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**OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS**

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**Humanitarian Situation Update – Northern Gaza****Friday, 15 October 2004**

On Thursday night 14 October, the Israeli government announced its intention to redeploy Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the northern Gaza Strip. This announcement followed an expansion of activities by Israeli forces on Wednesday, 13 October when Israeli tanks moved westwards from the Sheikh Zeid housing estate and took up positions in the centre of Beit Lahia. The forces subsequently withdrew one day later leaving considerable infrastructure damage, particularly to roads. Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim said the redeployment was a gesture to the Palestinians ahead of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and that "we have no desire to make it difficult for the population".

Operation "Days of Penitence" began on 28 September with the stated aim being to push Palestinian missiles out of range of the Israeli town of Sderot, several kilometres to the east of the Gaza Strip. The incursion came in the wake of the continued firing of homemade rockets by Palestinian militants towards Israel, and the killing of three soldiers in Morag settlement on 23 September and one settler in Neve Dekalim one day later. Palestinian home made rockets continue to be fired towards Israel with up to five rockets fired on 13 October, and a further two on Friday, 15 October.

During the course of the operation, Israeli tanks have deployed to the north and east of Jabalia camp (population 103,646) in the areas of As Sika street to the west of Salah ed Din street, Tal el Zatar, Glebo and Um Al Nasr bedouin village to the north of the Beit Lahia sewage treatment plant. All movement in and out of Beit Hanoun (population, 30,000) has been controlled by the IDF.

*As of Friday afternoon, 15 October and following the announcement of the redeployment, Israeli forces still remain in those areas noted above, with the exception of Beit Hanoun where tanks have moved back and residents are now being allowed to cross Salah ed Din street by foot and donkey cart. Vehicles are still not being permitted to move in and out of the area, without prior coordination.*

Concern is also growing among international agencies at their inability to provide humanitarian assistance in central and southern Gaza on account of the continued closure of the coastal road south of Gaza city and Abu Houli junction. (see below).

**Casualties**

The death toll continues to rise. Since the start of the operation on 28 September, a total of 135 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip of whom 114 have been killed in northern Gaza. On average, 8 Palestinians have been killed each day throughout the Gaza Strip and 30 injured.

In total, 521 Palestinians have been injured throughout Gaza of which 431 have been in northern Gaza. There is increasing international focus on the large number of civilians and particularly children who have been killed and injured. Of the 135 Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip in the last 17 days, 34 have been aged 18 and under.

Five Israelis have died, including two children who were killed by homemade rockets fired by Palestinian militants from northern Gaza into Sderot on 29 September.

### **Homes and Property**

Earlier in the week, during a meeting with a number of UN agencies, the northern Gaza Governor, Sakher Bseiso estimated that approximately 95 homes have been destroyed or damaged beyond repair in northern Gaza, while 280 have been damaged and are in need of repair. These figures preceded the incursion westwards into Beit Lahia on Wednesday, 13 October when further home demolitions took place. It has still not proved possible to obtain a figure of the total number of homes demolished and damaged from this most recent incursion.

### **Infrastructure damage**

Widespread infrastructure damage resulted from Wednesday's incursion into Beit Lahia. The main road west of Sheikh Zeid housing estate leading into the centre of Beit Lahia suffered extensive damage from the movement of "tens of tanks". Beit Lahia municipality made this a priority repair on Thursday, after the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Two secondary roads running north of the main road, Al Jamaiya road and Al Hatabiah also suffered damage. Four large tank "corridors" could also be seen leading off eastwards from these streets. A visit by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Office of the United Nations Special Co-ordinator (UNSCO) to these areas on Thursday, confirmed very obvious damage to homes, commercial property, vehicles, water, electricity and sewerage networks. Municipal teams were present on the ground carrying out repairs to the road surface and water and power networks.

In the wake of the Beit Lahia incursion, the North Gaza governorate has now revised its figures in relation to extent of roads and agricultural tracks that have been damaged. It is now estimated that more than 10 kilometres of asphalt road and 14 kilometres of tracks have been damaged. Figures provided on Monday, 11 October put the figure at 6 and 10 kilometres respectively.

Elsewhere in northern Gaza, breaks in the water and power networks remain localised and not widespread.

### **Land levelling**

Similarly, the the North Gaza governorate has revised its figures for land leveling over the course of the week. It now estimates that between 1000 and 1100 (100 to 110 hectares) dunums of olives and citrus fruits have been levelled. The earlier figure was between 70 and 80 hectares. Also a further five greenhouses have been destroyed from the earlier figure of 25. Following the withdrawal of Israeli forces from northern Gaza, Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) intends to provide assistance to those farmers who have lost their greenhouses through rebuilding and rehabilitation.

