



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

2 - 9 March 2009, 1700 hours

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The generous pledges of international donors at the Sharm Al-Sheikh conference for Gaza last week have yet to be implemented on the ground as the overall humanitarian situation in Gaza remains unchanged. Access remains the single most important condition for the advancement of the relief and rehabilitation efforts. Aid agencies need to be assured of having open access to deliver materials for the relief and reconstruction efforts. During the reporting period, there was little improvement in the types and quantities of materials being held up or delayed to enter Gaza. If the prevailing uncertainty and restricted access continues, additional delays may be caused due to agencies' fears of high costs of prolonged storage and, in some cases, expiration of validity of perishable food stuffs or medicines waiting for clearance.

The violent exchanges between the Israeli forces and the militants inside the strip have continued. Reports indicate that some 30 HMR (home made rockets), 3 mortars and 2 RPGs were fired into southern Israel. During the reporting period, Israeli military forces fired missiles causing 5 deaths and 12 injuries on the Palestinian side. On 4 and 6 March, Israeli patrol boats opened fire targeting Palestinian fishing boats west of Rafah and west of Beit Lahia forcing the boats to return to shore. On 7 March, two Palestinians, including one child, were injured when Israeli patrol boats opened fire targeting the Swedish Village, west of Rafah.

Three more Palestinian deaths and 6 injuries were caused by tunnel collapses. Tunnels continue to be used for import commodities banned or supplied in insufficient quantities through the official crossings.

PRIORITY HUMANITARIAN NEEDS FOR THE GAZA STRIP

- Opening of crossings. All crossings into Gaza must be operational to increase both the speed and the amount of commodities allowed into the Gaza Strip.
- Items most critically needed are: spare parts, fuel, water and sewage treatment facilities and construction materials.
- Cash. A consistent influx of cash is needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid. The monthly cash requirement is 400 million NIS (13 million NIS/day).

ACCESS INTO THE GAZA STRIP / CROSSINGS

Commodities Import

A total of 729 truckloads, out of which 311 (43%) were for humanitarian aid programmes, were allowed entry to Gaza this week (compared to 587.5 in the previous week), bringing in the following commodities:

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| • Food supplies | 588 truckloads (81%) |
| • Hygiene/cleaning supplies | 44 truckloads (6%) |
| • Medical supplies | 38 truckloads (5%) |
| • Non-edible consumables | 26 truckloads, (4%) |
| • Education/stationery | 19 truckloads (3%) |
| • Agricultural raw materials, | |
| • industrial/electrical appliances, packaging applications | 14 truckloads (1%) |

- Averages of 121.5 truckloads per day were received during the week, compared to a daily average of 246 received in the third week of July 08.
- No livestock, vehicles/transportation or construction materials were allowed entry.
- No fuel - petrol or diesel were allowed (last allowed entry for the public use on 2 Nov'08)
- A shipment of 704 packets of washing powder (part of hygiene kit distribution by World Vision) at Kerem Shalom was blocked on 3 March due to lack of an "environmental certificate", despite an identical cargo having been delivered through the same crossing on 26 February.
- Two pallets of UNICEF t-shirts were refused entry on 3 March on the grounds of not qualifying as a humanitarian priority. The t-shirts were being delivered under a UNICEF education programme to improve involvement of girls in 50 schools in disadvantaged areas of Gaza.
- Fuel transfer through the Rafah- Egypt border tunnels is very limited. Petrol and diesel are not available on the market as almost all gas stations remain closed. Due to fuel scarcity, prices have increased from 3 and 2 NIS in mid February to 8 and 5 NIS at present.
- 419 mt of cooking gas were allowed in last week compared to 497 mt in the previous week, representing only 24% of the weekly needs according to the Palestinian Gas stations Owners Association.
- 2,216,000 litres of industrial gas for the power plant were allowed in; representing some 68% of the required weekly needs set by the power plant authority.

Exports

Two truckloads of carnations were allowed out through Kerem Shalom crossing, compared to none in the previous week.

