

Fact Sheet, April 17, 2008

Gaza Fuel Restrictions: Walking Toward Crisis

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Gaza residents are completely dependent on fuel delivered via the Nahal Oz crossing between Israel and Gaza - Israel does not permit Gaza residents to receive fuel from any other source or by any other means • Gaza's fuel shortage began six months ago, when Israel restricted the quantities of fuel that it permits Gaza residents to purchase • The shortages got worse with a strike and closure of Nahal Oz.

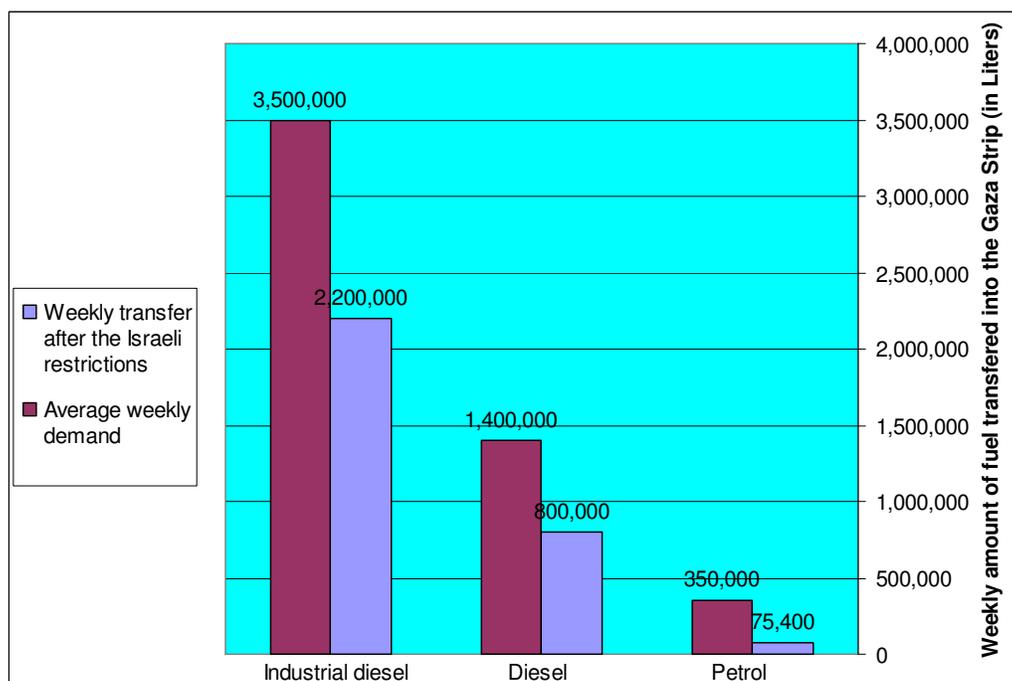


Donkey-driven cart rides past empty gas station in Beit Lahia, north Gaza Strip, April 14, 2008. Photograph: Human Rights Watch

Restrictions on the transfer of fuel to the Gaza Strip

Nahal Oz, between Israel and the Gaza Strip, is the only point on Gaza's borders – land, air and sea – through which Israel permits fuel to be supplied. Beginning Oct. 28, 2007, Israel imposed severe restrictions on the fuel amounts it allows to enter via the crossing.

Currently, Israel permits Gaza residents to receive just 75,400 liters of petrol (gasoline) per week, compared with the 350,000-400,000 liters weekly that they ordered prior to the cuts – **a reduction of 81%**. Similarly, Israel permits Gaza residents to receive just 800,000 liters of ordinary diesel weekly, compared with the 1.4 million liters purchased weekly six months ago – **a reduction of 43%**. Israel permits Gaza's power plant to receive just 2.2 million liters of industrial diesel each week, which allows the plant to produce 55 megawatts electricity. The plant needs 3.5 million liters industrial diesel per week, in order to operate at its current capacity of 80 megawatts.



The restrictions on the supply of industrial diesel exacerbate the shortage of electricity that has existed since Israel bombed Gaza's power plant in June 2006: Gaza needs up to 240 megawatts electricity during peak periods. Israel sells 120 megawatts of electricity, Egypt supplies 17 megawatts, and the power plant currently generates just 55 megawatts, for a total supply of 192 megawatts. Gaza experiences a deficit of up to 20% in electricity during peak periods, causing power outages which currently stand at 4-6 hours per day. The power outages are expected to lengthen during the summer peak.

Israel does not "donate" the industrial diesel to Gaza – it is paid for by the European Union, whose representatives oversee its transfer from Nahal Oz to the power plant.

On April 9, 2008, following an attack on Nahal Oz by Palestinian militants that killed two Israeli civilians, Israel closed the crossing for a week and prevented the supply of all kinds of fuel, including cooking gas, petrol, diesel, and industrial diesel. As a result, on April 16, Gaza's power plant reduced production to 40 MW, exacerbating power cuts.

Petroleum Owner's Strike

Beginning April 7, 2008, the Fuel Station Owners' Association in Gaza began a strike aimed at Israel and the international community, to protest the severe restrictions that Israel imposed on the quantities of fuel permitted into Gaza. Even before the strike, the severe shortages paralyzed most of Gaza's private cars and much of its public transportation. The strike does not affect the supply of industrial diesel, which is transferred directly to the power plant under EU supervision. The strike also does not affect cooking gas, because Israel has not restricted its supply.

