



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

27-29 January 2009, 1700 hours

A number of incidents over the past few days have endangered the cease-fire unilaterally implemented by Israel on 18 January, and later the same day by Hamas and other Palestinian factions. On the morning of 27 January, one Israeli soldier was killed and three soldiers injured by a roadside bomb on the Israeli side of the Gaza border. One Palestinian was killed, and another seriously injured, in separate incidents by Israeli fire following the explosion. On 29 January, the Israeli air force wounded the militant allegedly responsible for the explosion, in addition to seven schoolgirls who were passing by. The Israeli air force also carried out raids on tunnels along the Gaza-Egyptian borders and on a building in Rafah on the night of 28 January. Palestinian militants fired two Qassam rockets into southern Israel on 28 January; no injuries were reported.

The cease-fire followed twenty-two days of bombardment by land, sea and air which left over 1,300 Palestinians dead and over 5,300 injured. Extensive destruction was caused to commercial enterprises and to public infrastructure: according to Palestinian industrialists, 219 factories were destroyed or severely damaged during the Israeli military operation. Of the three per cent of industrial capacity that was still operating after the 18-month Israeli blockade, much has now been destroyed.

Needs and damage assessments are currently underway. The initial response is focusing on re-establishing basic services, including water, health, food, cash assistance, education and psychosocial support. Work has already begun on conducting repairs to shelters, water and sanitation systems, health facilities, and other essential infrastructure. Construction materials and spare parts were already blocked from entering Gaza prior to the military operation; the immediate import of such materials is vital for the reconstruction effort.

The level of truckloads of aid entering Gaza daily is insufficient to meet daily requirements, let alone the increased demand. Humanitarian organizations continue to face serious restrictions to enter Gaza, which is impairing the ability of the humanitarian community to respond to the urgent needs of the population in a timely and effective manner.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) figures as of 28 January are 1,366 Palestinians dead, of whom 430 are children and 111 are women. This number does not include those who have died due to lack of access to regular health care (including obstetric care and treatment for chronic diseases). The number of injuries stands at 5,380, of whom 1,870 are children and 800 are women. ICRC staff has collected data on more than 100 people registered by their families as missing during the conflict.

According to the Magen David Adom national society, three Israelis have been killed and 182 injured since 27 December by rocket and mortar fire by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip. Eleven Israeli soldiers have been killed and 339 wounded.

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. Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technicians are currently clearing areas throughout the Gaza Strip. Six main transportation roads were confirmed clear as of 23 January. All UNRWA schools have been checked and cleared of UXOs. Eight UNICEF-supported government schools were also cleared by 28 January.

SHELTER

Between 22 and 25 January, international and local NGOs operating in Gaza conducted a joint rapid needs assessment of the level of damage to housing units and the location and numbers of people still displaced.

The survey was conducted in all localities and neighborhoods in Gaza, except for refugee camps which are covered by UNRWA. In 48 of 61 localities which have reported results, the survey found that about 22.6 percent of housing units were damaged or destroyed. Of those damaged, 16.7 percent reported light to moderate damage, 3.2 percent reported severe damage, and 2.6 percent reported that the homes had been destroyed. Most of the damage has been reported in rural areas which have higher non-refugee populations, meaning the non-refugee population has been disproportionately affected by the damage to housing. This data is preliminary and further full assessments are underway.

Thousands of Gazans still remain homeless, although the exact number of people displaced is still unknown. The assessment of the 48 localities found that more than 66,000 people had not yet returned to their homes and were staying with relatives or other hosts. 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.

As of the morning of 29 January, three non-school shelters remain open in Jabalia, Beach Camp and Deir Al Balah, hosting 74 families (446 people). Distribution of food, water and non-food items to the shelters continues. Since the shelters were established, UNRWA has distributed approximately 7,000 mattresses, 42,000 blankets and 1,150 mats, along with water, bread and tinned meat.

HEALTH

Hospital capacity is gradually freeing up for the provision of routine care for chronically ill patients who are now returning for treatment, as well as regular services such as elective surgery. Hospitals are receiving mains electricity intermittently, with generators providing back-up electricity supply. Because of the Israeli closure of the Gaza Strip which has now lasted more than a year and a half, hospitals are run down and much of the equipment is unreliable and in need of repair. The import of spare parts remains a priority. Some medical supplies, including heavy painkillers and medicines for treating cancer patients and patients with bleeding disorders, are not available, according to ICRC.

Of the 1.5 million people living in the Gaza Strip, international and national agencies working in disability and rehabilitation estimate that, even before the military operation, over 10 percent had moderate or severe impairments. They estimate that as many as half of the 5,380 men, women and children injured over the past three weeks of conflict may suffer life-long impairment, exacerbated by the inability of rehabilitation workers to provide early intervention. These agencies highlight the importance of providing early intervention for those newly injured, especially those discharged prematurely from health facilities; reestablishing and strengthening the capacity of rehabilitation services and disabled peoples organizations to respond to the increased needs throughout the Gaza Strip; and ensuring that people needing specialist rehabilitation intervention unavailable in the Gaza Strip are transferred without delay to the three national rehabilitation centres in the West Bank which are ready to receive patients. This is especially critical given that Al Wafa Hospital, the main provider of specialist rehabilitation services in Gaza, sustained severe damage and is not yet fully operational.

