



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

17 – 23 March 2009

SITUATION OVERVIEW

- Access for humanitarian relief items remains a priority since efforts to resume basic services and implement humanitarian and early recovery programs are limited in the absence of reconstruction materials and spare parts. Amounts and types of deliveries reaching Gaza continue being subject to random restrictions and unpredictable clearance procedures. The limited range of goods that Israel allows into Gaza changes regularly, creating major logistical problems for humanitarian agencies and making it difficult for them to implement programmes.
- In the past week, the first delivery of cement since November 2008 (50 tons) was allowed to enter Gaza through the commercial channels specifically intended together with plumbing supplies, to rehabilitate damaged water works. However, according to the Coastal Municipal Water Authority, these supplies will not be useful without water pipes which remain blocked for entry since mid-January. The water supply has improved, but currently, some 40,000 people in Gaza still remain without water access through the public network. In addition, up to 100,000 people experience intermittent supply of water due to lack of materials.
- At the cabinet meeting on 22 March, the Government of Israel issued an instruction to enable the entry into Gaza - without restriction - of foodstuffs from all relevant sources and after verification.
- The IDF killed two Palestinians who were allegedly attempting to plant roadside bombs east of Deir El Balah city. Another two Palestinians, a farmer and a fisherman were injured by IDF gunfire east of Maghazi Camp and west of Beit Lahia. In addition, five fishermen were arrested west of Beit Lahia.

ACCESS INTO THE GAZA STRIP / CROSSINGS ¹

Commodities Import

- During the period from 15 to 21 March, a total of 728 truckloads of goods, including 140 for humanitarian aid agencies (19%), was allowed entry to Gaza.
- Food supplies made up the vast majority of the imported commodities, accounting for 556 truckloads (76%) followed by hygiene/cleaning supplies (limited to chlorine, tissues and diapers), which accounted for 93 truckloads (13%). Non-edible consumables (largely blankets and mattresses) made up 32 truckloads (4%), medical supplies accounted for 21 truckloads (3%) and industrial/ electrical appliances (limited to specific water related projects) made up 12 truckloads (2%).
- The remaining 14 truckloads carried education/stationery supplies (6 truckloads), agricultural raw materials (5 truckloads of fertilized eggs), packaging applications (2 truckloads) and a single truckload of construction materials.
- No livestock, vehicles/ transports and/or any other type of commodity was allowed entry this week. An average of 121 truckloads/day was allowed entry into Gaza this week compared to a daily average of 246 received in the third week of July 2008.²

1. Information on the status of border crossings and numbers of trucks crossing is compiled by OCHA Gaza, based on data provided by the Gaza Ministry of National Economy, UNRWA, UNSCO and Paltrade (Palestine Trade Centre) and cross-checked with data received from COGAT and covers the period 15 to 21 March.

2. July 2008 recorded the highest levels of imports into Gaza during the truce period.

Electricity/Fuel

- No petrol or diesel for public use was allowed entry into Gaza during the reporting period between 15 and 21 March. They were last allowed entry for the public use on 2 November 2008. Some 1,017.5 tons of cooking gas were allowed to enter, compared to 471 between 8-14 March. Despite this significant increase, this amount still represents only 58 % of the estimated weekly needs set by the Palestinian Gas Stations' Owners Association (GSOA). A total of 2,178,460 litres of the Power Plants' industrial gas was allowed in; similar to the amounts being allowed in every week in the last six weeks. However, this only represents 69% of the required weekly needs set by the Power Plant authority.
- GSOA reported that fuel continues to be transferred through the Rafah-Egypt border tunnels, with nearly 100,000 litres of diesel and 70,000 litres of petrol being transferred into Gaza per day. Diesel and petrol are now available on the open market.

Crossings Status

- **Sufa** is no longer a crossing point according to COGAT. (Last open on 12 September 2008; largely used for construction materials).
- **Karni** crossing point is closed (last open on 12 June 2007).
- **Karni** grain conveyor belt was operational during three days in the reporting period.
- **Karni** cement lane completely closed since 29 October 2008.
- **Nahal Oz** fuel pipeline was open on five days (cooking gas and industrial gas only); working days have been reduced from six to five according to COGAT.
- **Kerem Shalom** was open to humanitarian and commercial imports on six days. On two days flower exports were processed.
- **Rafah** border crossing opened for humanitarian cargo import on two days (mattresses, blankets, medical supplies, bottled market water).
- **Erez** crossing was open on six days for international aid workers as well as Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases with special permits.

