



GAZA HUMANITARIAN SITUATION REPORT 3 January 2009 as of 16:00

Israeli military operations and heavy bombardment of the Gaza Strip continued into their eighth day.

VIOLENCE

As of 3 January, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, 432 people have been killed and 2,200 persons have been injured.

On 3 January, the IAF continued air and naval strikes in all parts of the Gaza Strip, particularly North Gaza, Gaza and the Middle area, with airstrikes focusing on moving vehicles, residences, open areas, and former Israeli settlements. In addition to the airstrikes, the IDF has commenced shelling areas in Gaza up to and exceeding one kilometer from the Israel-Gaza border. At the moment of issuing this release, artillery shell fire has been reported from the eastern border to open areas in North Gaza, Gaza and the Middle Area.

Increasing numbers of warning leaflets are being dropped, warning people to evacuate the targeted areas, exacerbating confusion and panic among the civilian population.

The American School north of Gaza was directly hit and almost completely destroyed, with one school guard killed. In addition, at least three to five schools were damaged by Israeli shelling of nearby targets.

Palestinian militants fired 20 rockets and mortars into Israel injuring 3 Israelis.

HEALTH

According to WHO, many medical supply donations have entered the Strip in recent days, including through Rafah, and more are in the pipeline. The main challenge for now is how to catalogue and manage these supplies. WHO is identifying which individual items may still be needed, particularly in regards to medical equipment which is more difficult to assess. Intensive care unit capacity in hospitals is still limited and the lack of specialist surgeons remains a problem. Blood units have entered Gaza, bringing supplies to adequate levels.

In addition to the Ministry of Health's current central warehouse, UNRWA has identified a storage facility for incoming MoH pharmaceuticals. A logistical team of pharmacists and other staff are shifting supplies currently held in small storage spaces throughout Gaza to the new central warehouse for organization and inventory; all new medicines arriving will also be stored in this new warehouse. Three more storage facilities in the north, central and south have been identified.

Since 27 December, 103 patients entered Egypt through Rafah for external medical treatment. Of growing concern are the 700-1000 chronic medical patients who had been receiving regular treatment in Israel and East Jerusalem each month. The existing referral system through Erez for these patients has been disrupted.

Without electricity from the Gaza Power Plant (GPP), hospitals are operating on backup electric generators. These generators cannot be relied on to provide constant power to hospitals, and it is critical that fuel is delivered to the power station in order for mains electricity to be restored.

FOOD

Distribution of food assistance to the most vulnerable is erratic due to the security situation. Since 27 December, WFP (through implementing partners) has distributed only a fraction of the 1350 metric tonnes available and the food that is currently being distributed should have been distributed in the October-December cycle. UNRWA resumed its prior food distribution in seven distribution centres on 1 January which it had suspended on 18 December; distributions are continuing today.

WATER AND SANITATION

On 2 January, airstrikes in the Al Mughraga area damaged a main drinking water pipe, cutting off water supplies to 30,000 people in Nuseirat Camp.

Beit Lahiya Sewage Lagoon: There is a particular emerging concern, that current military operations could damage the sand walls of the Beit Lahiya sewage lagoon causing a massive sewage overflow. In addition to agricultural areas, up to 15,000 people are directly at risk. Two years ago, five people were killed and 2,000 displaced when the lagoon overflowed.

SHELTER

Several hundred people have sought shelter at locations provided by UNRWA. The Agency has 91 pre-identified locations throughout the Gaza Strip, primarily schools, with a capacity for 40,000 persons, including non-refugee displaced if necessary.

CROSSINGS

KEREM SHALOM: Closed today. A total of 75 truckloads including 42 for humanitarian aid agencies were allowed entry to Gaza through Kerem Shalom crossing yesterday, 2 January. These included 46 truckloads of food supplies (including 21 trucks for UNRWA), five medical supplies (MoH and WHO), 17 truckloads of animal feed, five power generators for ICRC, and two trucks of other items.

RAFAH: Three truckloads of medical supplies (Qatari, Kuwait and Egyptian donation) were allowed entry to Gaza through Rafah crossing today. Five medical cases were allowed out.

EREZ: Closed today. 226 foreign nationals (Russians, Ukrainians, Americans and Norwegians) were allowed out through Erez yesterday. International staff of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been prevented from entering Gaza for the past two months, adversely affecting program management and assessments.

PRIORITY IMPORTS NEEDED:

Power plant and electrical transformers: Industrial fuel is needed to power the Gaza Power Plant, which has been shut down since 30 December. Replacement of ten transformers which were completely damaged is also urgently needed to restore electricity supply to 250,000 people in central and northern Gaza. All water, sanitation and other utilities, which provide basic services to the population, as well as hospitals and the general population are affected by the outages; some areas have now experienced power outages for up to 48 hours. Hospitals are increasingly reverting to generators to support intensive care and operating room functions.

Wheat grain: Essential to provide flour for local bakeries and humanitarian food distribution to the population of Gaza. There are long lines at bakeries and bread rationing has been implemented by the Gaza authorities.

Cash: Has still not entered the Gaza Strip and is urgently needed, including for the UNRWA cash distribution program to some 94,000 dependent beneficiaries, as well as its “cash for work” program.