



## GAZA HUMANITARIAN SITUATION REPORT 17 November 2008

### KEY POINTS

- Between 5 and 16 November, Israel has blocked all commercial and humanitarian goods from entering into the Gaza Strip with the exception of two days when some industrial fuel was allowed in. Civilians continue to pay the price of conflict and violence and their access to humanitarian assistance is at stake.
- Today, 17 November, Israel allowed 33 truckloads including 21 for humanitarian aid agencies to enter Gaza. UNRWA, which was allowed to enter eight trucks, announced that as of Tuesday, 18 November, it will resume its food distribution. The Agency needs a minimal of 15 trucks/day to sustain normal humanitarian operations.
- While this is a positive step, the amount entered is insufficient to meet the needs of all the civilians dependant on humanitarian assistance. Efforts need to be redoubled to ensure that humanitarian organizations have unimpeded access to enter and deliver assistance to all those in need in the Gaza Strip. Whatever the political or security consideration behind these measures, there is an obligation by all parties to preserve human dignity and to ensure the basic well-being of the Gazan civilian population, of which more than half are children.
- The average daily number of truckloads entering Gaza hit a new low in November - 30 trucks/day - compared to 123 truckloads/day during October 2008. The October average was already low (constituting only 37% of the amount imported in May 2007) and was almost the same daily average before the 19 June 2008 "calm" had been implemented.
- Because of the ongoing blockade and the shortages of stock, these thirteen days of total closures have already caused severe shortages, especially in fuel and electricity supply. The closure shut down the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries- mainly the most vulnerable- who are dependent on this critical source of aid.
- Israel's closing came in response to the firing of more than 100 Qassam rockets and mortars into Israel injuring one Israeli civilian and causing property damage, by Palestinian militants. This was following an IDF military search operation which killed six Hamas operatives and demolished a house east of Deir al Balah and Khan Younis on 4 November.

**Statement by UN Secretary - General Ban Ki Moon 14 November 2008:** The Secretary-General reiterates his condemnation of rocket attacks. He calls for an end to such attacks and urges full respect by all parties of the calm that has been in effect since 19 June 2008.

The Secretary-General is concerned that food and other life saving assistance is being denied to hundreds of thousands of people, and emphasizes that measures which increase the hardship and suffering of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip as a whole are unacceptable and should cease immediately. In particular, he calls on Israel to allow urgently, the steady and sufficient supply of fuel and humanitarian assistance. He also calls on Israel to resume facilitating the activities of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and all humanitarian agencies, including through unimpeded access for UN officials and humanitarian workers.

## **FUEL SHORTAGES**

### **Industrial fuel for Electricity – daily rolling blackouts**

The Nahal Oz fuel pipeline, which is the only line to import fuel into the Gaza Strip, remains closed by the Israeli authorities for thirteen consecutive days except on two days in which it was partially opened for the inflow of the Gaza power plant's industrial fuel. Since 1 November, the Gaza power plant has received a total of 1,345,430 litres or (24%) of the 5,700,000 litres it should have received during this period.

Due to the lack of fuel, Gaza's sole power plant was forced to completely shut down on 9 and 10 November. Since 13 November, it has undergone rolling blackouts of up to eight hours per day in most areas.

The Gaza Electricity Distribution Company has set a daily power cut schedule by which each household in Gaza City and in the middle area have no power for 16 hours per day, 8-12 hours/day in northern Gaza, 4-8 hours/day in Khan Younis and 2-4 hours/day in Rafah. The power cuts are mainly affecting populations in Gaza City and central areas of the Gaza Strip.

Gaza's normal consumption of electricity is 240MW. Its power deficit is almost half- 103 MW, resulting from the blockade on fuel and mechanical parts as well as the deficit caused by the 2006 Israeli bombing of the power plant's transformers. The remaining 137MW provided by the Israel Electrical Corporation (120MW) and by Egypt (17MW) is now being load-shared among Gaza's 1.5 million population resulting in intermittent power supply to households across the Gaza Strip.

## **COOKING GAS SHORTAGES**

### **Bread rationing / households unable to cook**

The Gas Station Owners' Association (GSOA) reported that there is a severe shortage of cooking gas in the Gaza Strip and already 20 pita-bread bakeries out of 47 are not operational. Bread rationing (one bag per person) and long queues are occurring at bakeries.

Cooking gas is also not available for household use, causing some families to use any available flammable object including wood and plastic to cook.

## **PETROL REDUCED**

Petrol availability has been significantly reduced in the open market with only 124,410 liters received from Israel since the beginning of the month. According to GSOA, Gaza's estimated needs of petrol are 100,000 lit/day. Diesel is available but supply is decreasing due to the increased stockpiling by residents.

## **WATER AND SEWAGE**

Most Gaza residents are suffering disruption to their daily lives as result of the reduced access to water, since they are dependant on electricity to pump water into their houses. During the power outages, the water cannot be pumped above ground level.

The Coastal Municipal Water Utility (CMWU) reported that, due to the power outages and the lack of fuel (resulting also from Palestinian political rift), 20% of water wells (30 wells) are totally not functional, and 60% of water wells (85 wells) are partially functioning.

On 10 November 08, the CMWU launched an appeal, stating that the utility is unable to implement its maintenance work to water and waste water facilities due to the lack of fuel and spare parts as a

consequence of the closure. It was concerned that 150 water wells, three waste water treatment plants and 35 waste water pumping stations could stop functioning during the current electricity outages due to the lack of backup fuel reserve.

On 16 and 17 November UNRWA responded to the appeal and donated 40,000 litres of fuel to the CMWU. This amount will cover the needs until 21 November. UNRWA has provided the CMWU in the last three months with 15,000 litres of backup fuel. Approximately, 30% of the Gaza Strip population have access to running water for 4-6 hours every four days, 30% of the population has access to water for 4-6 hours every three days and 40% of the population has access to water for 4-6 hours every other day.

The fuel shortages are triggering a further deterioration since sewage pumps and the main station are dependant on electricity for operation. Without sufficient back-up fuel, these pumps may not function which could result in untreated sewage pouring into heavily populated areas.

## **FOOD**

The closure of the crossings was also affected humanitarian food assistance. On 13 November, UNRWA announced it could not continue its food distribution to nearly 750,000 Gazans because of the shortages. Today, it was allowed to enter eight trucks. The agency needs at least 15 trucks a day to sustain normal humanitarian operations. UNRWA is expected to resume its food distribution as of tomorrow, Tuesday 18 November.

A shortage of fresh food, meat and fruits and other types of food items has been reported. Although there are no reports yet of flour shortage, there is a growing concern for flour shortages to happen within this week if Karni conveyer belt, the only crossing handling wheat flour, remains closed.

## **HEALTH**

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that hospitals in Gaza remain operational in spite of the power cuts. The hospitals currently have enough fuel to power their emergency generators. However, there is growing fear in hospitals and clinics regarding increased dependency on the back-up generators to run basic medical services including surgical operations. These generators are in place for emergency use only and could fail at any time.

This blockade, compounded by the Palestinian political rift, together with the suspension of development assistance, are having a devastating impact on Gaza's already fragile health and sanitation services. The health services are in a dire state – there are pharmaceutical shortages, services closed down, specialists without proper trainings, medical machinery in need of repair and upgrade.

According to WHO, no pharmaceutical supplies have been delivered by the Ministry of Health in Ramallah to the Central Drug Stores in Gaza since 1 September 2008, except for a few drugs shipments facilitated by WHO. The last drugs shipment facilitated by the organization was on 24 October 2008. Currently, 95 essential drugs and 174 medical supplies are reported to be out of stock.