Exports

- While no exports have been allowed out of Gaza since 17 January 2008, since 12 February Israel has allowed 7 truckloads (two truckloads on 16 and 19 March) with some 400,000 flowers through Kerem Shalom. Currently, there are approximately 40 million flowers available on the Gaza ready for export. This export opportunity will last only until the end of March, when the flower season in Gaza ends.

CASH

- The Bank of Palestine reports that Gaza banks urgently needs to receive at least NIS 250 million cash in order to be able to process an acceptable level of day-to-day financial transactions. The 42 bank branches operating in the Gaza Strip are now lacking cash in general but mainly NIS (New Israeli Shekel). Gazans can only withdraw limited amount of cash (between 500-1000 NIS). Due to the lack of cash, the PA 65,000 Gaza staff have only received 1,000 NIS of their February salaries. Cash was last received on 6 February, when Israel has allowed nearly NIS 170 million into Gaza. According to the Bank, money is being hoarded at homes due to limits in cash withdrawals from banks. There is no indication as to when Israel will allow the next cash shipment into Gaza.

LOGISTICS

- As requested by humanitarian partners, the Logistics Cluster continues to compile information on humanitarian cargo awaiting approval by the Israeli Authorities for transport into Gaza. The list of items and an explanatory document including details of humanitarian cargo delivered, rejected and/or currently under review by COGAT are posted at the following link: <http://www.logcluster.org/gaza09a/supply-chain/clearance-status-of-humanitarian-cargo>
- During the week, the Israeli authorities refused clearance into Gaza for fortified wafers, halva, canned tuna, biscuits, tomato paste and jam, in USAID-funded NGO shipments. This represents a departure from the previous Israeli Government policy to allow food parcels into Gaza without analysis of constituent items, and results in the entire shipment of humanitarian relief parcels being held up in the warehouse. In addition, UNICEF toys awaiting shipment have not been approved as yet pending COGAT's inspection of a sample of the cargo for the presence of lead.

WATER AND SANITATION

- The number of people without any access to water is now down to 40,000 from 50,000 last week, due to the Coastal Municipal Water Utility (CMWU) having managed to repair Khadeeja water well in Beit Hanoun, and Al Attatra well in Beit Lahiya. In addition, the 100,000 people who were receiving water only every 5-6 days now have access to water every 2-3 days.
- The CMWU in Gaza received 12 truckloads carrying 50 tons of cement, electrical spare parts and water and sanitation materials for repairs to the damaged water networks. However, these materials cannot have any significant impact on the water and waste water situation in the Gaza Strip unless water pipes are also delivered. According to ACF (Action Against Hunger), one of their water network rehabilitation projects is currently on hold as a result of a shortage of materials. Only 30% of the necessary equipment could be found on the local market.
- According to UNRWA, the acute watery diarrhea for children below 3 years has exceeded the alarm threshold during the reporting period and close monitoring of the trend is required.

FOOD SECURITY / AGRICULTURE

- The recently tightened IDF restriction on Gaza fishing zones, which limits fishing to three nautical miles from Gaza's shores, are expected to have a severe impact on the fishing community of the Gaza Strip. The upcoming sardine season is potentially highly profitable for fishermen's livelihoods. However, sardines can only be found six to eight nautical miles from the coast, meaning that productivity will shrink substantially unless the new restriction is lifted. Over 3,000 families, or 19,500 individuals, rely directly on fishing as their source of income.
- The availability of most basic foods in Gaza is currently at an acceptable level for both fresh and dry foods but this continues to be highly volatile. Items like fresh chicken and meat, cleaning material, salt, and cooking gas were unavailable or in short supply as of 17 March 2009. The prices of 12 food items increased substantially compared to pre-war levels, especially for sugar, rice, onion, tomato, milk powder, chicken and frozen fish. People rely on frozen poultry for animal protein, as fresh red meat, chicken and fish is unaffordable for many families. As of 17 March, the total stock of wheat flour in Gaza mills is 10,464 tons, which is sufficient to cover the needs of the total population for approximately 24 days (i.e. until 10 April 2009).

HEALTH

- An assessment of all 54 units of Ministry of Health primary health care facilities, focusing on staffing, equipment, services and levels of care was completed and will be made available next week. In support of the Ministry of Health, WHO conducted three training of trainers (TOT) sessions, targeting 50 nurses and 25 teachers, on the standardization of anthropometric measures used in children growth monitoring at primary health care facilities and schools. The training will allow monitoring of the growth and nutritional status of the Gaza children.
- According to the Ministry of Health Central Drug Store, the inventory of 90 percent of the donated drugs is now completed.