



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

24 - 30 March 2009

SITUATION OVERVIEW

In addition to limitations on humanitarian deliveries, restrictions on imports and exports in general continue to seriously affect the living conditions of the population. The vast majority of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip rely on local farming to produce affordable fresh foods, including fruit, vegetables, meat and fish. Movement restrictions continue to prevent herders and farmers from accessing areas near the borders. Fishermen stand to lose substantial income as a result of new restrictions that limit fishing to three miles from Gaza's shores.

All Gaza patient referrals abroad have been halted affecting many patients with serious and complicated conditions due to the taking over of the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department by the Hamas authorities in Gaza. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, together with the World Health Organization, has issued a joint statement expressing serious concerns about the halting of referrals out of the Gaza Strip.

Two months after the launch of the Flash Appeal for Gaza, the level of funding received stands at just 35 percent. For example, the 27 agricultural recovery projects aimed at protecting the livelihoods of the most vulnerable farming families received only USD 2.3 million of the USD 30 million requested.

During the reporting period, two Palestinians were injured, one civilian and one armed man in two separate incidents. In addition, Israeli patrol boats opened fire on five different occasions warning Palestinian fishing boats west of Rafah and west of Beit Lahia, forcing the boats to return to shore.

ACCESS INTO THE GAZA STRIP / CROSSINGS ¹

Commodities Import

During the period from 22 to 28 March, a total of 721 truckloads of goods including 129 for humanitarian aid agencies (18%), were allowed entry to Gaza compared to 728 reported during the last week.

This week new food items (tea, yeast, salt, potato chips) were allowed entry through commercial channels after being barred since late October 2008. Food supplies accounted for the vast majority of imported commodities, 568 truckloads (79 percent), followed by hygiene/cleaning supplies (including soap and shampoo, barred since October 2008), which accounted for 118 truckloads (16 percent). Non-edible consumables (blankets and mattresses) made up 26 truckloads (4 percent).

The remaining 9 truckloads were divided among the medical supplies (1), education/stationery supplies (2), agricultural raw materials (4) and packaging applications (2).

No construction materials, industrial/electrical appliances, livestock, vehicles/transport and/or any other type of commodity were allowed entry this week.

Exports

Two (2) truckloads of carnations (nearly 54,000 cut flowers) were exported on 23 and 26 March through Kerem Shalom crossings. The Palestine Trade Centre reported that in season, which ends by late April/May, there are only 25 dunums (out of 400 – 500 dunums in a normal production season) with a carnation production capacity of nearly 50,000 flowers per week each. Since 12 February 2009, approximately 450,000 flowers have been allowed out through Kerem Shalom out of an expected 6 million flowers being produced this season. Gaza farmers can export 40 to 50 million flowers in a normal production season. ²

1. Information on the status of border crossings and numbers of trucks crossing is compiled by OCHA Gaza, based on data provided by the Gaza Ministry of National Economy, UNRWA, UNSCO and Paltrade (Palestine Trade Centre) and cross-checked with data received from COGAT and covers the period 22 to 28 March.
2. This represents a correction of flower production estimates per season contained in the last update.

Fuel

No petrol or diesel for public use was allowed entry from Israel to Gaza during the reporting period. Petrol and diesel were last allowed entry for public use on 2 November 2008. Some 1,173 tons of cooking gas entered during the week compared to 1,017.5 tons the previous week. This amount represents 67% of the estimated weekly needs set by the Palestinian Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA). Due to the continued shortage, cooking gas is being rationed among the 21 cooking gas stations in Gaza, each station receiving only a restricted amount of gas which limits their opening to three times per week.

A total of 2,159,620 litres of industrial gas for the Gaza Power Plant was allowed in; similar to the amount being allowed in during the last seven weeks. This amount represents only 69% of the required weekly needs set by the Power Plant authority.

GSOA reported that fuel continues to be transferred to Gaza through the Rafah-Egypt border tunnels, with nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 70,000 litres of petrol being transferred per day for the open market.

Crossings Status

Sufa crossing was last open on 12 September 2008.

Karni crossing was closed.

Karni grain conveyor belt was operational on three days.

Karni cement lane has been completely closed since 29 October 2008.

Nahal Oz fuel pipeline was partially open on five days.

Kerem Shalom crossing was partially open on all six scheduled days.

Rafah border crossing was closed for cargo on all days during the reporting period.

LOGISTICS

On 24 March, the Logistics Cluster organised a visit to Kerem Shalom border crossing for cluster members who were briefed on cargo crossing procedures at the site. A summary of the visit will be posted on the Logistics Cluster website. A sketch of Kerem Shalom border crossing and link to a live webcam is posted at: <http://www.logcluster.org/gaza09a/road-transport/kerem-shalom-live-webcam-border-crossing>.

