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## Rafah Humanitarian Needs Assessment Executive Summary

6 June 2004

### Objectives of the assessment

- To assess the humanitarian needs arising from the IDF incursions and house demolitions in Rafah – including the recent incursions in May 2004 – and from economic decline and poverty;
- To outline the response of aid agencies to humanitarian needs in Rafah, including an assessment of current shortfalls in assistance;
- To evaluate the sustainability of humanitarian assistance under current conditions.

### Shelter

#### Needs

- During May 2004, 298 buildings were demolished in Rafah and almost 3,800 people were made homeless. A further 270 residential buildings housing 502 families were damaged during the May incursions.
- The incursions which took place in May were larger in scale than any other month since September 2000. However, a total of 1,497 buildings have been destroyed in Rafah as a result of IDF activities since September 2000, and 15,009 individuals have been made homeless. 82.5% of these homeless people are refugees.
- 2,041 homes in Rafah have been registered as damaged or in need of repairs as a result of IDF activities since September 2000.
- After the demolition of buildings in May, UNRWA established transit centres in central Rafah to accommodate people who had been made homeless. The relatively slow movement out of these centres is of serious concern, as it indicates that housing alternatives have reached capacity.

#### Response

- The Palestinian Ministry of Housing has carried out 4,000 repairs of homes in Rafah in September 2000; in the same period, UNRWA has assisted 510 families eligible for assistance in repairing their homes.
- UNRWA distributes rental support every three months to 2,061 families in Rafah; UNRWA seeks to extend this support to an additional 560 families made homeless in May.
- A total of 232 new housing units been built to accommodate homeless in Rafah by UNRWA and the Ministry of Housing (30 remain unoccupied because of their proximity to an IDF base). A further 261 buildings are under construction and 168 are planned. UNRWA has spent, or is in the process of spending, \$12,106,474 on re-housing in Rafah.

#### Unmet needs, sustainability of response

- Rafah was crowded before September 2000. Because of extensive demolitions, availability of accommodation for rent in Rafah is now very limited.
- UNRWA estimates that even if no further demolitions occur in Rafah, and if all current or planned housing schemes are completed, 1,691 of the families eligible for UNRWA housing will remain homeless unless additional funding and land is available to re-house them.
- Re-housing a family in Rafah costs approximately \$20,000. If all the remaining homeless families were to be re-housed, the cost would be approximately \$44,760,000. UNRWA estimates the unfunded shortfall for re-housing eligible refugee families alone to be \$35,055,272.
- Finding new plots for homes in the Rafah area is difficult. Space is limited and much existing space is in areas affected by military violence.
- With accommodation so scarce in Rafah, the alternative for housing homeless families is either in school buildings or tent villages. The latter option risks severe sanitation and health problems and community dislocation.

## **Food**

### **Needs**

- Over the past twelve months levels of food insecurity in Rafah have almost doubled. According to the World Food Programme, 66% of the population of Rafah (109,254 individuals) is food insecure, compared with 35% in 2003. Another 17% is in danger of becoming food insecure should the current conditions continue.
- Rafah is one of the most food insecure areas of the occupied Palestinian territories.
- Rafah is particularly restricted by Israeli closure measures, and Palestinians living there are consequently isolated from sources of employment and income.

### **Response**

- Of Rafah's population of 166,700, 149,370 (89.6%) receive some food aid on a regular basis.
- 16,500 families also receive cash assistance, to enhance their capacity to purchase food and other necessary goods.
- In response to the May incursions, UNRWA supplied daily meals to affected families in Rafah.

### **Unmet needs, implementation problems**

- While tight closure is maintained around Rafah and the entire Gaza Strip, and access to agricultural land and fishing are restricted, a large proportion of Rafah's population will remain food insecure.
- Due to funding shortfalls, UNRWA food aid to 'new poor' beneficiaries in 2003 was only able to provide 40% of recipients' daily calorific needs instead of 67% as originally planned.
- Repeated closure of the Karni terminal and tightening of security measures has significantly reduced the volume of foodstuffs brought in through the terminal. This is expected to result in higher food prices on imported goods.

## **Health**

- In the aftermath of the May incursions, public health degenerated as a consequence of damage to water and sewage networks and overcrowded facilities.
- Rafah secondary healthcare facilities are operating at maximum capacity. There are 3.3 hospital beds for every 10,000 people in Rafah. The Palestinian national average is 13.8 beds per 10,000.
- Support by healthcare facilities elsewhere in the Gaza Strip is frequently limited by movement restrictions imposed by IDF.

## **Infrastructure**

- The poor state of Rafah's infrastructure caused public health problems even before recent demolitions occurred.
- Additional damage during IDF incursions in May to water and electricity lines, roads and public buildings compounds problems caused by weak infrastructure.
- Due to the repeated incursions and ensuing destruction, there are limited funds for upgrading and developing the existing networks. All available funds are channeled into immediate repair work, leaving little for long term infrastructure development.

## **Psycho-social**

- The population of Rafah has suffered stress and trauma from repeated incursions. Psycho-social assistance helps to support Palestinians who have been subjected to violence, and is important for the long-term well-being and rehabilitation of the community.
- The number of locally trained professionals required to assess needs and provide intervention in the psycho-social sector is insufficient.
- Funding from donors has been particularly short in this sector.

## **Conclusions**

Public health risks, food insecurity and damage to infrastructure are becoming increasingly severe problems for the people of Rafah. Successive incursions have resulted in the severe degradation of community resources. However, homelessness is the most pressing humanitarian issue. Land for re-housing and funds remain in short supply, so if further demolitions occur the homeless may be forced to live in tent villages. This risks severe sanitation and health problems, and even greater community dislocation.

In this context, Israel's apparent escalation of its demolition operation in Rafah is a source of grave concern to humanitarian agencies. During 2002, an average of 15 homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair every month in Rafah. In 2003, the rate of home demolition increased to an average of more than 47 homes a month. So far this year, Israel has demolished an average 100 homes per month in Rafah.