



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

30 January – 2 February 2009, 1700 hours

Violent incidents continue to undermine the cease-fire which was unilaterally implemented by Israel on 18 January, and later the same day by Hamas and other Palestinian factions. On 31 January, a Grad rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed south of Ashkelon, with no injuries reported. On 1 February, militants fired a number of rockets and mortar shells into southern Israel, lightly wounding two soldiers and a civilian. Also on 1 February, Israeli forces exchanged fire with militants near the Kissufim crossing, though no casualties were reported. On the evening of 1 February, the Israeli air force struck a number of tunnels along the Gaza-Egyptian border and a building in the Khan Yunis area. On 2 February, militants fired mortars into Israel, and an Israeli air strike on a vehicle in Rafah killed one Palestinian and wounded three others.

Needs and damage assessments are still underway. The twenty-two days of conflict left over 1,300 Palestinians dead and over 5,300 injured, as well as three Israelis killed and 182 injured, and caused extensive damage to commercial enterprises, public infrastructure and agriculture. Hostilities are also expected to have had substantial emotional and psychological effects on the population. Prior to the conflict, the humanitarian situation was already serious following an 18-month blockade of the Gaza Strip, where 80 percent of the population was already dependent on aid from the United Nations. Organizations are currently focusing on re-establishing basic services, including water, health, food, cash assistance, education and psychosocial support. Work has already begun on conducting repairs to shelters, water and sanitation systems, health facilities, and other essential infrastructure.

The number of truckloads of aid permitted to enter Gaza daily by the Israeli authorities remains insufficient, and humanitarian organizations continue to face serious restrictions to enter Gaza. These constraints are impairing the ability of aid organizations to respond to the urgent needs of the population in a timely and effective manner.

On 2 February, the Gaza Flash Appeal was launched in Geneva. Amounting to \$613 million, it is a strategic plan incorporating 106 NGO and 82 UN projects to respond to the emergency humanitarian and early recovery needs of the Gaza population. A copy of the appeal can be obtained at www.reliefweb.int or at www.ochaopt.org.

Protection of Civilians

Clarification: While correctly reported on 6 January that Israeli shells landed outside an UNRWA school in Jabalia, resulting in an initial estimate of 30 fatalities, the Situation Report of 7 January referred to 'the shelling of the UNRWA school in Jabalia.' The Humanitarian Coordinator would like to clarify that the shelling, and all of the fatalities, took place outside rather than inside the school. According to UNRWA, the number of fatalities is over 40, many of them among the 1,368 people who had taken refuge in the school.

Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, arrived on 2 February to conduct a visit to Gaza and southern Israel to ascertain first-hand the impact of the recent conflict on children.

Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) figures as of 31 January are 1,380 Palestinians dead, of whom 431 are children and 112 are women. This number does not include those who have died due to lack of access to regular health care (including obstetric care and treatment for chronic diseases). The number of injuries stands at 5,380, of whom 1,872 are children and 800 are women. ICRC is closely monitoring the issue of persons unaccounted for following the conflict. It has contacted the authorities both in Israel and in Gaza to obtain access to prisoners captured during the military operation.

Three Israelis have been killed and 183 injured since 27 December by rocket and mortar fire by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip. Eleven Israeli soldiers have been killed and 340 wounded.

Shelter

As of 2 February, three non-school UNRWA shelters remain open in Jabalia, Beach Camp and Deir Al Balah, hosting 388 displaced people. Although most people have left the shelters since the cease-fire, thousands of Gazans remain homeless. The preliminary report of the shelter/IDP joint rapid needs assessment which was organized between 22 and 25 January indicates that, in 45 surveyed localities in Gaza, 10,991 displaced households, or 71,657 people, were staying with host families. The total number of internally displaced persons remains unknown. Since the cease-fire, UNRWA has continued to provide immediate assistance in the form of blankets, mattresses and other basic items including clothes to refugees in need. Priority needs currently include blankets, mattresses, plastic sheeting, kitchen kits, hygiene kits, water tanks, clothing and tents.

Health

Most health facilities have resumed normal operation. Referral abroad of patients requiring specialized care has resumed, although at a lower level than before the crisis. Prior to 27 December, an average of 500 medical cases per month were referred out of Gaza via Erez, out of an average of 800-900 applications submitted per month. From 27 December to 29 January, 30 medical cases were referred out of Gaza via Erez; 97 applications were submitted between 1-21 January.

According to WHO's 29 January initial health needs assessment, enduring risks include complications and excess mortality in patients with chronic diseases as a result of the suspension of treatment and delayed access to health care during the conflict; diarrhea outbreaks from water-borne and food-borne diseases as a result of the lack of access to clean water and sanitation and the weak public health surveillance system; as well as long-term mental health problems as a result of the conflict, on-going insecurity and the lack of protective factors. The lack of access to specialized tertiary care remains a serious concern.

Large volumes of medical supplies have been donated, covering most needs of the health sector in Gaza. A recent assessment done by the NGO Medical Aid for Palestinians reveals that until 24 January, only approximately 30 percent of donations had been classified and logged. Psychotropic drugs are still lacking and urgently needed. The most urgently needed equipment identified by the Ministry of Health, notably pulse oxymeters, defibrillators, infusion pumps, syringe pumps, ventilators and anesthesia monitors, have still not been received.

Water and Sanitation

Preliminary findings of the Palestinian Hydrology Group's initial rapid needs assessment of households show that Al Atatra and Izbet Abed Rabbo sustained the most damage to their water network during the military operation, with 50 percent of their network damaged. Other areas, including Al Salateen, Al Twam, Jahr ad Deek Al Mughraga, Khuza'a and Al Fukhari, sustained damage to 30-35 percent of their water network. In total, 5,708 roof-top tanks were completely destroyed and 2,985 were damaged. 2,204 solar heaters were destroyed and 1,762 were damaged.

