



GAZA HUMANITARIAN SITUATION REPORT 28 December 2008 16:00

On 27 December, at around 11:30 AM, the IDF launched a large-scale attack on the Gaza Strip called, “Operation Cast Lead”. According to the Israeli government, the operation was in response to the escalation of the Palestinian rocket and mortar fire into Israel since the expiry on 19 December of the Egyptian negotiated “calm”. At the time of publication, Israeli fighter planes, helicopters and drones had bombed over 240 targets throughout the Gaza Strip. The majority of these attacks occurred within the first hour of the operation. Palestinian militants responded by firing over 100 rockets and mortars towards Israel.

CASUALTIES

Although no official numbers of Palestinian casualties are currently available, as of 4:00 PM, according to preliminary reports from the MoH (collected by the World Health Organization), at least 280 Palestinians were killed during the air strikes, and some 900 others were treated at hospitals, 650 of whom were admitted for further treatment with 115 in critical condition. Reports from Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights in Gaza indicated that most fatalities were civilian police; other fatalities included at least 20 children, nine women, and 60 other unarmed civilians. Most casualties fell in the first few minutes of the operation. The Israeli operation resulted in one of the highest single-day death tolls recorded in the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967. The number of casualties is expected to rise; search operations for dead bodies trapped under the rubble are still ongoing.

All parts of the Gaza Strip were targeted, with Gaza City being the hardest hit. Air-strike targets included civil police stations, military training bases and government buildings and installations. In one incident, at least 40 people were killed when an IAF plane fired an air-to-ground missile at the police headquarters in Gaza City during preparations for a graduation ceremony for regular civilian and traffic police. Other civilian casualties occurred among those living in residences within the vicinity of targeted buildings.

Following the air strikes, Palestinian militants fired some 100 rockets and mortars at Israeli towns and cities, reaching areas as far as 40 km from the Israel-Gaza border. One Israeli civilian was killed and ten others were injured.

In most parts of the West Bank, Palestinians demonstrated against the Israeli operation in Gaza, resulting in the death of two Palestinians, and the injury of 31 others. Preliminary reports indicate four Israeli soldiers and one Israeli child were injured in the clashes.

HEALTH

Initial reports indicate that Gaza hospitals were overwhelmed by the high number of casualties (see above). However, due to the discharge of non-urgent patients and the less seriously wounded, hospitals still have bed capacity. In total hospital capacity stands at 2000 beds—1500 MoH and 500 Private/NGO hospitals. No injured Palestinians have left to Egypt for medical treatments, nor were medical supplies allowed into Gaza via the Rafah crossing.

A shortage of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, including surgical kits was reported despite some supplies received today. UNRWA is currently facilitating the delivery of four truckloads of medicines from the MoH warehouses in Ramallah. Israeli authorities allowed the entry of seven truckloads of Medical supplies via the Kerem Shalom crossing.

SCHOOLS

Widespread panic was reported among student population, exacerbated by the attack's timing—during school hours. Classes were in session at the time of IAF air strikes, with some students sitting for midyear exams. Other students were either on their way to school for the afternoon shift, or returning home. Initial reports indicate some students were injured either from shattered glass inside schools, or en route to school. Parents rushed to schools to collect their children; all students were evacuated.

GAZA GOODS CROSSINGS

Kerem Shalom crossing was partially open today; seven truckloads of medical supplies and 14 truckloads of wheat from humanitarian agencies were allowed into Gaza.

WHEAT AND FLOUR SHORTAGE

Due to the depletion of wheat in the Gaza, all major Gaza mills were forced to shut down. Long queues of people at functional bakeries were reported. UNRWA stock of wheat grain is still at zero.

FUEL AND ELECTRICITY

The Gaza power plant is expected to shut down on 29 December as no fuel was allowed entry into Gaza today. Power outages of up to 16 hours per day are expected in Gaza City, and northern and middle areas of the Gaza Strip.