



Situation Report: Electricity, water and fuel supplies dwindling within the Gaza Strip - concerns over deteriorating humanitarian crisis

30 June 2006¹

On 25 June, Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip attacked an Israeli military post at Kerem Shalom and took captive an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier. Following this the IDF closed all the crossing points into the Gaza Strip, increased air strikes, resumed intensive artillery shelling, and stationed troops on the Gaza Strip border. Israeli authorities also closed Nahal Oz energy pipeline which is the only line of supply for fuel to the Gaza Strip. On 28 June, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) bombed the Gaza electric power station, which constituted the only domestic source of electricity for the Gaza Strip. Palestinian militants have continued to fire rockets into Israel.

Jan Egeland, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator stated: "We are very worried about the situation in the Gaza Strip and, in particular, the shortages of power and water, the effect on sewage, and humanitarian access. Civilians are caught in the middle of a vicious cycle of action and reaction, exemplifying how disproportionately they pay the price."

Electricity

- An IAF air strike on 28 June destroyed all six transformers of the only domestic power supply plant in the Gaza Strip. This plant provided 43% of Gaza's daily electricity supply (90 of the 210 megawatts). The remaining supply is provided by the Israel Electrical Corporation (IEC).
- Approximately 700,000 Gazans living in the middle governorate, and in the western and southern parts of Gaza City were initially without electricity. Currently, the Gaza Electrical Distribution Company (GEDCO) is load-sharing the remaining electricity supply from Israel among Gaza's 1.4 million population resulting in intermittent power to households across the Gaza Strip.
- GEDCO estimates that it will take more than nine months to procure replacement transformers which need to be made to order. Alternative options of procurement within Egypt are being explored. The replacement cost of the six destroyed transformers is estimated by GEDCO at US\$15 million.

Fuel

- The Nahal Oz energy pipeline, which is the only line to import fuel into the Gaza Strip, remains closed by the Israeli authorities for the fifth consecutive day. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) estimates that approximately 15,000 litres of fuel are required daily for the back-up generators to power regular water supplies. The Ministry of Health (MoH) and CMWU are concerned about the long-term costs of relying on generators given the current financial crisis facing the Palestinian Authority (PA). There is concern about the maintenance of such a large number of generators and obtaining spare parts.

Water

- Most of the 132 water wells managed by the CMWU were powered through the destroyed GEDCO national electrical grid. Given the reduced electricity supply, generators are being increasingly relied upon to power water wells, threatening sufficient daily water supply to Gazan households.
- During an IAF air strike on a bridge between Nuseirat camp and Moghraga in the Gaza Strip on 28 June, a water pipeline serving approximately 155,000 inhabitants of Nuseirat, Bureij, Maghazi and Suweida communities was fractured. Water supply was completely cut, but according to the CMWU, the pipeline has now been repaired.

¹ This is the third Situation Report issued by OCHA in June relating to the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip. The previous reports were published on 21 and 27 June and related to an escalation in the number of Palestinian and Israeli casualties in and around the Gaza Strip. These reports are available on www.ochaopt.org.

- The CMWU is concerned that they will not have the materials to repair future damages to pipe networks arising from any further Israeli military actions. They have had a number of containers with equipment, spare parts and materials at Karni crossing for over three months waiting to enter the Gaza Strip.

Health

- Two month emergency stocks of essential drugs that are held at the Ministry of Health (MoH) hospitals in the Gaza Strip are running low in certain selected items, such as: heparin, surgical plaster and some disposables including sutures, needles and canula.
- The possibility of increased casualties arising from Israeli-Palestinian clashes raises concerns over the ability to respond to large numbers of injured persons. The disruption to the road network around the middle governorate caused by the destruction of three bridges by the IAF, will hinder the transfer of wounded patients from southern Gaza to the main referral hospital (Shifa hospital) in Gaza city.
- All Gazan hospitals have back-up generators which are currently being used during power outages. Continuous power is required for the preservation of cold chain items, food for patients, and for emergency operations and at the Central Drugs Store.
- Health professionals are concerned about the public health consequences of decreased electricity in households. In particular, there are concerns over food spoiling from power outages to refrigerators and the lack of the requisite power to treat waste water, which could lead to outbreaks of communicable diseases.

Food

- WFP in its latest situation report raises the concern about wheat flour mills which are relying on fuel to power their generators to grind the wheat grain to bread. While Gaza mills currently have 22 days of wheat grain stocks, they have on average only 2-3 days of fuel stocks.²

Gaza Strip crossing points and humanitarian access

- All crossing points into the Gaza Strip remain closed for the movement of Palestinian goods and people. The Rafah, Karni, Sufa and Kerem Shalom crossings in an out of the Gaza Strip are completely closed for the sixth day. The Erez crossing is open only for diplomats. All international staff of humanitarian organisations who do not hold diplomatic passports, including UN staff require prior coordination with the Israeli DCL at Erez to enter the Gaza Strip with each application being decided on a case by case by the IDF. The closing of the crossing points has meant that essential humanitarian supplies cannot enter the Gaza Strip.

Protection of civilians

- Since 26 June, one Palestinian has been killed and seven injured in the northern and southern Gaza Strip from IDF tank fire and IAF air strikes. On 26 June, four Israelis in Sderot (Israel) were injured by homemade rockets fired from the Gaza Strip.
- Sonic booms over Gaza City (generated by IAF planes breaking the sound barrier at low altitudes) resumed as of 28 June. They have been occurring at around 4am, with approximately 3-4 'booms' each night. The booms are causing widespread anxiety and distress to families, especially young children throughout the whole of the Gaza Strip.
- Since 26 June Palestinians have fired 20 homemade rockets towards Israel and the IAF have conducted 50 air strikes. The IDF has resumed and intensified artillery shelling since 28 June firing over 500 shells in the last two days primarily on the north and eastern borders with Israel.

- End -

² WFP Emergency SitRep – Gaza Strip, 30 June 2006. Please contact Kirstie Campbell, WFP, (02) 540 1340 for further information.