On 19 March COGAT refused clearance for tomato paste, white tahine and jam in the USAID shipments to Gaza. This decision meant that 150 pallets of food parcels (approximately 6 truck-loads) were prevented from delivery to Gaza. Plastic floor mats in a Mercy Corps International shipment were rejected by COGAT, the reason being their potential use in mosques.

The Logistics Cluster continues to call for clearance from COGAT for transportation of UNICEF early childhood development kits, recreational sports kits and children's toys (musical instruments); UK MAP medical equipment; FAO veterinary supplies; FAO fruit and olive trees; World Vision washing powder in hygiene kits. The Logistics Cluster continues to compile information on humanitarian cargo awaiting approval or rejected for transport to Gaza. The list of items and explanatory narrative documents are posted at the following link: <http://www.logcluster.org/gaza09a/supply-chain/clearance-status-of-humanitarian-cargo>.

HEALTH

On 22 March, the Hamas de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip took control of the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department. This is the main office which assesses and processes referral applications by Gaza patients for specialized hospital treatment outside Gaza. The Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health in Ramallah will not approve or fund applications as a result, and Israel and Egypt will not allow them to exit Gaza unless they have been approved by the Palestinian Authority. All Gaza patients referrals have been halted due to this action affecting many patients with serious and complicated

conditions.

Two Jordanian medical teams arrived in Gaza on 26 March: a Royal Medical Services team of 180-200 doctors, nurses and pharmacists (replacing the previous Jordanian field hospital team, in Gaza since 26 January) and a Royal Civil Defense Department team (5-8 members) to provide psychosocial support in cooperation with NGOs, UNICEF and in support of MOH in school counselor training.

WHO has published a list of 144 drugs that will be required by the Central Drug Store in Gaza before the end of September 2009. 52 items are presently out of stock. The total estimated cost of the medicines stands at USD 4.8 million.

WATER AND SANITATION

The number of people without any access to water currently stands at 35,000 (down from 40,000 last week) with an additional 100,000 receiving water every 2-3 days, according to the Coastal Municipal Water Utility (CMWU).

On 27 March, rising wastewater level in one of the two temporary wastewater disposal lagoons that were created northwest of the Bedouin village in Northern Gaza after the 27 March 07 wastewater flood, led to the collapse of the sand bank and to the leakage of approximately 40,000 - 50,000 litres of wastewater, partially flooding the nearby sunken area but caused no injuries or property damages. Since then, CMWU has been forced to stop the pumping of nearly 15,000 cm³/day of wastewater towards the emergency lagoons which were built to reduce the risk of further flooding of the existing basins. CMWU is now trying to control the flooded wastewater and is also concerned about the possible rise of wastewater level in the existing basins.

AGRICULTURE / LIVELIHOODS

Strawberry farmers in Gaza are increasingly concerned about the ability to start the new season, due to the lack of mother plants of strawberries in Gaza. The strawberry nursery season, which begins on 15 April, cannot start without mother plant seedlings, only available from Israel.

Animal fodder is entering Gaza at a sustained rate and prices have remained stable. The Israeli authorities have not allowed live animals to enter Gaza through official crossings, however some are reportedly entering through the Rafah tunnels. Drugs and vaccines for poultry are entering through the crossing points and are generally available; drugs for cattle and small ruminants are available but vaccines are not, which presents risks to animal production and human health in the Gaza Strip.

Farmers, herders and fishermen have been struggling after the multiple effects of closure, conflict and lack of access to land and sea. The agriculture-dependent families are exhausting options for maintaining livelihoods. The prohibition of exports of agricultural products and the restrictions on imports of urgently required agricultural items severely limits the immediate response, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes. Cash for work programmes, targeting the most vulnerable farmers, herders and fishermen are currently on hold due to the shortage of cash. Movement restrictions continue to prevent herders and farmers from accessing arable land near the borders. Fishermen stand to lose substantial income during the upcoming sardine season, due to recent new restrictions limiting fishing to three nautical miles from Gaza's shores. Strawberry, cut flower and cherry tomato farmers rely on export (now mostly blocked with the exception of small quantities of cut flowers), rather than local markets for their profits.

FOOD SECURITY

- The majority of staple food commodities are available in markets throughout the Gaza Strip.
- Prices of flour, sugar and salt are declining compared to last week; salt is available in large quantities after being cleared to enter by Israel.
- Fresh vegetables and fruit (bananas and apples) are available in the market in relatively large quantities

at generally affordable prices.

