



## OCHA oPt Humanitarian Update: Winter Storm Developments

13 December 2013

### Winter Storm exacerbating needs among already vulnerable communities

The winter storm which hit the area on Wednesday has generated humanitarian needs in multiple locations throughout the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). In the Gaza Strip, the storm is exacerbating the poor humanitarian situation that has deteriorated in recent months due to an acute fuel and energy crisis. In the West Bank, a range of vulnerable communities are suffering the ill effects of floods, power outages, and bitterly cold temperatures. All schools have been closed since Wednesday in both the West Bank and Gaza. Preliminary reports indicate flooding of agricultural fields, and damages to greenhouses and livestock in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Damages are expected to increase as the storm continues and as more accurate information is received and field assessments undertaken in the coming days.

### Gaza

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#### *Overview:*

The Gaza Ministry of Health reported that, as of Thursday evening, 48 people had been injured in incidents related to the ongoing storm, 10 of whom remain hospitalized. Flooding has occurred in many parts of the Gaza Strip and more floods are expected due to the lack of pumps to remove water. The flooding is a direct impact of the water infrastructure being non-operational and stretched beyond its capacity. Due to the ongoing energy crisis, the 291 water and sewage treatment installations have been largely non-operational, and storm water ponds were already filled with sewage prior to the storm. In several places, sewage is mixed with flood water. The situation in Gaza has been worsened by damage to electricity feeder lines from Egypt and Israel on Thursday, which had been repaired by 5PM today.



While the most essential services have been supplied with emergency fuel, families remain without electricity for at least 16 hours per day. The Erez Crossing with Israel has also been flooded and is inaccessible, and is anticipated to be closed until Tuesday. The Government of Israel has offered to provide 4 water pumps for Gaza and has communicated that it will facilitate medical evacuations through the Kerem Shalom Crossing and other humanitarian assistance as required. Preliminary reports suggest 70-75 per cent of greenhouses in the Gaza Strip have been damaged.



**Worst affected communities:** Most affected are northern Gaza, in particular Gaza City, Rafah, Deir al Balah and Khan Younis. Refugee camps, and refugees in general, are areas of particular concern. Residents of lower-lying areas are evacuating to temporary shelters in 15 schools, designated by the de facto authorities and located across Gaza. More people are expected to be evacuated to higher areas. Hundreds of homes have been flooded in the past four days, with at least 2,800 people displaced in Gaza City, Khan Younis, Jabaliya and the Middle Area (Wadi Gaza); they are now taking refuge in the emergency shelters. Two schools in the Rafah area have been flooded while flooded roads hinder access to the affected areas.

**Urgent needs:**

In Gaza, the most urgent humanitarian needs include shelter, installations to remove flood water, and non-food items, particularly fuel.

**Shelter:** Hundreds of homes have been damaged and are in need of repair, and the number is expected to increase.

**WASH:** According to the WASH cluster, one of the biggest risk areas is the Sheikh Radwan Storm Water Lagoon, which is filled and threatens to overflow. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) declared on Thursday that the eight mobile pumps for storm water evacuation currently operating were insufficient. The CMWU has identified the need for five to seven large-scale mobile water pumps (with a capacity of 200m<sup>3</sup>/hour) from the

Palestinian Authority and/or Israel to reduce the flooding in several areas, four of which were reportedly being provided by the Government of Israel and on their way to Kerem Shalom Crossing Friday. It is critical that these pumps reach Gaza within the coming 24 hours. An emergency delivery of 64,000 liters of fuel on Thursday prevented worse flooding.

**NFIs:** NFI stocks among local partners are shrinking rapidly and actors are looking to import more goods from outside Gaza. It is estimated that only 50 per cent of those in need of NFIs are currently covered by local actors. UNRWA has supplies for 50,000 people, but in some places access challenges hamper distribution. A contingency group involving relevant actors was set up in Rafah, under which the Gaza Ministry of Social Affairs is to distribute food parcels and UNRWA NFIs.

Fuel needs remain high in Gaza, with emergency fuel donations covering only essential services. At a household level, many people lack fuel or electricity for their needs.