The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), Gaza's water utility, continues to work on urgent maintenance of the water and wastewater networks, though it will be unable to complete the repair without the entry of needed spare parts into Gaza, which remains problematic. On 28 January, ICRC requested approval from the Israeli authorities for the entry of 36 trucks containing repair material; only 13 trucks were allowed into Gaza. PVC pipes that ICRC had previously cleared were refused entry by the Israeli authorities.

ACF distributed 1,439.25 cubic metres of water to private households (19,591 beneficiaries) and 781.5 cubic metres to shelters between 17-31 January. Oxfam delivered 4,374 cubic metres between 17-29 January. PHG delivered 64 cubic metres between 22-31 January. UNICEF distributed 200 basic family kits and 3 collapsible water tanks in southern and central Gaza as well as 50 family hygiene kits in Gaza and North Gaza between 29 January and 1 February. ICRC continues to supply materials to CMWU for emergency repair of the networks.

Food

According to WFP, between 35-60 percent of the agriculture industry has been damaged by the Israeli military operation. FAO estimates that 13,000 families who depend directly on farming, herding and fishing have suffered significant damage to their livelihoods.

Electricity

Much of the Gaza Strip is receiving only intermittent electricity. While the main power lines in Gaza have been repaired, some of the lines providing electricity directly to households are still not working.

Due to the shortage of fuel supplies, the Gaza Power Plant reduced production to 30 MW on the evening of 30 January. Since the cease-fire, Israel has allowed 2,568,400 litres of industrial fuel into Gaza (an average of 171,000 litres/day), short of the 350,000 litres/day needed to produce the 60-65 MW it was able to produce last week and the 450,000 litres/day needed to produce its maximum capacity of 80 MW.

GEDCO estimates current a power deficit of 64 percent in Gaza Governorate, 50 percent in North Gaza and 50 percent in the Middle Area. Due to the power deficit, GEDCO has had to increase its schedule of rolling blackouts in most of the Gaza Strip: an average of 8 hours of power cuts per day are scheduled in Gaza Governorate, an average of 12 hours in North Gaza, and an average of 12 hours in the Middle Area. Khan Yunis and Rafah are largely not affected by these cuts.

Access into the Gaza Strip

NGOs continue to face difficulties accessing the Gaza Strip to carry out humanitarian work. Humanitarian personnel are only allowed to enter Gaza through Erez crossing after receiving prior clearance by the Israeli authorities. Many NGOs have failed to receive a response from the Israeli authorities regarding their applications, while others were requested to provide additional information regarding their specific mandates, activities and funding sources. Others have been denied entry altogether. A key problem has been inconsistency in the application process; some staff members are informed that they have been approved, only to be denied entry when they attempt to cross Erez. In other cases, staff receive conflicting information from Israeli authorities regarding regulations that must be met before entry is allowed.

The inability of NGOs to enter their humanitarian staff into the Gaza Strip, along with inconsistent, unpredictable procedures, impedes the ability of NGOs to effectively plan their humanitarian response and obstructs efforts to address the humanitarian crisis brought about by 18 months of closure and Israel's recent military operation.

Crossings

On 1-2 February, Rafah terminal was open in both directions subject to prior co-ordination from the Egyptian authorities; Erez was open for internationals subject to prior co-ordination from the Israeli authorities; Karni was closed except for the conveyor belt; Nahal Oz was closed; Sofa was closed; and Kerem Shalom was open. On 31 January, the Karni conveyor belt was closed, as were Nahal Oz, Kerem Shalom and Erez due to the Jewish Sabbath. On 30 January, Rafah, Erez and Kerem Shalom were open, while the Karni conveyor belt and Nahal Oz were closed.

Between 30 January and 1 February, 192 truckloads, including 111 for aid agencies, entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing. Seventy-three truckloads of grain were transferred into Gaza through the Karni conveyor belt. 260,550 litres of industrial gas and 95.5 tonnes of cooking gas entered through Nahal Oz. Fourteen trucks, 13 of medical supplies and 1 of baby milk, entered through Rafah.

The Israeli authorities have assured the humanitarian community that Kerem Shalom would be improved to allow 150 trucks per day. However, for the most part, capacity has not exceeded 120 truckloads. Only a very restricted list of items is being allowed in. For example, on 30 January, UNRWA was not allowed to bring in the plastic bags that it uses to distribute supplies. With some 20,000 food parcels distributed daily, these bags are a vital component of UNRWA's assistance.

Priority Needs

Opening of crossings: All crossings into Gaza and Israel must be operational and the number of trucks allowed into the Gaza Strip needs to be increased. The following items in Gaza are critically needed:

- *Spare parts and fuel* for the power plant, hospitals and water and sewage treatment facilities;
- *Cement, sand and other construction materials* to rebuild destroyed schools, hospitals, clinics and homes.

Humanitarian Access to Gaza: In the aftermath of the Israeli military operation, it is critical that full and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza be granted by all parties to the conflict. International agencies have faced unprecedented denial of access to Gaza since 5 November. Humanitarian access remains unreliable and needs to be granted every day without restriction.

Cash/liquidity: Cash has still not entered the Gaza Strip (except for a few international organizations) and is urgently needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid. The lack of cash prevents access to basic supplies. A system must be urgently established that ensures the regular and predictable monthly transfer of the necessary cash.

Operational security: Explosive remnants of war are limiting the access of humanitarian workers to certain areas. Security, including the marking and clearance of UXOs, is essential to ensure efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance to the population.