



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

3 - 5 February 2009, 1700 hours

Violent incidents continue to undermine the cease-fire which was unilaterally implemented by Israel on 18 January, and later the same day by Hamas and other Palestinian factions. On the morning of 3 February, a Grad rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed south of Ashkelon causing some damage to property, but no injuries. Later on 3 February, the Israeli air force bombed a building in Beit Lahia and a number of tunnels along the Gaza-Egyptian border, injuring two Palestinians. On 4 February, a mortar shell was fired at southern Israel; no injuries were reported. On 5 February, an Islamic Jihad militant attempting to fire a mortar shell into Israel was injured when the shell exploded at the launch site.

Needs and damage assessments are still underway. Organizations are focusing on re-establishing basic services, including water, health, food, cash assistance, education and psychosocial support. Repairs to shelters, water and sanitation systems, health facilities, and other essential infrastructure are ongoing.

On 3 February, over 3,500 blankets and 406 food parcels were confiscated by Hamas police personnel from an UNRWA distribution centre in Beach Camp. On 4 February, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes condemned as unacceptable the confiscation of aid supplies and demanded that the aid be returned immediately.

Protection of Civilians

Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) figures as of 5 February are 1,440 Palestinians dead, of whom 431 are children and 114 are women. According to the MoH, the rise in the number of casualties is due to the delay in people officially registering the deaths of family members from the conflict. 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 still stands at 5,380, of whom 1,872 are children and 800 are women. ICRC is closely monitoring the issue of persons unaccounted for following the conflict.

Three Israelis have been killed and 183 injured since 27 December by rocket and mortar fire by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip. Eleven Israeli soldiers have been killed and 340 wounded.

Shelter

An initial survey conducted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that more than 14,000 homes, 68 government buildings and 31 non-governmental organization offices were either totally or partially damaged during the latest conflict. As a result, an estimated 600,000 tonnes of concrete rubble will need to be removed.

As of 5 February, three non-school UNRWA shelters remain open in Jabalia, Beach Camp and Deir Al Balah, hosting 388 displaced people. Thousands of Gazans remain homeless, although the total number of internally displaced persons remains unknown. Distributions of non-food items by aid agencies to damaged shelters and host families are ongoing. Priority needs for the population include blankets, mattresses, plastic sheeting, kitchen kits, hygiene kits, water tanks, clothing and tents. Construction materials remain a priority to rebuild destroyed homes, schools, hospitals and clinics.

The ICRC continues to register people whose houses were partially or totally destroyed. Until 3 February, the ICRC and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society had assisted more than 60,000 people, including with plastic sheeting to cover windows and damaged walls, kitchen sets, mattresses, blankets and hygiene items.

Health

Post-ceasefire assessments to evaluate immediate health needs and damage to health facilities are being finalized. Of the 122 health facilities assessed by WHO, about 48 percent were damaged or destroyed: 15 hospitals and 41 primary health care (PHC) centers were partially damaged; two PHC centers were destroyed; and 29 ambulances were partially damaged or destroyed.

According to WHO, the public health laboratory in Gaza is collecting random samples from the water networks, water wells and wastewater treatment plants on a daily basis for microbiology testing to ensure water quality, especially in areas with destroyed/damaged networks. The ICRC continues to work with Ministry of Health hospitals in Gaza to improve the quality of the water they use.

Based on preliminary data from the Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Unit of the Ministry of Health, the largest proportion of injuries during the conflict, 44 percent, was caused by shrapnel. The MoH in Gaza also shows that 33 percent of the injuries were sustained in North Gaza and 38 percent in Gaza Governorate. ICRC reports that 70 amputations were carried out at Shifa Hospital during the three weeks of hostilities.

Of the two rehabilitation hospitals in Gaza, Fata Hospital is still not functioning. A Jordanian field hospital is in place to deal with the Fata Hospital caseload. It focuses mainly on surgery and chronic patients, but does not have capacity for rehabilitation services that are normally also provided at Fata. Even before 27 December, there was already a back-log of people waiting for specialised services including rehabilitation and surgery.

According to the MoH/WHO operations room in Ramallah, 96 percent of priority drugs at the central level have been either delivered or committed and 81 percent of priority disposables have been either delivered or are in the pipeline.

Water and Sanitation

The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), Gaza's water utility, reports that ten water wells that were damaged during the hostilities are still not functioning, and four pumping stations (three in Gaza and one in Beit Hanoun) are also not functioning. Mains have been repaired almost everywhere in the Gaza Strip, although some secondary pipelines are still in need of repair. In some of the worst-hit areas north and east of Gaza City, parts of the network have been completely destroyed. CMWU will be unable to complete repairs without the entry of needed spare parts into Gaza, which remains problematic.

