



The Spread of COVID-19 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip (Updated to August 3, 2020)

August 3, 2020

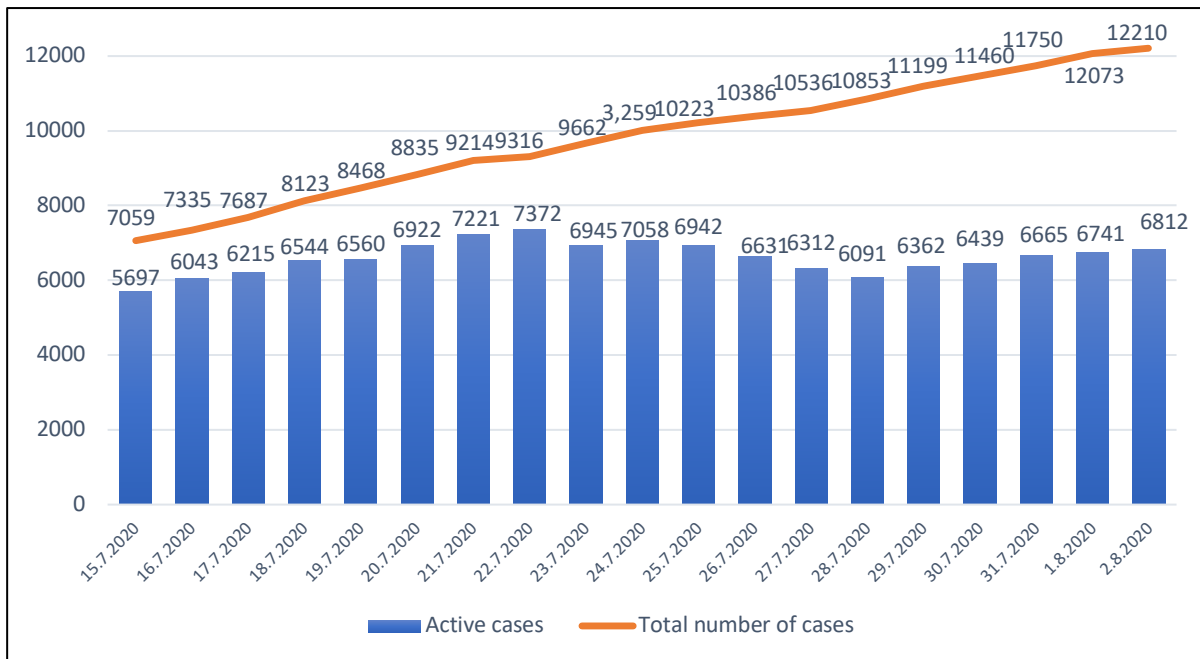
Overview

The rate of COVID-19 infection in the Palestinian Authority (PA) territories continues to stabilize, although it is too early to say the surge of the second wave has ended. This past week 1,824 new cases were detected, thus, according to the PA ministry of health, **the total number of active cases stands at 6,812** (as of August 2, 2020).¹ Of them **4,221** (62% of the total number) **are in the Hebron district**. Seven patients are in ICUs, two of them on ventilators. **As of August 3, 2020, 87 Palestinians have died, up from 79 a week ago**. The total number of cases of COVID-19 is now 12,210 (up from 10,386 a week ago). Two new cases were detected in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians who returned through the Erez Crossing. There are currently **seven active cases** in Gaza, and they are hospitalized in the quarantine center at the Rafah Crossing (as of August 1, 2020).

► As opposed to the general trend in the PA territories, **the rate of infection continues to spike in the east Jerusalem neighborhoods**, where there are currently **2,212 active cases**, up from 1,685 a week ago and 160 at the beginning of July 2020. **The large number of active cases can potentially lead to mutual infection in the eastern and western neighborhoods**. Another source of potential infection are the **tens of thousands of Palestinian workers in Israel** who went to the PA territories for Eid al-Adha and will return to Israel when the holiday ends, all **without a system of organized cooperation between the PA and Israel** (See below).

¹ The statistics from the Palestinian ministry of health include recoveries, but the ministry does not provide systematic information about their numbers.

