



SITUATION REPORT FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

7 January 2009, 1700 hours

The Israeli military operation has entered its twelfth day, with the civilian population of Gaza continuing to bear the brunt of the violence. Israeli air, sea and ground forces continue to surround populated areas, with the Gaza and North Gaza governorates isolated from the rest of the territory. Internal movement within the Gaza Strip remains dangerous. A humanitarian cease-fire on humanitarian grounds was coordinated between 1300 and 1600 hours today in order to allow the civilian population to access basic supplies and medical services.

A critical protection crisis:

There is no safe space in the Gaza Strip- no safe haven, no bomb shelters, and the borders are closed making this one of the rare conflicts where civilians have no place to flee. UNRWA shelters are marked and their GPS locations are provided to the IDF, but they are not constructed to withstand bombardments as they are mostly schools and office buildings. Of particular concern are the growing numbers of children killed and injured. Every other person in Gaza is a child (56 percent of the population), and they remain dangerously exposed to the fighting around them. At least 101 children have been killed, almost one thousand injured and tens of thousands traumatized.

Temporary ceasefire:

Any mechanism that facilitates the distribution of assistance is welcomed. However, the needs of the population are so great at this time, that humanitarian assistance programmes need to operate round the clock. Humanitarian programmes require a constant and sustainable supply line into Gaza at a level to meet the needs of the population, as well as an environment which allows the people of Gaza to have safe access to assistance and services including free and safe movement of ambulances carrying wounded to medical services, and repair of damaged vital infrastructure. In addition, cease-fires on humanitarian grounds must be parallel to the effort to reach an immediate cessation of hostilities. As long as the hostilities continue, civilians remain unprotected and more will be killed and injured.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Hostilities continued overnight, with Israeli forces targeting residential houses of suspected Hamas and Islamic Jihad members, as well as tunnels along the Rafah border. Local radio stations continue to issue appeals for those who are trapped, injured or dead under the rubble but medical and civil defence crews face danger in accessing these areas.

Growing pockets of Gazans are trapped in their homes. In some eastern parts of the Strip and some parts south of Gaza City next to the former Israeli settlement of Netzarim, Gazans cannot flee to safety or access food because of Israeli ground forces in the area. They have supplies for a limited number of days.

In addition to dropping leaflets over areas including northern Gaza, the entire eastern border of Gaza and Rafah, the Israeli army is broadcasting messages over local radio and television stations and phoning people all over the Gaza Strip, ordering people to evacuate their homes and go to urban areas. Panicked, people are fleeing amidst gunfire and shelling.

According to the MoH, the total number of casualties as of 1400 hours today has risen to at least 683 Palestinians killed and more than 3,085 injured since 27 December. The latest toll from the shelling of the UNRWA school in Jabalia is 43 killed and about 100 injured. UNRWA has rejected Israeli claims that the school was being used to fire mortars at the Israeli army.

An Israeli soldier was killed this morning. Palestinian militants have fired at least 11 missiles into Israel as of 16:00.

SHELTER

As of this morning, approximately 16,000 Palestinians are staying in 26 emergency shelters. UNRWA has received donations of non-food items (NFIs) from organisations based in Gaza, however additional NFIs are still required. ICRC has provided UNRWA with 2,500 blankets, 500 mattresses and an additional 150 hygiene kits today, to bring their total number donated over the past two days to 500 (sufficient for 9,000 people for 10 days).

ELECTRICITY

Much of the population of the Gaza Strip continues to live without electricity, though some parts of Gaza City (fewer than 50,000 people) are now receiving electricity for 3-6 hours per day.

The 215,000 litres of industrial gas pumped into Gaza on 5 January were delivered to the Gaza power plant yesterday, 06 January. However, the GPP has not been turned on as this amount is insufficient: the plant should receive a minimum of 300,000 litres to re-operate. This would only allow for the production of around 25 MW of electricity over two days: this represents one quarter of the energy needs for Gaza City only.

GEDCO, Gaza's electricity company, confirms that their teams managed to repair one of the damaged electrical lines near Karni yesterday and plan to repair four other lines on 7 January. However, the repaired line has not been utilized due to the need to fix related damage. As of 7 January, five out of ten electricity lines from Israel are not functioning.

Despite these minor improvements, the electricity situation is not likely to drastically improve due to extensive damage to the network. An initial assessment by GEDCO indicates that they are in urgent need of 20 transformers, 10 km of cables, and at least 100 low-voltage disconnectors. GEDCO estimates it will need weeks of work and a large number of spare parts to repair the damage.

HEALTH

Hospitals continue to run on back-up generators for the fifth consecutive day. Hospitals are now reporting that fuel reserves are running out: the Gaza European Hospital has a one-week reserve; Shifa Hospital has enough for about three days; and the Gaza Pediatric Hospital reserves will last less than three days. In the PRCS Al Quds Hospital in Gaza City, the main generator that ensured that life saving medical equipment could continue to function broke down on 5 January. The hospital is now using a very small back-up generator that is only able to supply enough electricity to the intensive care unit and the operating theatre.