According to the CMWU, 50 percent of the population of the Gaza Strip receives running water for 6-8 hours every second day; 30 percent of the population receives running water every third day; and ten percent of the population receives water every five days. Ten percent of the population does not receive running water and depends on tankered water, notably in east Jabalia, Beit Lahia, Jahr el Deek, Az Zaitoun and El Qarara.

The preliminary report from the Palestinian Hydrology Group's damage assessment shows that the price of tankered water is around 30-40 NIS/m³ in many areas in Beit Lahia and Gaza City, which remains too expensive for many Gazans.

Food

Gazans continue to face difficulty obtaining food due to shortages on the market and the shortage of currency. Eighty-eight percent of Gazans are now registered to receive food aid from WFP and UNRWA.

Electricity

Since 1 February, the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) has received 1.75 million litres of industrial fuel. As a result of the increased supply, the GPP was able to operate its second turbine on the morning of 3 February and now produces 60-65 MW of power. GEDCO, Gaza's power utility, has been able to reduce its rolling power cuts: an average of eight hours are scheduled in Gaza and North Gaza three times per week; and an average of six to eight hours are scheduled in the Middle Area two times per week. Unscheduled power cuts continue.

GEDCO estimates the damage to the electricity network due to the recent hostilities at over \$10 million. Even before the conflict, its reserves of spare parts were close to depletion due to the 18-month blockade on Gaza. Despite the lack of supplies, GEDCO continues to partially repair the network where possible. Temporary connections and repairs will have to be corrected according to proper technical standards as soon as GEDCO can receive the required supplies. Ad-hoc partial repairs will increase technical losses by 25-30 percent, reduce the lifetime of the network components, and further expose sections of the network to possible collapse. GEDCO is unable to repair those parts of the network which were completely destroyed and warns that there will be no supply to these areas until the necessary materials are allowed into Gaza.

Access into the Gaza Strip

NGOs continue to face difficulty accessing the Gaza Strip to carry out humanitarian work. At a recent meeting of the Association of International Development Organizations' sub-group on Gaza, 75 percent of those attending reported that their organizations were continuing to face difficulties in accessing the Gaza Strip. Humanitarian personnel are only allowed to enter Gaza through Erez crossing after receiving prior clearance by the Israeli authorities. Many NGOs have failed to receive a response from the Israeli authorities regarding their applications, while others were requested to provide additional information regarding their specific mandates, activities and funding sources. Others have been denied entry altogether. A key problem has been inconsistency in the application process; some staff members are informed that they have been approved, only to be denied entry when they attempt to cross Erez. In other cases, staff receive conflicting information from Israeli authorities regarding regulations that must be met before entry is allowed.

Crossings

Palestinian sources at Rafah report that the crossing has closed again for Palestinians as of today 5 February. Only internationals who crossed into Gaza over the past weeks will be allowed to return to Egypt. Palestinian medical cases will be allowed through the crossing on an ad hoc basis, as was the case before 27 December. The movement of goods will not be permitted through Rafah except on an urgent basis. Rafah crossing was re-opened on 31 December 2008 as an exceptional arrangement to assist the evacuation of the war wounded and to facilitate the entry of medical supplies and personnel.

On 5 February, Erez was open for internationals subject to prior co-ordination from the Israeli authorities; Karni was closed except for the conveyor belt; and Kerem Shalom was open; Rafah, Nahal Oz and Sofa were closed. On 2-4 January, Rafah was open for those with co-ordination, Erez was open subject to prior coordination with the Israeli authorities, and Kerem Shalom, the Karni conveyor belt and Nahal Oz were open.

Between 2 and 4 February, 318 truckloads, including 209 for aid agencies, entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing. 270 truckloads of grain were transferred into Gaza through the Karni conveyor belt. 391,300 litres of diesel for UNRWA, 1,497,000 litres of industrial fuel and 676 tonnes of cooking gas entered through Nahal Oz. Eleven and a half trucks entered through Rafah.

The number of truckloads of aid permitted to enter Gaza daily by the Israeli authorities remains insufficient, and humanitarian organizations continue to face serious restrictions to enter Gaza. At the launch of the Gaza Flash Appeal in Geneva on 2 February, for \$613 million funding for emergency humanitarian and early recovery needs of the Gaza population, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, reiterated that 'there must be a regular, predictable and sufficient flow of life-sustaining goods and uninterrupted and facilitated movement of humanitarian staff in order for this relief effort to succeed. Essential items such as construction materials, pipes, electrical wires and transformers, key equipment and spare parts now need to be allowed in... [F]or the Palestinians in Gaza to live, as opposed to simply being able to exist and survive, commercial goods also need to be allowed in and out.'

Funding

For a copy of the Gaza Flash Appeal, visit: www.reliefweb.int or www.humanitarianappeal.net.

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 2008. Humanitarian access remains unreliable and needs to be granted every day without restriction.

Cash/liquidity: Cash has still not entered the Gaza Strip from Israel (except for a few international organizations) and is urgently needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid.