



OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

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"I have seen only a fraction of the damage. This is shocking and alarming. These are heartbreaking scenes. I am deeply grieved by what I have seen today ... We need to restore a basic respect for civilians. Where civilians have been killed, there has to be a thorough investigation, full explanations and, where it is required, accountability." UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 20 January 2009

Latest Developments: 21 – 22 January 22, 2009

- United Nations Under Secretary-General of Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes arrived in the oPt on 21 January, on a five-day mission in the region to review humanitarian needs in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the recent military operation. On 22 January, he visited the Gaza Strip and met with residents and UN staff as part of the humanitarian needs assessment team appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

- Four Palestinians were injured on 22 January by a shell fired from an Israeli gunboat sailing off the Gaza coast. The gunboat reportedly was firing at Palestinian fishermen. Earlier the morning of the 22nd, a house was set afire by a shell fired from an Israeli gunboat. No injuries were reported. Also on the morning of the 22nd, IDF troops shot and injured a child east of Gaza City near the border.

Cease-fire declared in Gaza; Over 1,300 Palestinians killed

After weeks of hostilities, Israel declared a unilateral cease-fire effective at 0200 18 January. Later in the day, Hamas and other Palestinian factions and groups (except the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) also announced a unilateral cease-fire. Israel announced the withdrawal of all its troops from the Gaza Strip and the cease-fire was holding as of 20 January.

From the start of the Israeli military operation on 27 December through 1600 19 January, 1,314 Palestinians were killed and 5,300 injured, according to the Palestinian Minister of Health in Gaza. Among those killed are 412 children and 110 women. Children and women make up 1855 and 795 of the injured, respectively. Two additional Palestinian children were killed on 20 January by unexploded ordnance in Az Zaitoun in Gaza governorate. According to the Israeli Magen David Adom, Israeli civilian casualties were three dead and 182 injured. Ten Israeli soldiers were killed.

Tens of thousands displaced

Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights estimated that up to 90,000 people were displaced during the operation, including up to 50,000 children. At the height of hostilities, UNRWA was operating 50 emergency shelters for over 50,000 displaced persons. Thousands of other Gazans sought refuge with family members. The ICRC also provided shelter to some, especially during what it characterized as a night of "terror and drama", on 15 January when intense fighting occurred. As of late 20 January, 18,035 people remained in 30 shelters, down from 29,421 people on 19 January.

Follow-up on Zeitun killings

Following the cease-fire, rescue workers were able finally to reach the Zeitun area and recover corpses of Palestinians killed during Israeli military activity there. In a previous report (see *Weekly Briefing Notes, 1-8 January 2009*), OCHA reported that on 5 January Israeli military shells hit a house where over 100 Palestinians had gathered following orders to do so by the Israeli army. Initial estimates placed the death toll from the shelling at approximately 30. During a three-hour

lull in the fighting on 7 January, some of the dead and wounded were recovered, including wounded persons originally believed to have been killed. Given limited time, however, the ICRC/PCRS team was unable to reach all houses in the area. Restricted access to the area, thereafter, made confirming the total number of killed and injured impossible. Bodies recovered and information gathered after the cease-fire now place the death toll at 22 members of the same family, including 9 children and 7 women. An additional seven members of the same family, including three children, were killed in the same area in separate incidents during the military operation.

UN personnel and facilities hit

At approximately 10:00 hours on 15 January, Israeli shells struck the main UNRWA compound, injuring three persons. The shells caused a fire that destroyed a workshop and the main warehouse which housed hundreds of tonnes of humanitarian supplies set for distribution. Approximately 700 Palestinians were taking refuge in the compound at the time of the incident; they were eventually evacuated to a nearby emergency shelter. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called the attack on the UNRWA compound “an outrageous and totally unacceptable attack against the United Nations.”

On 17 January, a number of white phosphorous shells struck the yard of an UNRWA school in Beit Lahia, causing panic among the 1600 civilians who had taken refuge there. While evacuating the shelter, a shell struck the third floor of the school, killing two brothers, aged five and seven, and injuring 14 others including the boys’ mother. UNRWA demanded an investigation into the incident.