As it is now almost impossible to move from one part of the Gaza Strip to another, many nurses and doctors are no longer able to report to work. The ICRC attempted to coordinate safe passage for a bus with 58 hospital staff on 5 January, but this attempt had to be aborted due to the security situation.

Shifa Hospital, the main referral hospital for specialized services, and the central MoH warehouse for the entire territory, are both located in Gaza City. Due to the bisection of the Gaza Strip by Israeli forces, approximately 680,000 Gazans from the Middle Area, Khan Yunis and Rafah cannot access Shifa and it is difficult for medicines to be transported throughout the Gaza Strip.

WATER AND SANITATION

Many water wells and sewage pumps are still not functioning due to lack of electricity, diminished fuel supplies to operate back-up generators and lack of spare parts. Until electricity supply is resumed, back-up fuel distribution must be done on a daily basis as the pumps and wells have no storage capacity for fuel. On 7 January, the water utility distributed 10,000 litres of fuel from remaining reserves of 45,000 litres, donated by UNRWA several days ago, to the wells in Gaza City, enough to operate the water wells for 1-2 days. Without electricity, people are unable to pump available water to higher floors and water storage tanks on roofs due to lack of pressure.

The shortage of drinking water and sewage overflows in residential areas are becoming an imminent public health danger. Much of the population is dependent on their own stored water supplies and limited sales by private water distributors. In Gaza City, some people are now in the streets with jerry cans looking for drinking water. Sewage continues to overflow in many parts of northern Gaza, in particular Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya.

FOOD

Prior to the current operation, about 80% of the Gaza Strip's population was reliant on international assistance and 60% on food distributed by the UN and international organizations. The UN (UNRWA and WFP) estimates that, in light of the current crisis, it will have to increase its distribution by a minimum of 11 percent.

Only 50 percent of WFP's warehouse capacity is currently being used (3,700 metric tons). An additional 4,000 metric tons of food (150 trucks) is needed to ensure the food supplies in the coming period.

As most vegetables originate from Khan Yunis and southern Gaza, the bisection of the territory is resulting in a lack of vegetables in the Gaza and North Gaza governorates and an increase in prices.

CROSSINGS

Due to the dangerous security situation and bisection of Gaza, 27 out of 35 employees of Kerem Shalom who live in Gaza City cannot get to the crossing, hampering the ability to process aid.

Kerem Shalom crossing and the Nahal Oz fuel pipelines are open today. 50 truckloads are expected to come in through Kerem Shalom, and 400,000 litres of industrial gas through Nahal Oz. Rafah crossing is partially open today for the import of medical supplies and the evacuation of medical cases. Two trucks of medical supplies were allowed entry through Rafah crossing on 6 January. In addition, 20 medical cases exited and 10 people entered Gaza. The Karni conveyor belt used for grains remains closed.

PRIORITY NEEDS

Protection of civilians: Civilians, notably children who form over half of Gaza's population of nearly 1.5 million, are bearing the brunt of the violence. As one of the most densely populated places in the world, it is clear that more civilians will be killed, and more homes, buildings and civilian infrastructure will be destroyed, if the conflict continues. The parties must respect the norms of International Humanitarian Law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality.

Access for ambulance and rescue teams: There are an unknown number of dead, injured and trapped people in houses which have been shelled and in areas where there is ongoing hostilities. The local radio stations

continue to broadcast appeals for rescue services. Ambulances and fire trucks have been attacked before and are fearful to go to these places.

Electricity is necessary for the operation of services within the Gaza Strip notably health, water and sanitation services. This includes repairing damaged electricity lines, bringing in needed transformers, and allowing repairs to five transformers. Back-up generators are not meant to function more than 8 hours per day, and are not reliable following repeated and prolonged use.

Supply of fuel: Industrial fuel is needed to power the Gaza Power Plant, which has been shut down since 30 December. The replacement of transformers which were heavily damaged is also urgently needed, as well as coordination to allow technical teams to fix other damage. Nahal Oz crossing must remain open as it is the only crossing which can facilitate the transfer of sufficient amounts of fuel to restart and maintain operations of the power plant, and restock other types of fuel needed in the Strip.

Wheat grain, essential to provide flour for local bakeries and humanitarian food distribution to the population of Gaza. The Karni Crossing conveyor belt is the only mechanism which can facilitate the import of the amount of grain required in the Strip at this time. This crossing remains closed.

Cash has still not entered the Gaza Strip and is urgently needed, including for PA salaries and the UNRWA cash distribution programme to some 94,000 dependent beneficiaries, as well as its “cash for work” programme, salaries for its staff and payments to suppliers.