COVID-19 infection in Judea and Samaria (from the middle of July 2020)



The Spread of COVID-19 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip

► The spread of COVID-19 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip this past week:

- ◆ **This past week 1,824 new active cases were detected.** The Hebron district, the villages around Jerusalem and east Jerusalem neighborhoods are still the leading epicenters of the disease. Kamal al-Sheikh, spokesman for the PA ministry of health, said **the number of new cases recently declined because fewer tests were administered during Eid al-Adha.** He added, however, that the situation was **stable and under control** (al-Kawfiya, August 2, 2020).

- ◆ **The number of deaths continues to rise.** So far 89 Palestinians have died, most of them in the Hebron district.

- ◆ **During Eid al-Adha PA residents were told to stay at home and follow the strict lockdown orders** imposed by the PA. The Palestinian media reported that most businesses closed, but **Eid al-Adha prayers were held without close adherence to public health guidelines** (especially social distancing). The Temple Mount was opened for prayers and there as well there was little or no social distancing.

- ◆ **The Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip continues its control over COVID-19 infection.** All seven active cases are Palestinians who entered the Gaza Strip through

the Rafah or Erez Crossings; inside the Gaza Strip there are no active cases. Therefore, the ministry of Muslim endowments rescinded the fatwa instructing people to pray at home and allowed prayers to be held in the mosques again. However, there is **still concern that the virus will spread inside** the Gaza Strip, which, according to the ministry of health, **would have disastrous consequences for the local population.**

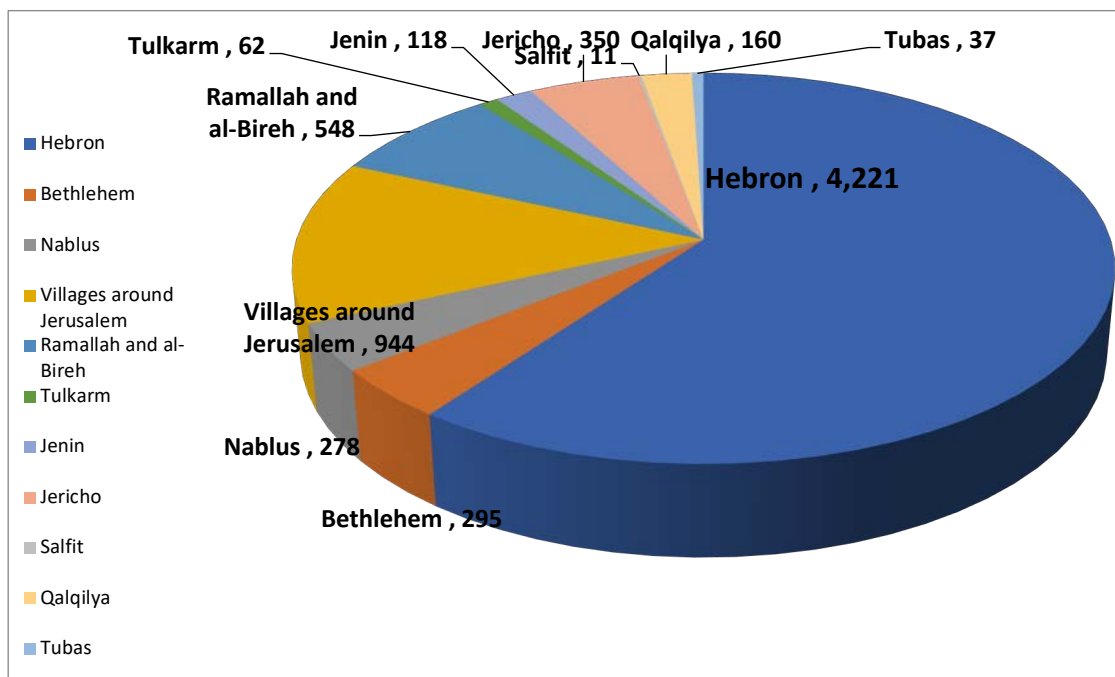
◆ **The PA prepared to deal with between 35,000 and 40,000 Palestinian workers who returned to the PA territories from Israel for Eid al-Adha, made difficult** by the cessation of security cooperation with Israel. An additional problem, according to the PA, is that the security fence has been breached in **about 500 places**. The PA claims it has no control over the situation and Israel ignores it.

