FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR
24-26 January 2009, 1700 hours

The cease-fire, implemented unilaterally by Israel on 18 January, and later the same day by Hamas and other Palestinian factions, continues to hold. The cease-fire followed twenty-two days of bombardment by land, sea and air which left over 1,300 Palestinians dead and over 5,000 injured. Many of the injured will require long-term treatment.

Extensive destruction has been caused to commercial enterprises and to public infrastructure, including Gaza's largest flour mill, concrete plant and food processing plant. Many families are homeless: preliminary estimates by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicate the complete destruction of over 4,000 residences and partial destruction to 17,000 others. Thousands still have no access to piped water. Unexploded ordnance poses a significant threat to the Gazan population and to the work of humanitarian organizations.

Needs and damage assessments are currently being undertaken. At this stage, the initial response is focusing on the re-establishment of basic services, including water, health, food, cash assistance, education and psychosocial support. Even as assessments are on-going, work has been initiated to conduct repairs to shelters, water and sanitation systems, health facilities, and other essential infrastructure. The immediate import of construction materials and spare parts are vital in this regard.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Rescue services continue to recover the dead: two bodies were recovered from the rubble of the Presidential building in Gaza City on 23 January. Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) figures as of 19 January are 1,314 Palestinians dead, of whom 412 are children and 110 are women. The number of injuries stands at 5,300, of whom 1,855 are children and 795 are women.

According to the Magen David Adom national society, four Israelis have been killed and 182 injured since 27 December by rocket and mortar fire by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip. Nine Israeli soldiers were killed and 336 wounded during the course of the military operation, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

MINE ACTION

UNICEF, ICRC and other agencies continue to highlight the danger posed by unexploded ordnance (UXOs) following the deaths of two children by UXOs on 20 January. UXOs are also considered a major obstacle to the work of organisations removing rubble. In addition to assessing the scope and scale of the UXO problem, the mine action team (including UNMAS, MAG and NPA) has delivered UXO safety briefing to staff from approximately 30 NGOs, and is clearing main roads and checking facilities to allow distribution of humanitarian aid. To date, UNICEF has distributed 75,000 leaflets and aired two radio spots on four different radio stations on protection from UXOs.

SHELTER

Thousands of Gazans remain homeless, although the exact number of people displaced is still unknown. As of 25 January, fewer than 500 displaced people remain in three UNRWA emergency shelters in Jabalia, Beach Camp, and Deir el Balah. Since the resumption of school on 24 January, the shelters are now in youth centres and other non-school facilities. Most Gazans who have been displaced are currently staying with host families, which are overstretched and face shortages of food, non-food items (mattresses, blankets) and water and electricity.

HEALTH

Although hospitals still have a large number of intensive care patients, capacity is gradually freeing up for the provision of routine care for chronically ill patients who are now returning for treatment, as well

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as regular services such as elective surgery. Hospitals are receiving mains electricity intermittently, with generators providing back-up electricity supply. Repair of medical equipment, already a priority before the conflict when the blockade hindered the import of necessary spare parts, remains a priority, as does the import of spare parts for medical equipment.

According to a recent report by the consultancy company Near East Consulting, about 96 percent of Gaza residents feel depressed and disheartened. The highest level of depression is in North Gaza and Rafah, where 81 percent of the respondents do not feel secure about their households and family members. This represents an increase of 17 percent since December 2008.

WATER AND SANITATION

The water and sanitation situation in Gaza Governorate, North Gaza and the Middle Area has improved; at least 70 percent of the water system is functioning, although this does not mean everyone is receiving water due to localized damage. The sewerage network in parts of Gaza is still damaged. In some areas, the price of tankered water is as high as 175 NIS/m3. UNICEF warns that a continued shortage of drinking water and overflowing sewage in residential areas poses serious public health risks.

The CMWU, Gaza's water utility, continues to work on urgent maintenance of the water and wastewater networks, though it will be unable to complete the repair without the entry of needed spare parts into Gaza: CMWU currently has a list of prioritized items, such as pipes, generators and pumps, awaiting clearance by the Israeli authorities for entry into Gaza. Humanitarian organizations, including ACF, CARE, ICRC, Oxfam and UNICEF, continue to provide drinking water to people in need, material and financial support to CMWU for emergency repairs of water and plumbing, hygiene kits and family water kits, though additional assistance is required to meet the needs of the population.