Two days after the strike began, Nahal Oz was attacked, and Israel stopped supply of all fuel. Limited supply of industrial diesel and cooking gas was renewed on April 16, 2008, but the Defense Ministry still refuses to permit supply of petrol and ordinary diesel.

The Effects of the Fuel Crisis on Civilian Institutions

The shortage resulting from the restrictions on the quantities of fuel that Gaza residents may purchase, the strike declared in response, and the continued closure of Nahal Oz to supplies of petrol and diesel - have paralyzed Gaza's transportation system – public and private. The possibility of traveling inside Gaza is extremely limited, requires long waits and numerous changing of cars, and is very expensive for Gaza's impoverished residents. **Gaza residents report a dramatic increase in the cost of public transportation - 2-10 times last month's price - in the few cases where public transportation is available at all.** Many Gaza residents have begun to travel in donkey-driven carts. On the streets of Gaza, the smell of gas is potent, because of attempts by Gaza residents to power their cars using cooking gas – a dangerous modification.

According to the World Health Organization, because of the fuel shortage, 20% of hospital and Ministry of Health vehicles have stopped functioning. In some of Gaza's hospitals, transportation problems have led to a **75% decrease in the number of ambulatory patients seeking medical care**, and all of Gaza's hospitals are experiencing high percentages of absences and delays among medical staff. According to

the WHO, there is no fuel at all in the generators for Gaza's central pharmacy, used to power the refrigeration system for medicines during electricity outages.

As of April 16, 2008, **all of Gaza's universities have shut down**, because of extremely high absences among faculty, staff and students who cannot reach their studies. Most school children are able to reach governmental schools and UNRWA schools, which are generally located within walking distance of the students' homes, but private schools have mostly shut down, because they cannot operate transportation for the children.



Young men in Gaza trying to run a car on cooking gas instead of petrol, April 14, 2008.

Photograph: Human Rights Watch

Summary and Recommendations

The fuel crisis in the Gaza Strip is a result of the ongoing and severe restrictions that Israel has imposed on the transfer of fuel into Gaza, since October 2007. These restrictions are a central tool of the Israeli policy of collective punishment against the residents of Gaza Strip – a policy which is illegal under international law. This policy is crippling the already fragile civil institutions in Gaza, and it violates the rights of Gaza residents to freedom of movement, access to health care and education, and the right to lead normal lives. The policy has no legitimate security rationale.

Gisha calls upon the Israeli government to fully reopen the Nahal Oz terminal and to stop the restrictions on the transfer of fuel into the Gaza Strip – restrictions which constitute illegal collective punishment of Gaza's 1.5 million residents.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why should Israel allow Gaza residents to receive fuel through its crossings with Gaza? Why don't Gaza residents receive fuel from somewhere else?

→ Israel controls Gaza's borders – land, air, and sea– and does not permit Gaza residents to receive any goods, including fuel, except through the crossings with Israel. Israel is preventing the construction of a seaport or airport which would allow Gaza residents to receive goods from abroad, and Israel's opposition to the re-opening of Rafah Crossing, between Gaza and Egypt, is a central factor in keeping the crossing closed since June 9, 2007. Even when Rafah Crossing was open, Israel did not permit goods to enter through Rafah, requiring goods to enter only through the crossings on the Israeli border, under Israeli control. Because Israel prevents Gaza residents from purchasing fuel from any other source, and because it owes obligation to Gaza residents under the law of occupation, it is obligated to allow Gaza to receive fuel through the crossings on the Israeli border.

Who pays for the fuel pumped through Nahal Oz?

→ The Palestinian Authority pays a private Israeli company, "Dor Alon," for the petrol, diesel and cooking gas. Dor Alon pumps the fuel to Gaza through the Nahal Oz terminal. The European Union pays for the industrial diesel, which is used exclusively for producing electricity at the Gaza power plant.

Why are the fuel companies in Gaza striking?

→ The Fuel Station Owners' Association in Gaza has called for a strike to protest the severe cuts in the quantities of fuel that Israel allows Gaza residents to purchase – a cut of 81% in petrol and 43% in diesel. Mohammad Hazandar, vice-president of the association, says that the strike's aim is to protest the Israeli restrictions on fuel supply to Gaza and to pressure the international community and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah to step up demands that Israel to lift the restrictions.

Is the strike causing fuel shortages in Gaza?

→ No. The shortages began in October 2007, after Israel started to limit the amount of fuel it allows residents of Gaza to purchase. The strike intensifies the shortage by preventing these reduced quantities from being distributed, but even if they were distributed – Gaza's severe fuel shortage would continue.

Is Israel justified in preventing the transfer of fuel as a response to the attack on the Nahal Oz terminal, in which two Israeli citizens were killed on April 9, 2008?

→ The state of Israel has the right and obligation to protect its citizens from attacks, such as the attack on April 9, 2008, a brutal act which violates the international law prohibition against targeting civilians. Yet, just as international law prohibits the deliberate attacks on Israeli civilians working at the fuel terminal in Nahal Oz, it prohibits the collective punishment of 1.5 million civilians, residents of the Gaza Strip, in response. The State of Israel has a right to fight against combatants, but it may not punish civilians for acts they have not committed.