Geographical Distribution of COVID-19 Epicenters

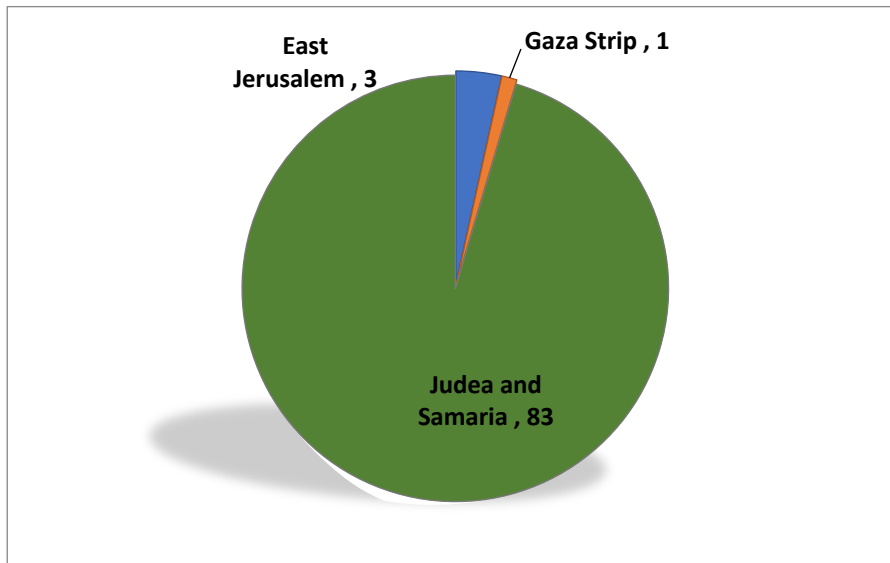
Overview

► The distribution of active cases in the PA, by district, is as follows: Hebron, 4,221; Bethlehem, 295; Nablus, 278; Ramallah-al-Bireh, 548; the villages around Jerusalem, 994; Tulkarm, 62; Jericho, 350; Qalqilya, 160; Jenin, 118, Salfit, 11; and Tubas, 37.

Distribution of active cases by district



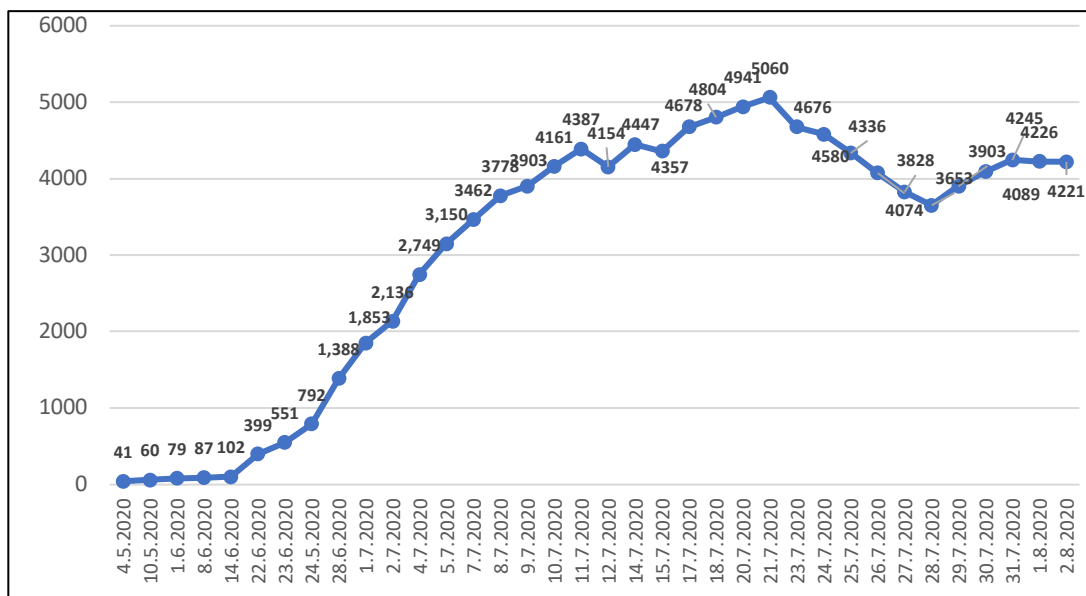
Distribution of deaths in Judea, Samaria, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip



Hebron district

The number of active cases in the Hebron district currently stands at 4,221, up from 4,074 a week ago (as of the evening of August 2, 2020). They make up 62% of the total number of active cases in Judea and Samaria. The graph below shows a slight flattening of the curve.