WATER AND SANITATION

Although approximately 70 percent of water wells are functioning, certain localities are not receiving water due to localized damage, including 10,000 people in Beit Hanoun. The Gaza City Wastewater Treatment Plant was partially repaired on 23 January, and wastewater is no longer leaking into surrounding agricultural fields. Following additional repairs, sewage is no longer leaking in the streets of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia.

The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (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. Oxfam, GVC and ACF report a shortage of water tanks for distributing water.

The final report of the damage assessment carried out by the CMWU reveals that repairing the water and wastewater network and facilities will cost approximately \$6 million, including \$1.8 million to repair the water network and \$830,000 to repair the wastewater network.

CMWU currently has 80 tonnes of chlorine to disinfect water supplies, sufficient for the coming 45 days, subject to the water production ration.

FOOD

Shops and markets continue to offer limited food supplies at prices which have doubled or tripled since before 27 December. This makes food extremely difficult to obtain due to the shortage of currency.

The main food aid providers, WFP and UNRWA, have increased their caseload in order to address the increased need by the population. WFP has expanded its caseload from 260,000 to 365,000 people. UNRWA has expanded its caseload from 750,000 beneficiaries to 900,000, out of the one million refugees in Gaza. In addition, on 25 January, UNRWA conducted a one-time distribution to nearly 50,000 Palestinian Authority employees who are registered refugees.

From 25-27 January, an average of 30,240 people/day received food from UNRWA's ten distribution centres. UNRWA school feeding resumed on 24 January, providing 200,000 school children with snacks twice daily. Relief convoys to the worst affected areas are ongoing.

On 27 January, WFP distributed 62.3 metric tonnes (Mt) of food to 937 families in Gaza Governorate. On 26-27 January, WFP also directly distributed 6.2 Mt of high energy biscuits and milk rations to a total of 24,424 school children in Khan Yunis and Gaza Governorate schools. On 28 January, WFP distributed 59 Mt of food to 877 families in Gaza Governorate and the Middle Area with CHF, as well as 5.4 Mt of food rations to 21,195 school children.

EDUCATION

All government and UNRWA schools re-opened on 24 January. On 28 January, student attendance in UNRWA's 221 schools was 96 percent and teacher attendance was 99 percent. UNICEF continues to provide essential education equipment and materials to re-establish learning and recreational activities, create safe environments and help restore a sense of normalcy for children. On 26 January, UNICEF supplied schools with 130 school-in-a-box kits which include items such as exercise books, pens and pencils to cater for 10,400 students, 84 recreational kits targeting 6,720 students, and 42 mathematics and 42 science kits targeting 4,200 students.

ELECTRICITY / FUEL

The electricity situation has returned to its pre-27 December status, with much of the Gaza Strip receiving only intermittent electricity. While the main power lines in Gaza have been repaired, many low-voltage lines providing electricity directly to households are still not working. Certain areas, notably Al Qerem, Izbet Abed Rabbo, east Jabalia, east At Tuffah, Al Twan and Al Atatra, are receiving very little power as a result. Gaza now receives 202 MW (120 MW from Israel, up to 65 MW from the Gaza Power Plant, and 17 MW from Egypt) out of the total current demand of 225-240 MW. Demand is currently lower due to damage sustained to the industrial sector. In order to meet demand throughout the territory, GEDCO has put in place a power cut schedule: Gaza and North Gaza will face power cuts of eight hours three times a week; and the Middle Area and Khan Yunis will face power cuts of 6-8 hours twice per week. This does not include unintentional power cuts. Thirty-eight transformers essential for the repair of the electricity system are still waiting permission from the Israelis to be allowed into Gaza.

Since 27 December, UNRWA has provided 150,050 litres of fuel to municipalities to enable them to cover all their solid waste management needs until mid-March. In addition, UNRWA has provided 75,000 litres to the CMWU during the said period to enable them to operate on an emergency basis. ACF Spain distributed 50,000 liters of fuel for water wells in Gaza Governorate last week.

ACCESS INTO THE GAZA STRIP

As of the morning of 28 January, approximately 30 international NGO staff members were in Gaza, along with approximately 22 UN international staff members. Currently, there are outstanding requests for over 200 people to enter Gaza and this number is growing by the day. "It is unacceptable that staff of international aid agencies with expertise in emergency response are still not given full access into Gaza, and that the crossings are not fully operational for humanitarian and commercial goods," according to Charles Clayton, chair of the Association of International Development Agencies, which includes 75 humanitarian organizations.

CROSSINGS

On 28 and 29 January, Rafah terminal was open in both directions subject to prior co-ordination from the Egyptian authorities; Erez was open for internationals subject to prior co-ordination from the Israeli authorities; Karni was closed except for the conveyor belt; Nahal Oz was closed; Sofa was closed; and Kerem Shalom was open (partially on 28 January). On 28 January, 90 truckloads including 63 for aid agencies entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing. Seventy-eight truckloads of grains were transferred into Gaza through the Karni conveyor belt. 45,000 litres of industrial gas entered through Nahal Oz. Six trucks of medical supplies entered through Rafah.

On 28 January, because Kerem Shalom was not functioning at full capacity, only 9 out of 30 scheduled truckloads were allowed access into Gaza.

Since the cease-fire on 18 January, an average of 80.5 truckloads per day crossed through Kerem Shalom. The Israeli authorities have assured the humanitarian community that Kerem Shalom would be improved to allow 150 trucks per day. However, except for 2 days, capacity has not exceeded 120 truckloads.

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 and Israel 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 a few international organizations) and is urgently needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid. The lack of 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.