Crossings Status

- Sufa crossing was closed on all scheduled days (last open on 12 Sep'08).
- Karni crossing remained closed.
- Karni grain conveyor belt was partially operational on 3 days out of 5.5 scheduled days.
- Karni cement lane completely closed (last open on 29 Oct'08).
- Nahal Oz fuel pipelines were partially opened on 5 out of 6 scheduled days.
- Kerem Shalom goods crossing was partially open on 5 out of 6 scheduled days.
- Rafah border crossing was closed for cargo on all scheduled 7 days.

Humanitarian personnel access

Interviews with seven DFID partner INGOs (Oxfam, Mercy Corps, Islamic Relief, Handicap, Action against Hunger, CARE and Welfare Association) indicate that INGOs are finding it problematic to gain entry into Gaza for Palestinian national staff, even for those holding a Jerusalem ID. INGO international personnel wait an average of three to four weeks for clearance to enter Gaza.

LOGISTICS

The humanitarian community has continued advocating for unimpeded access of relief aid to Gaza. A list of sectoral priorities has been compiled and submitted to COGAT, which is also being asked to clarify rules governing the approval procedures. On behalf of the humanitarian partners, the logistic Cluster is leading efforts on documenting access issues from Israel.

EARLY RECOVERY

The Early Recovery Cluster has initiated a mapping and sequencing of early recovery activities through a “who does what where when and how” exercise in order to link different recovery plans and appeals. The Palestinian National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza 2009-2010 (PNA Plan) has now been published. The Early Recovery sequencing and mapping exercise will aim to avoid the establishment of parallel budgets, programming, and monitoring and evaluation systems.

PROTECTION

The International Women’s Day provided an opportunity to highlight the importance of strengthening women’s NGOs in Gaza and enabling them to monitor and report on violations against women, as there is a noted lack of local capacity for reporting in this area. The Palestinian Center for Community Rehabilitation (NCCR) calls for attention to people with disabilities, who have been displaced and lost previous coping mechanisms. Newly disabled people also lack access to crucial facilities. The NCCR is working on a survey to track the disabled people in the Gaza Strip.

SHELTER

NFI distributions to all families who have lost their homes or whose homes were seriously damaged are ongoing throughout the Gaza Strip. Distributions of NFIs have continued throughout the week. ICRC’s distributions have covered some 2,700 families out of 5,000 families registered and will continue for another two weeks. Additionally, USAID partners have distributed 2,500 rolls plastic sheeting, reaching up to 20,000 damaged shelters.

Cash: To date, UNDP has provided cash assistance (42,000,000 NIS) to 4,600 families. Based on the same system, UNRWA will start payment of cash assistance to refugee families whose homes have been destroyed or damaged as of next week. The cash assistance is not intended for repair or reconstruction, but meant to support these families until reconstruction and major repairs can take place. For minor repairs up to USD 5,000 prices have been adjusted to ensure that beneficiaries can actually carry out the repairs upon receipt of the money.

HEALTH

Following last weeks’ donor conference, the Palestinian MOH reports pledges of approximately US 35.7 million for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of destroyed medical facilities, with nearly USD 30.5 million specifically earmarked for disability-related activities. Health partners have now created an information network in order to compile, process and analyze data on disabilities related to the war.

The Palestinian MOH in Ramallah reports that eleven trucks (95 pallets) of medical supplies arrived in Gaza from the central drug store in Ramallah on 5 March. Of the total of 4,600 mt of medical supplies received in Gaza so far, around 70%. The MoH International Cooperation Department (ICD) in Ramallah, WHO and key national and international NGOs agreed that medical supplies into Gaza should continue to be received by and registered at the central drugstore in Ramallah before getting shipped into the Strip, within five working days.

NGOs report an increase in the number of psychosocial referrals to the Community Mental Health Programmes.

Out of 324 patient permit applications submitted during February, 183 (56.5%) patients had their permits granted in a timely manner; 109 (33.6%) had their applications delayed; 9 (2.8%) had their application denied and another 23 (7.1%) were interviewed by the General Security Service and are still awaiting an exit permit. According to the Palestinian Liaison Officer at Erez, 258 patients exited through Erez during February. The Rafah border crossing opened for three days in February (22-24), when 337 patients managed to cross the border for medical treatment abroad, including 15 patients via ambulances.