Extent of the spread of COVID-19 in the Hebron district



► Even though the Hebron district is the largest epicenter of the virus, **during Eid al-Adha preventive public health guidelines were not followed, especially during the prayers.**

Pictures posted to the Hebron municipality's Facebook page show the Hebron mayor trying to enter the Cave of the Patriarchs with a large crowd of Palestinians. When they were not allowed in they held the Eid al-Adha prayer at the entrance to the Cave, **crowding one another and not practicing social distancing** (Facebook page of the Hebron municipality, July 31, 2020).



Hebron mayor attends a mass Eid al-Adha prayer at the entrance to the Cave of the Patriarchs (Facebook page of the Hebron municipality, July 31, 2020).



Mass Eid al-Adha prayer in the Dura Stadium in Hebron. People wore masks and there was some social distancing (Wafa, July 31, 2020).

Bethlehem district

► **In the Bethlehem district there are 295 active cases, up from 279 a week ago.** Kamal Hamid, governor of the Bethlehem district, paid a visit to the city center with the local police chief to inspect the preparations made by the local residents for the holiday and to see if public health guidelines were being followed. During the visit **he expressed dissatisfaction at the low level of public compliance.** He said that disobeying public health guidelines would force the authorities to impose more stringent limitations to prevent the spread of the virus in the district (PNN website, July 30, 2020).



Right: The Bethlehem district governor tours the center of the city to monitor the preparations made by local residents for Eid al-Adha (PNN website, July 30, 2020). Left: Palestinian police distribute masks to Bethlehem residents (Palestinian police website, July 30, 2020).

Nablus district

► **In the Nablus district there are 278 active cases, up from 247 a week ago.** Despite the rise in infection, the district governor announced that following directives from the government, he would allow hairdressers and beauty parlors to operate, based on scheduling appointments and the following of public health guidelines, including social distancing (Facebook page of the Nablus district governor, July 27, 2020).

Ramallah and al-Bireh district

► **Ramallah and al-Bireh district there are 548 active cases, down from 611 a week ago.**



Tightening the lockdown in the Ramallah and al-Bireh district as Eid al-Adha begins (Wafa, July 31, 2020).

Jenin district

► **In the Jenin district there are 118 active cases, up from 68 a week ago.** Given the rise in the number of cases, Akram Rajoub, the district governor, decided to impose lockdowns on a number of towns and villages in the district, where large numbers of active cases have been detected (Facebook page of the Jenin district governor, July 30, 2020).



**Disinfecting the town of Ya'bed in the Jenin district
(PA civil defense Facebook page, July 26, 2020).**

Tulkarm district

- ▶ **In the Tulkarm district there are 62 active cases, up from 55 a week ago.**



**Full lockdown of the Tulkarm district as Eid al-Adha begins
(Wafa, July 31, 2020).**

Qalqilya district

- ▶ **In the Qalqilya district there are 160 active cases, up from 135 a week ago.** The office of Rafi' Rawajba, district governor, announced lockdowns in towns and villages where active cases were located. The building housing the education department, the maternity ward in the UNRWA hospital and a restaurant were closed for disinfection. However, the governor's office announced hairdressers and beauty parlors could open (Facebook page of the Qalqilya district governor, July 27, 2020).