- There is an improvement in poultry meat availability in local markets with prices varying between 13-18 NIS per kg.
- The price of fresh meat remains stable at 60 NIS per kg in all markets. According to livestock traders; thousands of small sized sheep (30 kg each) have been transferred from Egypt to Gaza through the tunnels and sold at 120 Jordanian dinars (660 NIS).
- Dairy products prices remain at the same levels as during the previous week.
- As of 25 March one out of the six Gaza four mills is still not operating (El Bader Mill), destroyed during the Cast Lead operation. The total stock of wheat flour at the Gaza mills stands at 11,300 tons, sufficient for approximately 25 days.
- Most bakeries in the Gaza strip are operating at 70 percent of their capacity, due to a shortage of cooking gas and insufficient quantities of essential commodities crossing into the Gaza Strip.
- Fishing continues to be restricted to three nautical miles only, causing major losses to fishermen. Sardines were not available last week in the market even though the sardine season has already started. Fish imported from Israel (at 30-40 NIS per kg) was available.

EARLY RECOVERY

Environment The safe removal of rubble (estimated at 600,000 tons) is a pressing environmental issue. Some communities and municipalities have begun clearing already but the associated risks require coordinated technical expertise. Two children reportedly died recently as a result of a UXO explosion. In addition to the presence of remnants of war, a recent assessment by UNEP revealed asbestos contamination in the Rafah area and confirmed ground water, aquifer and soil contamination from sewage in the Sheikh Eljin area, south of the Gaza wastewater treatment plant, according to the Early Recovery Cluster.

Livelihoods A number of agencies, including World Vision and UNDP, are involved in livelihoods activities, primarily on a cash-for-work basis to provide opportunities for vulnerable and affected households. The recent war has paralysed economic development, destroyed much of the remaining capital stock and severely affected employment opportunities. Lack of availability of cash remains a significant constraint for early recovery of livelihoods.

Utilities Utilities infrastructure in energy (fuel and electricity), transportation and telecommunications sustained severe damage during the crisis. Gaza Electricity Distribution Company has completed partial, temporary repairs to the electricity infrastructure however, 10 percent of the population in the Gaza Strip still does not receive electricity. The remaining 90 percent receive an intermittent supply with an overall deficit of 46 MW (19 percent of overall energy demand). Limited access of essential equipment and materials into Gaza is particularly constraining activities.

Governance. The three week war in Gaza resulted in the destruction of physical infrastructure used for official governance duties as well as the displacement and/or death of civil servants, including a large number from the security sector. Many civil society operations and premises were also damaged. UNDP is supporting the restoration of essential services delivery capacities and actual delivery through civil society organizations.

SHELTER

- An UNRWA survey of damage to refugee shelters continues, with the shelters of more than 20,000 families assessed to date. The number of refugee families whose shelters has been totally destroyed currently stands at 2,000. UNRWA is ready to provide cash assistance and shelter repair support to all of these families, but has been unable to deliver this assistance to beneficiaries to date due to a shortage of liquidity and construction materials in the Gaza Strip.

- With PA support, UNDP has been able to pay cash assistance and provide shelter repair support to almost 9,000 non-refugee families to date.
- The lack of construction materials and cash remain the main obstacles to implementing shelter activities in Gaza.
- Large scale rubble removal is yet to start.
- The PA has initiated a registration campaign whereby families whose houses were destroyed or severely damaged can register at local banks.

FUNDING

The Gaza Flash Appeal was launched in Geneva on 2 February 2009. The Appeal requests USD 615 million and it includes nearly 200 projects by NGOs and United Nations agencies in response to the emergency humanitarian and early recovery needs of 1.4 million people in Gaza. The table below shows the status of pledges and commitments to-date and reveals a 35 percent funding level with many sectors (agriculture, protection, education and early recovery) being severely under-funded.

Another funding mechanism used to fund the Gaza emergency is the Humanitarian Response Fund mechanism (HRF). To-date, 18 projects have been approved through the HRF to meet a variety of urgent needs including shelter, health, food, psycho-social counselling, UXO clearance, water rehabilitation and non-food items, worth just over USD 3 million. The Fund currently stands at USD 2.5 million, with new contributions and disbursements pending.

Cluster/Sector	Requirements in USD	Committed/ Pledged in USD	% Funded
Total:	615,125,031	216,126,903	35
Agriculture	31,083,016	2,300,000	5
Cash for Work and Cash Assistance	92,338,376	29,620,341	32
Coordination and Support Services	29,817,823	13,901,235	47
Early Recovery	27,475,000	619,010	2
Education	46,219,914	5,095,319	11
Food Aid and Food Security	153,246,254	85,048,124	55
Health	46,262,341	12,678,421	27
Protection	5,515,926	0	0
Psycho-social and Mental Health	38,375,495	5,085,298	13
Sector not yet specified	-	20,629,465	
Shelter and non-food items	119,559,932	33,743,997	28
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	25,230,954	7,405,693	29