WATER AND SANITATION

Gaza water authorities continue to monitor water quality at its 550 sampling sites across the strip and to work on water and wastewater networks. Water and sanitation infrastructure remains inadequate as essential materials such as pipes and spare parts continue to be blocked from Gaza, with several critically needed items not permitted to enter for over a month.

EDUCATION

The need for psychosocial support to school children remains a priority. Partners are considering common approaches to address this urgent need through teacher training in child-centered teaching practices to strengthen psychosocial well-being of the children. Another issue under consideration is the need to provide teacher training before the end of the school term in May.

UNICEF, Sharek and CHF carried out minor repairs of windows in schools using nylon sheets. No major repairs have been possible due to lack of construction materials

Access continues to be the key constraint in getting education supplies, temporary school and school rehabilitation materials into Gaza.

FOOD SECURITY / AGRICULTURE

Gaza farmers lack cash and agricultural inputs, to restart the growing season. Rehabilitation of destroyed agricultural lands, greenhouses, nurseries, fisheries and rural roads cannot start due to access restrictions.

Most critically required items include animal feed, seeds, fertilizer, irrigation materials (pipelines, networks, and drippers), pesticides, seedlings, live animals, veterinary drugs and vaccines, metal nets for cages, and nursery supplies (peat moss, vermiculate and trays for planting seeds). Fishers require feed for fresh water fish, nylon nets, boat engines and spare parts, fibreglass, GPS instruments and, diving suits. Most of these goods are either unavailable locally or are unaffordable.¹ While over 70% of the population relies on chicken for animal protein, the poultry availability has decreased considerably, due to prolonged lack of animal feed and gas for incubators and families cannot cope with the increase in price.

The Food Security Cluster published the main findings of the bi-weekly market survey in Gaza completed 2 March, as follows:

- Availability of basic food stuffs, both fresh and dry foods, is currently acceptable.
- Availability of red meat, poultry meat and eggs remains problematic.
- As of 25 February, the total stock of wheat flour in the GS mills stands at 11,700 mt, sufficient to cover the needs of the total population for approximately 26 days, until 22 March 2009.
- Shortage of animal feed has contributed to the increase of poultry prices.
- The price of meat has decreased after the war by 0.5%. Vegetables are available and prices have decreased, with the only exception of tomato prices.
- However, food availability in the GS is volatile, dependent on the opening of border crossings for both humanitarian and commercial goods and resumption of local production.
- The availability of fresh foods is highly dependent on the ability and timeliness of the agricultural sector to recover and is relatively at high risk from shortages or economic access difficulties (high prices of imported fresh food, if such imports are allowed at all).
- A crucial factor influencing food security in the weeks/months to come is the resumption of the cash economy and employment. Failing that, Gazans will continue to depend on food aid, cash assistance and emergency temporary job creation schemes.

I. Barley for animal feed, for example, costs 400 USD/MT compared to an average West Bank price of approximately 270 USD/MT. As live animals are not allowed through Gaza's commercial crossings, smuggling of sheep and goat meat through the Rafah tunnels has resumed. The price of chicken skyrocketed to 25 NIS/kg this week, a jump of 52% since December 2008.

- Lack of cash: there is a shortage of cash in the GS. The monthly cash requirement is 400 million NIS (13 million NIS/day).

UNOSAT released satellite-based imagery of damages absorbed by the agriculture: <http://www.apis.ps/index.php>

COORDINATION/INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

OCHA has launched the Gaza Response Activity Database on-line. Most clusters and sectors have contributed data to the database which can be viewed and is searchable online. Training in data entry is provided in Gaza and on request in Jerusalem. Also, reports and maps can be developed upon request for the clusters' and sectors' coordination needs. In addition, the OCHA on-line meeting calendar is updated regularly, based on information provided by partners.