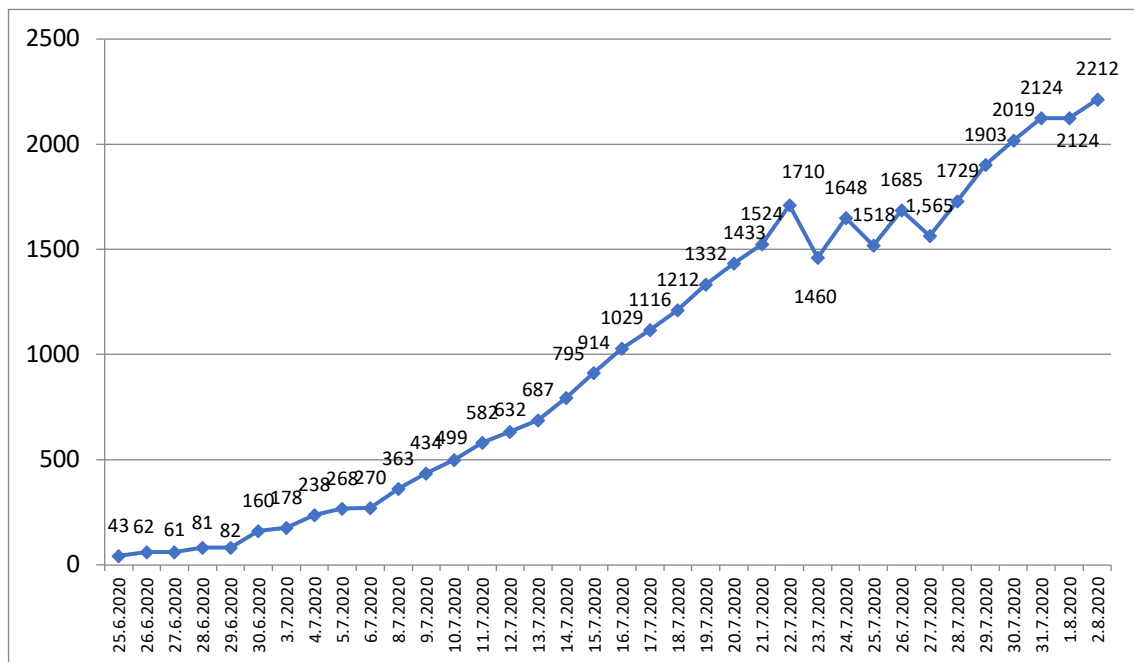


Right: Disinfecting the town of Azbat Salman, where a number of COVID-19 cases were detected (PA civil defense Facebook page, July 26, 2020), Left: Disinfecting Qalqilya (PA civil defense Facebook page, July 27, 2020).

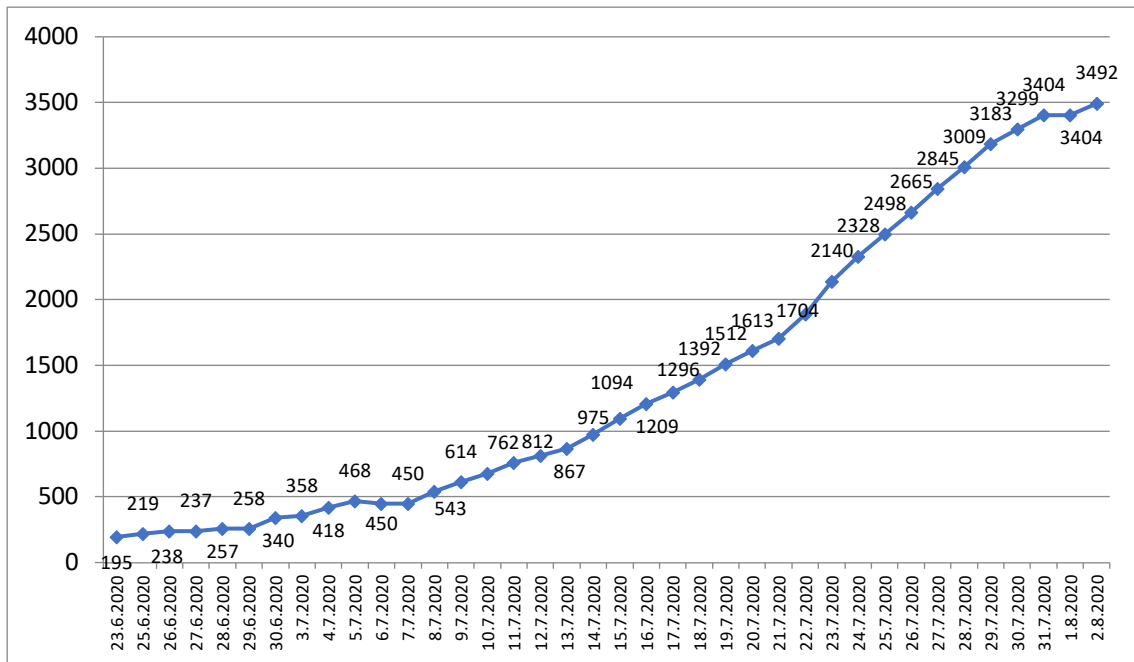
East Jerusalem

According to reports from the PA, the number of active cases in east Jerusalem stands at **2,212**, up from 1,565 a week ago and 160 at the beginning of July 2020. As opposed to the flattening curve in other locations in the PA territories, the number of infections in east Jerusalem continues to rise.

