channelled through Al Jalama Checkpoint and Reikhan checkpoint in Jenin governorate, and At Tayba checkpoint in Tulkarm governorate. At Reikhan checkpoint only a few commercial trucks taking food products to Barta'a enclave are permitted to cross. Trucks with goods destined for Israel have to cross several checkpoints before reaching the crossings that allow movement of goods to Israel. For example, materials transported from Ashdod to a factory in Nablus will go through At Tayba, Enav, and Beit Iba checkpoints before entering Nablus causing an increase in transport costs, from 1,800 NIS to 2,800 NIS (55%).

Southern regions

Access for Palestinians

The one metre high concrete barrier along road 317 in southern Hebron was removed restoring access for 2,000 farmers and herders, to 24 rural roads. The building of the Barrier in Bethlehem governorate has led to further restrictions on movement of farmers from Khadr village to their land. Wadi Nar checkpoint is still a bottleneck for north-south travel and is often the scene of long queues of vehicles. The very tight restrictions on Palestinian movement in the H2 area, especially the Old City of Hebron, remain.

The condition of secondary roads, which Palestinian traffic is forced to use, continues to deteriorate. Travelling on road surfaces which are breaking leading to longer journey times.

Humanitarian access

Humanitarian agencies are facing the same difficulties in accessing rural areas as Palestinian travellers. During the summer months, agencies providing emergency water supplies to rural villages in southern Hebron were particularly affected. Water tanking trucks were forced to make long detours to reach filling points, adding to the cost of the aid. International organisations pay 500NIS for 10 cubic meters of water delivered to the southern villages while elsewhere the same amount costs 250NIS.

End Notes

1. 8 green line checkpoints have been removed from the OCHA closure count as of September X 2007.
2. According to the 1946 Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, to which Israel is a signatory, UN premises, archives, documents and vehicles are immune from search.
3. Humanitarian organisations report incidents to OCHA using the Access and Closure Information System. Monthly ACIS reports can be accessed at www.ochaopt.org