



OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

Humanitarian Situation Update. Northern Gaza**Friday, 8 October 2004**

At 10.30 pm on Tuesday, 28 September, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) entered northern Gaza establishing positions on high ground overlooking Izbet Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahia and Jabalia. Israeli reinforcements entered northern Gaza on 30 September and it is estimated that up to 200 tanks, bulldozers and armoured personnel carriers are on the ground in heavily populated civilian areas. The incursion comes in the wake of the continued firing of homemade rockets by Palestinian militants towards Israel, and the killing of three soldiers in Morag settlement on 23 September and one settler in Neve Dekalim on 24 September.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz announced on 30 September, a “large scale and prolonged operation” – Days of Penitence - aimed at pushing Palestinian missiles out of range of Sderot with plans to create a buffer zone that may reach up to 9 kilometres. Despite the heavy military presence, Palestinian homemade rockets continue to be fired towards Israel and the Gaza settlements on an almost daily basis, with a further two landing near Sderot on 7 October.

The IDF operation still remains focused on Jabalia camp, an area of 1.4 km² home to a registered refugee population of 103,646. Block 4 has been the scene of heavy fighting as well as Blocks 2, 3 and 5. Since the start of this week, Israeli forces have controlled all movement in and out of Beit Hanoun to the east of Salah ed Din street, while access to the Tal el Zatar and Glebo areas in the east of Jabalia is all but impossible because of the large number of Israeli tanks.

Humanitarian assistance remains extremely limited. A significant number of UN staff has been unable to enter or exit Gaza since 21 September because of IDF imposed restrictions. The extent of military operations has made the operating environment extremely dangerous. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) did not operate in northern Gaza on 6 and 7 October. The ICRC estimates that each request for coordination takes on average five to six hours.

Casualties

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH), 101 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since 28 September of which 29 have been children aged 18 and younger - nearly 30 %. Eighty-eight of these deaths occurred in northern Gaza, 25 killed were children. Five Israelis have died, including two children who were killed by a homemade rockets fired by Palestinian militants from northern Gaza into Sderot on 29 September.

An even higher percentage of Palestinian children have suffered injuries. On the basis of figures provided by the MoH, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 392 Palestinians were injured in the Gaza Strip of which 168 (42.8%) were children. Of these, 339 injuries were reported in northern Gaza of which 146 were children.

Homes and property

Accurate figures on the extent of home destruction are difficult to obtain. The ICRC, on the basis of field visits to eastern Jabalia between 3 and 5 October, estimates that between 70 and 80 Palestinian

homes have been destroyed. UNICEF has distributed 300 family kits containing clothes, shoes and school stationery for the worst affected families covering some 1,500 children.

Infrastructure damage

The ICRC reports that power has now been restored to most of the homes in the area between Sika street and Salah ed Din street. However, leaks still occur in the water network system in the area. A 8,000 litre UNRWA tanker accompanied the food distribution on 7 October to address this problem.

Land levelling

UNRWA and the World Food Programme (WFP) (who were distributing food in the Sika street area of eastern Jabalia on 7 October) confirmed that extensive land levelling has taken place between Sika street and Salah ed Din street. Given the volatile situation on the ground, it is not possible for UNRWA or local organisations to provide an accurate assessment of the amount of land that has been levelled since the start of the operation.

Food

Following prior coordination with the IDF to enter areas under its control, UNRWA and WFP finally succeeded in a food distribution on 7 October. UNRWA had last attempted a distribution on 30 September but this was abandoned due to heavy IDF gunfire in the vicinity of the UNRWA relief office from where the distribution was taking place.

During the Thursday distribution, 300 families in the Sika street area received food parcels. Each UNRWA food parcel contained 15 kg of rice, 15 kg of sugar, 12 kg of lentils, 5 kg of whole milk, 7 litres of sunflower oil, 60 tins of canned meat, fish and vegetables and fresh bread. WFP supplied the bread, cooking oil and high energy biscuits.

UNRWA and WFP intend a further distribution 8 October that planned to target 200 families in Tal el Zatar. As of 2.00 pm 8 October, UNRWA and WFP were still awaiting the agreement of the IDF to move into the area. (UNRWA has identified 600 vulnerable families, approximately 3,300 persons that have been unable to leave their homes since the beginning of the incursion.)

Education

Schools remain closed in Jabalia , Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia affecting 30,000 UNRWA students and 8,000 students from the state sector.

Health

Concern persists over the inability of Palestinian civilians living in isolated areas to access health services. Patients cannot reach clinics and hospitals, and health service providers cannot reach those needing medical assistance. In Beit Hanoun, primary health care services are available through the MoH and UNRWA clinic, but there are no secondary facilities in the town. Persons must travel to Kamal Adwan hospital in Jabalia and Al Awda hospital in Beit Lahia. Prior coordination with the IDF is required, in order to reach either of these hospitals.

International organisations are attempting to increase the capacity of both hospitals and clinics. CARE International as part of its ongoing Emergency Medical Assistance Programme (EMAP) will support an additional two clinics in northern Gaza operated by the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and the Palestinian Medical Relief Services (PMRS). Each clinic will receive a medical kit containing approximately 800 treatments.

Emergency disposable kits will also be provided by CARE International to PMRS mobile units currently in Jabalia camp. Around 60% of the items in the kits will be repacked and distributed to

houses in the camp as individual first aid kits, and the remaining 40% will be used by the mobile units. Items included are sterile gauze, micropore tape, crepe bandage, cotton wool and gauze rolls.

UNICEF has delivered an emergency health kit to Kamal Adwan hospital, which has sufficient supplies to treat 30,000 people for one month. Additionally, as part of its regular pre-positioning process, UNICEF will be factoring in additional supplies to take account of the current situation in northern Gaza. Orders have been placed for early newborn kits of which 200 are planned for northern Gaza, physical trauma kits, obstetric kits and a further five emergency health kits, which will each have a 150,000 person capacity.

Access for chronic patients suffering from conditions such as asthma, diabetes, hypertension and cardiac disorders remains a serious concern. UNRWA believes that a number of patients has stored their required medications in expectation of prolonged closures. However, this is only possible for those taking oral treatments. As each day passes, stocks will diminish. Despite reports of widespread infrastructure damage which has affected water and sewerage networks, there is currently no indication of an increase in communicable diseases.

Closures

The Gaza Strip remains divided into three sections because of the IDF imposed closures of the coastal road south of Gaza city since 27 September and Abu Houli junction since 29 September. Restrictions were lifted on both the road and junction only on 4 October between 2.30 and 5.00 pm.

Humanitarian Access

International humanitarian staff working for the UN have been prevented by the IDF from entering Gaza since Tuesday, 21 September. An attempt at coordination was made on Monday, 4 October that failed. A further attempt is planned for Saturday, 9 October.

UNRWA and the ICRC report that the IDF has now gravelled the “humanitarian road” between Al Nadr towers and the bedouin village in northern Beit Lahia. Prior to this resurfacing, it had been extremely difficult for vehicles to pass.

Coordination

Coordination meetings initiated by OCHA and WHO have taken place in Gaza City on 3 and 7 October and have involved UN agencies, ICRC, national and international NGOs.