Number of active cases in the east Jerusalem neighborhoods (since the end of June 2020)



Total number of COVID-19 cases in east Jerusalem (since the end of June 2020)



- The Temple Mount compound was opened for prayers during Eid al-Adha (as opposed to Eid al-Fitr, in May, when it remained closed). According to reports, on the first day of the holiday about **27,000 Muslims** arrived at the Temple Mount to pray. Most of them wore masks but did not practice social distancing.



Mass Eid al-Adha prayer on the Temple Mount with no social distancing (Wafa, July 31, 2020).

Distribution of infection in east Jerusalem

- According to data from the Jerusalem municipality, the number of active cases in the east Jerusalem neighborhoods is **1,568**, as of August 3, 2020, down from 2,019 a week ago. The number is lower than the 2,212 reported by the PA.

| Neighborhood | Number of Residents | Number of COVID-19 cases | Self-quarantined cases | Deaths |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Anata | 11,812 | 64 | 57 | 0 |
| Silwan | 19,916 | 127 | 112 | 1 |
| Issawiya | 19,280 | 100 | 89 | 2 |
| Old City | 35,345 | 162 | 146 | 0 |
| Abu Tor | 12,299 | 81 | 74 | 1 |
| A-Tor | 32,218 | 242 | 222 | 2 |
| Bayt Hanina | 45,488 | 181 | 168 | 1 |
| Wadi Joz/Sheikh Jarrah | 14,381 | 36 | 33 | 0 |
| Shuafat refugee camp | 22,622 | 132 | 121 | 0 |
| Shuafat | 24,188 | 78 | 74 | 1 |
| Ras al-Amoud | 23,032 | 86 | 74 | 2 |
| Bayt Safsafa | 14,926 | 19 | 15 | 0 |
| Bab Sahara | 7,221 | 29 | 23 | 0 |
| Kafr Aqab | 34,374 | 148 | 136 | 0 |
| Sur Baher | 23,341 | 27 | 22 | 0 |
| Jabel Mukaber | 26,260 | 56 | 43 | 0 |
| Total | 366,703 | 1,568 | 1,409 | 10 |

The Return to the PA of Palestinians Working in Israel for Eid al-Adha

- ▶ **The return of Palestinians who work in Israel is a source of concern for the PA.** The PA launched a campaign on the social media and sent text messages to workers **with instructions for contacting the ministries of labor and health, and calling on them to cooperate with the security services** regarding coronavirus preventive measures.
- ▶ Rami Mahadawi, director of the employment department and spokesman for the PA's ministry of labor, estimated that the number of Palestinians working in Israel who could be expected to return to the PA territories for Eid al-Adha was **between 35,000 and 40,000**. He

said the ministry of labor had a program for dealing with them, created according to instructions from the ministry of health. **He said the lack of security cooperation with Israel increased the PA government's burden and forced it to make new plans.** He said **returning workers would initially be tested by teams of medical personnel at the roadblocks and anyone who needed treatment would immediately be transferred to a hospital.** He called on workers to take all precautionary measures to protect themselves and their families, and to follow self-isolation procedures if necessary. He also called on anyone who developed symptoms to be tested at a clinic or hospital (al-Najah, July 26, 2020).

► Mahadawi noted additional problems relating to the workers:

◆ **The breaches in the security fence are a source of worry.** He estimates there are approximately **500 breaches in the fence over which the PA has no control.** He claimed Israel ignored them to make it easier for workers to enter its territory, making it difficult for the emergency committees and security services to monitor Palestinians who cross the fence.

◆ **There is a lack of information about Palestinians working in the settlements.** He said the PA has no information about Palestinians working in the settlements because even before the outbreak of the coronavirus, following a decision from the Palestinian leadership, the ministry of labor had issued a ban on such work. He said they were now employing the social media to increase awareness of the ban.