Since the onset of the Israeli military operation on 27 December, over 50 UN facilities sustained damage, of which 28 reported damage in the first three days of the operation. UNRWA reports that five staff members, one Job Creation Programme (JCP) beneficiary and three contractors have been killed, and 11 staff members, 2 JCP beneficiaries and 4 contractors injured. WFP reports the death of one contractor and two injured.

One NGO supported clinic was destroyed and several NGO compounds were damaged. At least four incidents of aid convoys being shot at or near, were reported.

Israeli military acknowledges use of white phosphorous

Following allegations by human rights organizations and other experts, the Israeli media reported that the IDF acknowledged it had used two different types of ammunition containing phosphorous during its operations in Gaza. According to media reports, the IDF is investigating the misuse of one of these types in Beit Lahiya. Human rights groups have charged that Israeli forces used WP in other areas of the Gaza Strip as well. The use of phosphorus weapons is not explicitly banned under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), however it is subject to all IHL restrictions aimed at protecting the civilian population. According to several human rights groups, due to the wide area affected and its devastating health effects, the use of white phosphorus weapons in densely populated areas is illegal.

The head of the ICRC’s Arms Unit notes that WP has “a potential to cause particularly horrific and painful injuries or slow painful death”. Several hospital and clinics in Gaza reported the treatment of patients with severe flesh burning, breathing difficulties and throat spasms, which may have been caused by white phosphorous.

Also of grave concern are reports on the use of 155mm artillery shells by the IDF in the bombardments of heavily populated areas of Gaza City. According to Human Rights Watch these shells inflict blast and fragmentation damage up to 300 meters away and therefore their use in such circumstances constitutes indiscriminate attack prohibited by IHL.

Attacks on medical facilities and personnel and restricted access of rescue teams

On 15 January, the Al Quds Palestinian Red Crescent Society Hospital was hit by Israeli shells while it was providing refuge to some 500 displaced Palestinians. According to WHO, the administrative building and emergency and ambulance stations were entirely destroyed. The hospital's roof, top floor and a corridor were damaged. As a result, the hospital was unable to function. On the same day, the Al Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital and Al Fata Hospital also sustained damage from Israeli shelling. WHO reports that 34 health facilities (8 hospitals and 26 primary health care (PHC) clinics) were damaged between 27 December and 20 January. WHO also reports that 16 health personnel were killed and 22 injured while on duty since 27 December.

On 16 January, Mr. Maxwell Gaylard, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, said that "(t)he situation for hospitals, medical workers and the injured in Gaza is alarming and deteriorating. Hospitals must be protected and remain neutral in areas under any circumstances. Civilians and injured must have access to medical care."

The restricted access of rescue and medical teams to the wounded was a major problem that characterized the three weeks of hostilities, particularly after the launching of the ground offensive. The severity of the impediments to the evacuation of the wounded became more evident once the cease-fire took effect on 18 January, when rescue teams were finally able to reach areas that had been previously off-limits. ICRC reported that during the following two days about 120 corpses had been recovered from under the rubble. Many of the recovered bodies were in a state of advanced decay, posing a serious health risk. It is hard to determine how many of these people could have been saved had timely evacuation of the wounded been possible.

Widespread destruction

As access within the Gaza Strip has improved, there are reports of widespread destruction of houses, infrastructure, roads, greenhouses, cemeteries, mosques, schools and government institutions, particularly in the northern Gaza Strip. Preliminary findings from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) indicate the complete destruction of over 4,000 residences and the partial destruction of 17,000 buildings and housing units. PCBS also notes damage or destruction to mosques (23), schools, hospitals and universities (25), security headquarters (31), ministry buildings (16) and factories, workshops and other commercial establishments (1500). While stressing that its findings are preliminary, PCBS details damage to or destruction of two bridges, 10 water and sewer lines, 10 electricity generating stations and 50 kilometers of roads. PCBS estimates that direct economic losses from damage to infrastructure and buildings, along with harm to various economic activities, amount to over 1.9 billion US\$.

Al Mezan Centre field workers reported that 'entire urban blocks have disappeared' in North Gaza and eastern suburbs of Gaza City. The ICRC reported that: "A number of areas, including parts of Beit Lahiya, looked like the aftermath of a strong earthquake – entire neighbourhoods were beyond recognition. Some houses had been completely levelled; others were still standing but were so badly damaged by shelling that it would be too dangerous to move back in. Roads were completely destroyed, making it almost impossible for vehicles to move through them. Friends and neighbours who had not seen one another for weeks hugged as they returned to their homes. Others sifted through the rubble, looking for pieces of furniture or kitchen utensils that could still be used."

