



## **FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR**

**6 - 9 February 2009, 1700 hours**

On 9 February, UNRWA lifted the suspension on the movement of its humanitarian supplies into Gaza, after the Hamas authorities returned all of the aid supplies confiscated on 3 and 5 February. UNRWA had suspended its movement of aid into Gaza on 6 February, following the confiscation of ten trucks of food aid by the Ministry of Social Affairs on 5 February. This incident followed the confiscation of food aid and blankets from an UNRWA distribution centre on 3 February. UNRWA had announced that the suspension would remain in place until all aid was returned and credible assurances were provided that there would be no further interference to the import and delivery of aid.

Violent incidents continue to undermine the cease-fire which was unilaterally announced by Israel on 18 January, and later the same day by Hamas and other Palestinian factions. On the evening of 5 February, an alleged member of the Popular Resistance Committees was killed after the Israeli forces opened fire as he approached the border fence in southern Gaza, reportedly with an explosive device. Another Palestinian, reportedly an Islamic Jihad militant, was killed in a similar incident in the northern Gaza Strip on 9 February. Militants in Gaza fired rockets towards Israel on 6, 8 and 9 February, causing damage to a number of cars. Israeli patrol boats opened fire towards Palestinian fishing boats on 6 and 8 February, injuring one fisherman on 6 February. The Israeli air force conducted a number of airstrikes on 6 and 9 February, targeting tunnels under the Gaza-Egyptian border as well as buildings and open areas in Beit Lahia, Khan Yunis and southern Gaza. On 7 February, Israeli tanks and bulldozers entered Gaza east of Abassan village, where they leveled land.

One person was killed and five were wounded when unidentified perpetrators detonated an explosive device in a café in central Gaza City on 5 February.

### **PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS**

There have been no official updates of the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) figures as of 5 February, when the death toll stood at 1,440, of whom 431 were children and 114 were 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 still stands at 5,380, of whom 1,872 are children and 800 are women, according to the MoH. ICRC is 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.

Protection of the human rights of civilians in Gaza remains a concern. After a four-day visit to the occupied Palestinian territory and southern Israel, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, stated that, "Despite the Gaza cease-fires, children continue to suffer and remain in a precarious state of insecurity".

### **SHELTER**

As of 9 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. Priority needs for the population include blankets, mattresses, plastic sheeting, kitchen kits, hygiene kits, water tanks and clothing.

### **HEALTH**

Based on preliminary figures from the MoH, Handicap International estimates that 30 percent of those who were injured during the hostilities are at risk of becoming permanently disabled and will require rehabilitation or other specialised services to prevent or mitigate their disability. This figure is subject to change as more data is received and verified.

WHO estimates that 25,000 to 50,000 new people are likely to be in need of psychological intervention for longer term effects of the hostilities. Groups particularly at risk include separated children, people with pre-existing mental disabilities, pre-existing or new physical disabilities, elderly who have lost family support and female-headed households.

According to the MoH, 608 injured were evacuated through Rafah between 29 December and 22 January. WHO reports that another 30 patients (mostly chronically ill) were evacuated through Erez between 28 December and 25 January. According to WHO, an estimated 40 percent of chronic patients interrupted their treatment during the hostilities.

A Lebanese ship carrying aid supplies was stopped by the Israeli Navy before it could enter Gaza waters on 5 February. 1,100 frozen fresh plasma units from the ship were subsequently allowed into the Gaza Strip, escorted to Erez by Magen David Adom.

## **WATER AND SANITATION**

As of 9 February, the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), Gaza's water utility, reports that 50,000 people do not have access to water and an additional 150,000-200,000 receive water every 5 or 6 days. Although emergency repairs are still ongoing, major repairs can not take place without the entry of needed spare parts into Gaza, which remains problematic.

According to PHG, solid waste is accumulating in most areas affected by the hostilities (with the exception of Gaza City, where only Az Zaitoun and Ash Sheikh 'Ijleen face problems with solid waste). COOPI has received funding from the oPt Humanitarian Response Fund for collection of solid waste in Gaza City and will collect 2,800 tonnes of waste per week for three months.

Urgent needs include the distribution and repair of roof-top tanks, restoration of water network lines and additional trucks for solid waste collection. Water tankers are in short supply which makes it difficult for organizations to cover all areas in need.

## **CASH**

On 6 February, Israel allowed the transfer of NIS 170 million (\$42 million) from banks in the West Bank to the Gaza Strip. According to the Bank of Palestine, this money transfer will enable the Palestinian Authority to pay the salaries of its 70,000 Gaza-based employees. Israel last allowed cash into the Gaza Strip in mid-December 2008.

## **FOOD SECURITY**

According to WFP, basic commodities are currently available at affordable prices. Shortages of fresh meat, chicken and sugar are reported, resulting in inflated prices of these items. Chicken costs NIS 20 per kilo, compared to NIS 3-4 per kilo before 27 December, and fresh meat costs NIS 60-65 per kilo. All 47 bakeries are operating, although with continuing shortages of cooking gas. Of the six mills in Gaza, all are open except for the one which was badly damaged during the hostilities.