► **The ministry of local government appealed to the local councils and municipalities** to monitor the return of Palestinians from Israel, especially in places where there are breaches in the fence and crossings, and to construct a database for each population concentration. The ministry also said a **legal body would be established with contacts with a legal team in Israel to monitor the rights of workers regarding the coronavirus outbreak and to present legal cases to a court in Israel for every violation of their rights** (Watan TV, July 28, 2020).

Economic Difficulties Caused by the COVID-19 crisis

► **Khaled al-Asili, PA minister of the economy,** said that more than **100,000 stores and businesses had closed their doors, and the GDP, per capita income and the**

government's revenues had dropped. That occurred at a time when Israel stopped transferring tax revenues to the PA which accounted for, he claimed, two thirds of the government's income. He said the government could not meet its payments, for example the salaries of its employees. He said most of the economic sectors had been hit, and that 97% of them were small businesses. **The losses of the various sectors, he said, totaled \$3 billion.** He added that they were trying to get funding to return all the businesses to their previous activities with a package of economic aid from various local and international sources (Wafa, August 1, 2020).

► Ibrahim Melhem, PA government spokesman,, said that after Eid al-Adha deliberations would be held about restarting the Palestinian economy while guarding public health. Based on the protocols of the ministry of health, **as many of the vital sectors as possible would reopen**, especially restaurants (Wafa, August 1, 2020). In the meantime, **store owners and businessmen were increasing their pressure on the government to allow them to reopen after the holiday, including restaurants, hotels and reception venues.** Given the pressure, a spokesman for the ministry of health said the ministry would make recommendations to the emergency committees about coping with the pandemic and reopening businesses in accordance with its recommendations (al-Kawfiya, August 2, 2020).

Foreign Aid for the PA

► During the week the PA received more donations to help it fight the coronavirus. The World Bank announced it would give the PA \$30 million for Palestinians in the PA territories who had been harmed. The objective was to provide social protection from the disease for residents who had fallen into poverty and for needy families whose situation had worsened because of the virus (Wafa, July 28, 2020).

The Gaza Strip

The extent of the infection

On July 30, 2020, the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that **two new cases of COVID-19** had been detected. They were Palestinians who had returned to the Gaza Strip through the Erez Crossing (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, July 30, 2020). As of August 1, 2020, there was seven active cases in Gaza, all of them in the quarantine hospital at the Rafah Crossing. Seventy patients have recovered. Ten of them were transferred to

quarantine centers to complete their isolation periods and 60 were discharged to their homes. Since the outbreak of the disease, there have been 78 active cases in the Gaza Strip and one death (Dunia al-Watan, August 1, 2020).

► As of August 1, 2020, 13,970 coronavirus tests had been administered in the Gaza Strip, 78 of which were positive. There are currently 228 Palestinians in three quarantine centers (Dunia al-Watan, August 1, 2020). The W.H.O. sent the ministry of health in Gaza 45 test kits for administering tests to 3,000 people (Facebook page of the W.H.O. representative in Gaza, July 30, 2020).



Delivery of test kits
(Facebook page of the W.H.O. representative, July 30, 2020).

The status of preventive measures

► In preparation for Eid al-Adha the ministry of health in Gaza called on residents to strictly observe preventive measures, especially at gatherings. The ministry issued a press release saying that despite all precautions, **the danger of infection inside the Gaza Strip was still a threat**. Infection could occur inside the Gaza Strip because of the unstable nature of the virus, because of human error and because of events that go out of control. **The ministry of health warned that the consequences would be destructive and disastrous for local residents** (al-Ra'i news agency, July 30, 2018)

► On the other hand, the ministry of Muslim endowments announced that after having ascertained that the Gaza Strip was free of COVID-19, it allowed prayers to be held in the mosques again. The ministry also lengthened the time permitted for Friday sermons. However, the ministry stressed that it was important to continue observing preventive measures during the prayer, and for each worshipper to bring a prayer rug from home, to read from his own personal Qur'an and to cleanse himself thoroughly at home (Facebook page of the ministry of Muslim endowments in the Gaza Strip, July 28, 2018).



Eid al-Adha prayers in Gaza: no masks and no social distancing (al-Ayn website Twitter account, July 31, 2020). Left: Senior Hamas figure Khalil al-Haya leads the prayers in the Filastin mosque (Safa, July 31, 2020)