Access to food has improved, but remains difficult

Difficulties in food access continued during the reporting period. Access to shops improved following the partial withdrawal of Israeli troops, but the population continued to face difficulties due to the shortage of some food items on the market, the increase in prices and the lack of banknotes (cash). Between 27 December and 20 January, WFP delivered 3,885 Metric tonnes (Mt) of food into Gaza and reached over 158,000 regular beneficiaries (43% of its regular caseload). An additional 40,000 Palestinians were reached through: emergency bread distributions in Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya and ready to eat food to 13 hospitals, and High Energy Biscuit distributions at UNRWA shelters.

Health

Hospitals continued to be overwhelmed by the influx of wounded and medical personnel were under severe strain during the reporting period, including following the cease-fire. WHO has warned of the risk of an outbreak of epidemic disease due to unrecovered bodies and the flow of sewage in Beith Hanoun and Beit Lahia.

Following the cease-fire, immunization, antenatal care and management of chronic diseases services fully resumed in the 50 functioning MoH PHC clinics. Laboratory and dental services partially resumed. Health education and promotion services have recommenced in all the functioning PHC clinics. Internal referrals between PHC clinics and hospitals have been resumed for only severe cases.

Electricity

At the start of the reporting period, most households did not have electricity due to damage to the network, though power supply had increased as a result of repairs and the partial operation of the Gaza Power Plant. According to GEDCO, Gaza's power utility, 40 percent of the population remains without electricity. The remaining 60 percent receive only intermittent supply. The need for spare parts and other equipment remains a priority in order to allow GEDCO to repair damage. Gaza Electricity Distribution Company technical teams have been working since 18 January to assess and repair damage to the electricity networks.

Water and sanitation

Approximately 500,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip did not have access to running water at the start of the reporting period, as the CMWU, Gaza's water utility, had not received approval to repair damage to the water and waste water networks. As of 18 January, an additional 100,000 people had access to running water due to the partial resumption of the electricity supply, CMWU refueling of some water wells and the distribution of drinking water by several NGOs. CMWU technical teams have been working since 18 January to assess and repair damage to the water and waste water networks caused during the Israeli military operation. *(For more details on water and sanitation issues, see the Field up-date on Gaza from the Humanitarian Coordinator, available at <http://www.ochaopt.org>).*

Cash / Liquidity

Restrictions on the transfer of currency between Palestinian banks in the West Bank and their counterparts in Gaza continued during the reporting period. These restrictions prevented the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank from paying critical salaries and benefits to PA civil servants, and the banks from operating. It also prevented the payment of salaries to UNRWA staff as well as payments for its cash assistance programme for the most destitute in Gaza (94,000 beneficiaries)

Crossings

Between 16 and 20 January, 466.5 truckloads, including 293.5 for aid agencies, entered Gaza through Kerem Shalom crossing, while approximately 29 truckloads of industrial fuel for the power plant entered through Kerem Shalom and Nahal Oz crossings. Additionally, 405 tonnes of cooking gas were transferred from Nahal Oz and 189 truckloads of wheat grains and animal fodder entered via the Karni conveyor belt. On 18 January, 90,000 litres of fuel were pumped into the Gaza filling point of the Nahal Oz pipeline. During the same period, 44 doctors, 16 ambulances, a team of 27 medics and 28 truckloads of medical aid, along with 213 tonnes of medical supplies, were allowed into Gaza through Rafah. Fifty-eight medical cases were evacuated out of Gaza through Rafah.

The daily average of truckloads that entered Gaza between 16 and 20 January was 137¹ – six times as many as the daily average of truckloads that entered in November 2008, 23. It is a small fraction, however, of the daily average entered in December 2005, prior to PLC elections, when an average of 631 trucks were entering Gaza on a daily basis. In May 2007, prior to the Hamas takeover of Gaza, the figure dropped to 475 trucks daily.