### **Responses:**

A wide range of responses have already taken place: NFIs including 324 mattresses, 950 blankets, more than 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> of plastic sheets, 21 kitchen kits, and 24 cleaning kits were distributed to families by local government, PRCS and other local partners. UNRWA has distributed NFI (mainly plastic tarpaulin & nylon but also mattresses, blankets, kitchen kits) to 276 families; distributions are in progress to an additional 468 families. The PRCS and Gaza Ministry of Social Affairs have distributed at least 490 bread packs on Friday, and the World Food Programme has distributed food rations for an initial period of approximately one week to about 157 families, who had moved to emergency shelters. Efforts are underway to provide at least 137 more families, including in Gaza City and northern Gaza, with assistance. On Thursday, UNRWA and the ICRC supplied 64,000 litres of emergency fuel to priority water pumping stations as identified by CMWU and the WASH cluster. This delivery has limited the flooding to some extent. Water pumping from two UNRWA schools is also taking place as well as an emergency fuel delivery to the municipality.

### **West Bank**

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#### *Overview:*

In the West Bank, the overall situation is dire. Communities that are already vulnerable are most at risk, this includes many of the communities in Area C and most notably the Bedouin and herding communities who often live in sub-standard shelters. Urban areas are also affected. According to figures provided by the Palestinian Civil Defense (PCD) mid-day Friday, the governorates most affected by the snow are Nablus, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron. The northern part of the West Bank (Salfit) has been affected mainly by heavy rainfall, which has caused flooding and damage to homes. Significant livestock losses have been reported among herding and Bedouin communities and it is anticipated that further losses will occur due to the spreading of diseases.

The situation is further compounded by restrictions on access to these communities due to the weather conditions. The Palestinian Civil Defense (PCD) reported it had about 500 emergency calls since Thursday, mainly due to medical urgencies.

**Worst affected communities:**

All parts of the West Bank are affected by the winter weather and electricity outages are common, and 80 percent of Ramallah City is suffering from power outages. Bedouin and herding communities across the West Bank are particularly affected and it is estimated that 10 percent of communities in need of assistance are Bedouin. Refugees are another vulnerable group and UNRWA is closely monitoring the situation in the 19 refugee camps in the West Bank. Several instances of flooding and domestic fires requiring evacuation or assistance have been reported in the refugee camps (in Hebron, Tulkarem and Nablus).

**North** (Nablus, Tubas, Qalqiliya and Jenin, Salfit governorates): In the North the major towns are accessible. But secondary roads in Nablus and Salfit governorates have been closed. In Tubas, damage to some homes has been reported in eight communities .

**Central** (Ramallah, Jericho, Jerusalem governorates): In Jerusalem governorate the main roads to and from the city remain open and the most affected area is Silwan. Major roads to and from Ramallah are inaccessible and electricity supply has been cut off for large parts of the city since Friday morning, hindering the emergency response.

**South** (Hebron, Bethlehem governorates): In the South, the main cities are accessible, but some secondary roads are closed. The storm has damaged shelters in herding and Bedouin communities, valleys and refugee camps, affecting at least 270 people.

**Urgent needs:**

Major needs include shelter, NFIs (including fire wood and heaters), food, and WASH support. It is anticipated that as snow melts flooding will damage roads and crops, affect the electricity network and increase livestock losses. Specifically in the livestock sector, herders are expected to face increasing livestock fatalities and morbidity as the storm continues.

**Responses:**

Most of the affected communities are receiving assistance through the PRCS, the PCD, and the Governor's Offices in Bethlehem and Hebron governorates, where Joint Operations Rooms are functioning to coordinate all actors. The PRCS has provided assistance to approximately 1,000 households since the onset of the winter storm in the West Bank and Gaza on Thursday; 90 per cent of cases were in Gaza, 10 per cent in the West Bank. The PCD has pumped water from affected homes and evacuated people as needed. However, the PCD has reported limited supplies to further assist affected families. Responses by other actors, such as UNRWA and the World Food Program, included the distribution of blankets, plastic sheeting, food parcels, heaters, and kitchen kits to affected families including to 1,200 families in the Ramallah governorate.

*Disclaimer: Data and analysis provided in this Humanitarian Update is based on preliminary information available. Further assessments are pending.*

*For more information on the humanitarian situation in the oPt, please refer to the [OCHA Protection of Civilians weekly reports](#).*

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