### **Food**

Following previous distributions on the 7 and 11 October to the As Sika street area to the east of Jabalia camp, UNRWA and the World Food Programme (WFP) had planned a joint distribution in Beit Hanoun on Wednesday, 13 October. This was unable to proceed due to the ongoing incursion in Beit Lahia that prevented movement through the north of Gaza. A distribution did however take place by UNRWA and WFP on Thursday afternoon, 14 October around by Al Awda and Al Nadr towers in northern Beit Lahia. Three hundred food parcels were distributed to families and these are designed as a 45 day ration.

Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) continue to provide food parcels. Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) is in the process of purchasing food and vegetables from farmers and local communities and

these will be consolidated into 1500 parcels to be distributed through northern Gaza. Rafeed plan to distribute 400 food parcels over the course of next week.

### **Education**

Between 29 September and 7 October all UNRWA and Palestinian Authority schools were closed affecting 38,000 pupils, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Since Saturday, 9 October the Ministry of Education has been operating a system of compensatory schools, whereby schools are being opened outside of the conflict areas, and pupils are being encouraged to attend. Around 4500 students have benefited from these alternative arrangements. UNRWA has initiated a similar scheme with six schools in the safer parts of Jabalia opening their doors to pupils from the worst affected areas in the east of the camp. UNRWA is currently reporting 80% attendance at its schools.

On account of Wednesday, 13 October incursion into Beit Lahia, most schools there, and in the neighbouring parts of Jabalia remained closed on both 13 and 14 October affecting 15,000 pupils, according to UNICEF. Both Palestinian Authority (PA) and UNRWA schools remain closed in Beit Hanoun.

Following the destruction of the Tal el Zatar kindergarten serving 500 children during the first week of the military operation, an alternative building has now been identified in west Jabalia and supplies and training needs have been assessed. Kindergarten teachers are using the local media to inform parents of the new location and will start to receive children in the coming days. UNICEF and a local NGO will support the kindergarten with supplies.

### **Health**

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), drugs and medical supplies still remain sufficient in the majority of primary health care clinics and the two main northern hospitals, Kamal Adwan and Al Awda. However, the Ministry of Health (MoH) central drugs store is now reporting a depletion in certain stocks and a list of urgent needs has been circulated through the WHO. Care International, through the Emergency Medical Assistance Programme II (EMAP) has already responded to partially fill these needs.

The working hours of the primary health care clinics according to WHO, have almost doubled to compensate for the reduction of available staff in some centres, and in order to guarantee a response to first aid and emergency cases. Access to the clinics has not been adversely affected by the three week operation on the basis of the number of daily visits. Only in Beit Hanoun has there been a notable decline, with the number of visits to the clinics decreasing from an average of 710 visits per day to 500 visits per day. There are no reports from the clinics of increased incidences of communicable diseases, with the exception of Izbat Beit Hanoun which has seen a tenfold increase in the daily cases of diarrhea.

### **Psychosocial needs**

Psychosocial emergency teams run by the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR) with the support of UNICEF have now started debriefing sessions for injured children in hospitals. Five teams have also started sessions for children under the auspices of a number of community groups in Jabalia, with each group comprising 25 children. Sessions for pupils in the compensatory schools will begin on Saturday, 16 October.

### **Humanitarian Access**

International staff working for UN agencies, with the exception of diplomatic passport holders is still not being permitted to cross Erez in vehicles, in all but exceptional cases. This has been the case since 21 September.

### **Humanitarian Coordination**





At a meeting with international NGOs and a number of UN agencies, a system of coordination was established to ensure that agencies are aware of what each other is doing and to avoid duplication of resources. It was agreed that agencies will send details of their intended activities to OCHA who will then forward this to others on the mailing list. In addition, this information will be passed onto the Northern Gaza Governorate Emergency Committee so that they will be aware of what resources are available and to try and match this with actual and emerging needs.

### **Central and Southern Gaza**









Access south of Gaza city has been impossible since 27 September when the coastal road was closed and this was then followed two days later by the closure at Abu Houli junction. This means that effectively no access has been possible for international agencies working in central and southern Gaza for over two weeks.

Agencies such as Medecins Sans Frontiers (F/ES) have most of their project activities in the psychosocial sector focused in central Gaza and the south and have not been able to access any of their beneficiaries. While the coastal road and Abu Houli junction have opened every two to three days for up to three hours at a time, this is insufficient for agencies to do a round trip to Rafah let alone undertake any humanitarian assistance.

**Closures**

-  Checkpoint
-  Road Gate
-  Military Post
-  Observation Tower

-  Palestinian Built up Area
-  Refugee Camp
-  Yellow Area (Palestinian Areas Under Israeli Security Control)
-  Israeli Settlement
-  \*Cleared Areas
-  Roads for Settlement/IDF Use Only
-  Main & Local Road
-  Urban & Dirt Road

\*Based on satellite image analysis and field surveys