A damage assessment by the CMWU revealed that four water wells in Beit Hanoun, Gaza and Jabalia have been completely destroyed and several water carriers (e.g. Nuseirat, Gaza main water wells and Khan Yunis) have been damaged. The waste water networks in Gaza, Beit Hanoun, Jabalia and Beit Lahia have also sustained serious damage.

FOOD

The Gaza population continues to face difficulties accessing food due to price increases and the lack of currency. In addition, the destruction to agricultural fields has added to a shortage of locally-produced foods.

All 10 UNRWA distribution centres are open, feeding 25,000 people per day. On 25 January, WFP distributed 95 tonnes of food to 993 families (5,958 beneficiaries) in Gaza and North Gaza. On 26 January, WFP began a school feeding programme in government schools to provide UHT milk, high-energy biscuits and canned meat to students.

EDUCATION

All government and UNRWA schools opened on 24 January. UNICEF reports an 80 percent pupil attendance rate in government schools. UNRWA reports an 89 percent pupil attendance rate and a 99 percent teacher attendance rate in its schools. Schools are currently focusing on providing psychosocial and mental health support to students. UNRWA has 185 counsellors in its schools. On 26 January, UNICEF supplied 130 school-in-a-box kits, targeting 10,400 students; 84 recreational kits targeting 6,720 students; and 42 maths and 42 science kits targeting 4,200 students.

ELECTRICITY / FUEL

Most of the Gaza Strip receives only intermittent electricity, with Gaza Governorate and North Gaza receiving an average of 12 hours of electricity every day, though some areas still do not have power due to localized damage. While the main power lines in Gaza have been repaired, the low-voltage lines taking electricity directly to households are still not working in Jabalia, Zaitoun and Sudania. This also affects water

distribution in those areas. According to GEDCO, Gaza's power utility, the lines can be repaired within three weeks provided that the necessary parts and other supplies are made available.

The power plant is still working on only one turbine, producing 30 MW. On average, since the cease-fire, the power plant has received 223,000 litres per day while it needs 450,000 litres daily to produce its full capacity of 80 MW.

Since the cease-fire, Israel has allowed nearly 700 tonnes of cooking gas - approximately 87 tonnes per day - which is much less than its estimated need of 300 tonnes per day. No petrol or diesel has been allowed into Gaza since 2 November, except for UNRWA.

CROSSINGS

The Nahal Oz fuel pipeline, Karni conveyor belt and Rafah, Kerem Shalom, and Erez crossings were open on 26 January. On 26 January, two teams from World Vision and Save the Children were refused entry into Gaza via Erez.

On 25 January, seven truckloads of medical supplies, water, blankets and mattresses entered Gaza via the Rafah crossing. 120 truckloads, including 47 for aid agencies, entered Gaza through Kerem Shalom crossing. 173.5 tonnes of cooking gas and 448,000 litres of industrial gas were transferred into Gaza through the Nahal Oz pipeline.

On 24 January, all crossings except Rafah were closed due to the Jewish Sabbath.

FUNDING

For the list of immediate funding needs, visit:

http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_crisis_cap_funding_2009_english.pdf

PRIORITY NEEDS

Opening of crossings: All crossings into Gaza must be operational and the number of trucks allowed into the Gaza Strip needs to be increased. The following items in Gaza are critically needed:

- *Spare parts and fuel* for the power plant, hospitals and water and sewage treatment facilities;
- *Cement, sand and other construction materials* to rebuild destroyed schools, hospitals, clinics and homes.

Humanitarian Access to Gaza: In the aftermath of the Israeli military operation, it is critical that full and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza be granted by all parties to the conflict. International agencies have faced unprecedented denial of access to Gaza since 5 November. Humanitarian access remains unreliable and needs to be granted every day without restriction.

Cash/liquidity: Cash has still not entered the Gaza Strip (except for the staff of a few international organizations) and is urgently needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid. The lack cash prevents access to basic supplies. A system must be urgently established that ensures the regular and predictable monthly transfer of the necessary cash.

Operational security: Explosive remnants of war are limiting the access of humanitarian workers to certain areas. Security, including the marking and clearance of UXOs, is essential to ensure efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance to the population.