West Bank casualties; Protests against Israeli operation in Gaza continue

One Palestinian child was killed and forty Palestinians (including 13 children and eight women) were injured in Israeli-Palestinian violence in the West Bank between 14 and 20 January. The majority of these casualties occurred during demonstrations: one fifteen-year-old child was killed and sixteen injured (including four children and five women injured) during demonstrations protesting the attack on Gaza. The 15-year-old Palestinian boy was killed when Israeli soldiers opened fire on Palestinian stone-throwers in the Israeli-controlled part of Hebron city (H2). Seven Palestinian males, including one child, were injured by rubber-coated metal bullets in the same incident. In addition, eighteen (including eight children) were wounded in anti-Barrier demonstrations. Six other Palestinians were assaulted during the month by IDF soldiers in different circumstances.

Also during the period, three Israeli policemen were reported injured in demonstrations against the military operation in Gaza, and an Israeli settler was injured after being shot near Kochav Hashahar settlement in the Ramallah governorate. Israeli media reports indicate that he was shot by gunfire from a Palestinian-plated car.

Pregnant woman in labor held for two hours at East Jerusalem checkpoint

During the previous reporting period, a 25-year-old pregnant woman from Al A'sawiya (Jerusalem) was delayed by soldiers at Zayem checkpoint, which controls access to East Jerusalem through the Barrier. The woman, who holds a Jerusalem ID and was traveling in an Israeli-plated car, informed the soldiers upon arrival that she was in labour. According to the woman, she was delayed for two hours, during which her water broke. After soldiers finally released the car, she delivered in it while en route to the hospital, where she was rushed into the emergency room.

Israeli authorities seal the home of Palestinian attacker's family

Israeli security forces sealed two floors (150^{m2} each) of a four story building in East Jerusalem belonging to the family of Ala' Abu Dheim, who carried out the March 2008 attack on a West Jerusalem Yeshiva (during which eight Israelis, including four children, as well as the perpetrator, were killed). The Israeli forces sealed the windows and doors with cement, after destroying the inner walls of the two floors, and then filled both floors with concrete, one meter in depth. The sealing of the house followed the Israeli High Court of Justice's rejection of a petition objecting to the demolition of the two floors in early January 2009. (see *Weekly Briefing Notes, 1-8 January 2009*). The sealing of the house resulted in the displacement of 20 Palestinians.

Settler land-leveling and related events in Nablus governorate

Increasing tension was reported in the northern West Bank following Israeli settlers' leveling of land belonging to Qaryut village (Nablus) to build a road connecting the settlements of Shilo and Eli. On 14 January, the Israeli army entered Qaryut and clashes erupted between Palestinian stone throwers and the soldiers. During that incident Israeli soldiers assaulted three women and arrested two persons. The incident occurred after Palestinian youth threw stones at the Israeli settlers leveling land. On 15 January, Israeli settlers from Eli settlement reportedly opened fire on the head of the Qaryut village council, along with two staff of an Israeli human rights organization while they were on their way to the area where land is being leveled. No injuries were reported.

West Bank: land requisition and access restrictions

¹ This figure excludes goods entered through Rafah and cooking gas entered through Nahal Oz.

The Israeli authorities issued two requisition orders in the Bethlehem governorate: one for the requisition of 13.4 dunums of land from the town of Husan for Barrier construction; and another for the requisition of 10.2 dunums of land from the town of Nahhalin for the purpose of paving a military road.

During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities imposed a general closure on the West Bank on 16 and 17 January, preventing all Palestinians holding valid permits from entering East Jerusalem and Israel, excepting urgent medical cases and those working with UN and international agencies. In the northern West Bank, four Palestinian locales, with a combined population of 11,500) spent 40 hours under IDF-imposed curfew following stone-throwing incidents (at Israeli vehicles and the Barrier) and one instance of fire opened on an Israeli vehicle.

During the reporting period, the Israeli army re-imposed six obstacles it had removed in December 2008 in the area of Massafer Yatta (Hebron).

Also in the Hebron Governorate, on 19 January, the Israeli authorities issued a military order indicating that Palestinians must now possess an Israeli-issued permit in order to reach the area beyond Beit Yattir checkpoint, located south of Yatta (Hebron), along the route of the Barrier. This follows the Israeli authorities' declaration of the area between the Barrier and the Green Line in the Hebron Governorate a closed military area, as reported last week.