Palestinians launch postcodes in assertion of sovereignty

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Palestinian postal codes would also help put an end to the Israeli seizure of shipments from abroad, said the Palestinian Authority [File: Fadi Arouri/Reuters]

Ramallah, February 9 (RHC)-- The Palestinian Authority (PA) has announced it will begin using its own postal codes, a move at easing the delivery of parcels in the occupied territories, as well as asserting

sovereignty.

International mail sent to or from the occupied West Bank currently has to pass through Jordan or Israel. In both cases, mail intended for the occupied West Bank has to be cleared by Israel, which controls the entry of goods and customs into the occupied territory.

But the PA said it had asked the Universal Postal Union to notify its member states that Palestinian postal codes were coming into force. According to the PA, the postcode project would help establish a Palestinian addressing system that would facilitate Palestinian mail, and would constitute an essential component of an infrastructure that will enable the public and private sectors to provide services in a manner that depends on geographical location.

"From April, postal items that do not bear a Palestinian postal code will not be processed," Palestinian Minister of Communications Ishaq Sidr told reporters in Ramallah, the occupied West Bank headquarters of the Palestinian Authority.

"It is a question of asserting Palestinian rights," he said, adding that postcodes would improve parcel delivery services, postal sorting, logistics services, and emergency and ambulance services.

Palestinian postal codes would also help put an end to the seizure of shipments from abroad, Sidr said. He said six tonnes of packages had been held up in Jordan since 2018, and accused Israel of obstructing deliveries.

Using postcodes "will prevent Israel from seizing postal items that come to Palestine, and will help make the services more efficient," Imad al-Tumayzi, head of international relations at the Palestinian Post, told the news agency AFP. "In 2020, we recorded more than 7,000 violations of postal equipment on the Israeli side, whether by opening packages, seizing them or summoning their owners for investigation," he said.

In 2008, Israel agreed to give more autonomy for Palestinian postal services, meaning that some international mail could be flown to Jordan and then transferred to the Palestinian territories.

However, the agreement appeared to falter, creating a huge postal backlog in 2010 which resulted in mailed items – letters, parcels and even a wheelchair – being stuck in Jordan for eight years, before Israel finally processed them to enter the occupied West Bank.

At the time, a Palestinian postal officer who worked at Jericho's post office told AFP that the items appeared to have been blocked by Israel on security or administrative grounds. Palestinians have complained that they are forced to use costly private courier services to send or receive parcels.

But it was not clear if the application of postal codes would cut mailing costs. Official PA news agency Wafa said some half a million buildings in the occupied West Bank had already been given postcodes. It said the roll-out would soon be extended to the Gaza Strip, which has been under Israeli blockade since 2007.

In the occupied West Bank, a Palestinian postal worker who asked not to be named, told AFP the new postcodes were "more symbolic than practical." "Postal coding can only truly be implemented when the Palestinian Authority controls ports or airports," he said.

The occupied West Bank, wedged between Israel and Jordan, has no operational civilian airport.

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