Fishing has resumed since the end of January. Israeli Navy boats are in practice limiting fishing to 3 nautical miles from the coast (the fishing limit outlined by the Oslo Accords was 20 nautical miles). As a result, only one type of fish is available on the market at a high price (NIS 32 / kilo). FAO estimates losses to the fishing industry as a result of the military operation at over \$2.2 million.

A joint UN-NGO damage assessment of the agriculture sector estimates the total direct losses at over \$180 million, including direct losses to plant production, animal production and agricultural infrastructure.

On 8 February, UNICEF, through its partner organisation ANERA, started the distribution of fortified biscuits and micronutrients for pre-school children. From now until mid-March, it will distribute 7,500 cartons of fortified biscuits and micronutrients sufficient for 80,000 preschool children for one month.

In light of the poor quality of water in Gaza, the MoH and UNICEF are concerned about the increased risk

of diarrhea and other water-borne diseases in infants given formula milk as a substitute to breastfeeding. The MoH and UNICEF advise that donations of formula milk should only be accepted if carefully targeted and monitored.

## **EDUCATION**

A UNDP rapid damage assessment of 170 out of the 407 government and private schools in the Gaza Strip found that ten schools (eight government and two private) were severely damaged, and that 160 government and ten private schools were partially damaged, during the Israeli military operation. Eight kindergartens were severely damaged and 60 were partially damaged. Repairing damaged schools remains an urgent priority.

Over the past week, UNRWA has distributed notebooks to eleven schools in Beit Hanoun. Further distribution has been halted as UNRWA has not been able to import any additional notebooks. UNRWA has still not received permission to import the necessary paper to print the remainder of its textbooks. Sixty percent of children are therefore still without textbooks. Notably, the new human rights curriculum – designed to impart values of non-violence to Gaza's children – is being affected.

Ten UNICEF tents were brought into Gaza on 8 February. The tents will be used as learning spaces in the most damage-stricken areas.

## **ELECTRICITY / FUEL**

On 6 February, the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) was forced to reduce production from 60 to 30 MW due to shortage of fuel. Fuel supplies to the power plant resumed on 8 February, allowing the GPP to turn on the second power-generating turbine on the afternoon of 9 February, bringing power production back up to 60 MW. The following scheduled power cuts remain: 8 hours three times per week in the Gaza and North Gaza governorates, and 6-8 hours two times per week in the Middle Area. Khan Yunis and Rafah have no scheduled power cuts.

Petrol and diesel for public use were last allowed into Gaza on 2 November 2008. Since then, Israel has only allowed 50,000 litres of petrol and 883,000 litres of diesel for UNRWA. As a result, most of the 240 Gaza fuel stations have closed. Long queues of cars waiting for fuel rations at the open fuel stations are being reported in many locations.

The Gas Station Owners Association reports a significant drop in the amount of fuel smuggled through the Gaza-Egyptian border since the beginning of February, largely due to the destruction of tunnels by Israel. Sources in Rafah suggest a decrease in the amount of merchandise being smuggled into Gaza through the tunnels due to the ongoing Israeli aerial attacks.

## **ACCESS INTO THE GAZA STRIP**

NGOs continue to face difficulties accessing the Gaza Strip to carry out humanitarian work. 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**

On 5-6 February, Kerem Shalom and Erez were open; Rafah, Nahal Oz and Sufa were closed. The Karni conveyor belt was open on 5 February and closed on 6 February. On 7 February, all crossings were closed due to the Jewish Sabbath. On 8 February, Kerem Shalom was open; Erez was open for internationals and medical cases with prior co-ordination with the Israeli authorities; Nahal Oz was open; Karni was closed except for the conveyor belt; Rafah and Sufa remained closed.

Between 5 and 8 February, 274 truckloads, including 164 for aid agencies, entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing. Ninety-five truckloads of grain were transferred into Gaza through the Karni conveyor belt. 792,200 litres of industrial gas entered through Nahal Oz.

Although the Israeli authorities have informed the humanitarian community that 150 trucks would be allowed into Gaza per day, for the most part capacity has not exceeded 120 truckloads. In addition, only a restricted list of items is being allowed into Gaza.

The preliminary list of priority items for transport into the Gaza Strip was compiled and shared with COGAT on 4 February. The list will be updated regularly to reflect humanitarian needs in Gaza. On 5 February, items in the list under the categories of Basic Shelter, Teaching Aids and Recreational Kits were refused clearance for crossing at Kerem Shalom.

## **PRIORITY NEEDS**

**Opening of crossings:** All crossings into Gaza and Israel must be operational, and the number of trucks and range of commodities allowed into the Gaza Strip need 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:** Although some cash has entered the Gaza Strip, more is needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid.