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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

9 - 15 January 2009

"Each day more children are being hurt, their small bodies wounded, their young lives shattered. These are not just cold figures. They talk of children's lives interrupted. No human being can watch this without being moved. No parent can witness this and not see their own child. This is tragic. This is unacceptable." Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, 14 January

More than 1000 Palestinians killed, including 346 children; 4900 others injured

From the start of the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip on 27 December to 15 January, 1086 Palestinians have been killed and more than 4900 injured, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. Israeli operations have caused extensive damage to homes and public infrastructure, and seriously jeopardized water, sanitation and medical services. UN schools sheltering displaced persons have been hit, humanitarian workers have been killed and ambulances struck, and sick and wounded have been left trapped and unassisted. Up to 90,000 people are displaced from their homes. John Holmes, the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs, told the Security Council on 14 January that while the Israeli forces are "no doubt trying, as they say, to take steps to minimize civilian casualties... they are clearly not succeeding."¹

Alarming rate of children killed and injured

As of 15 January, almost 32% of all fatalities (346) have been children. Approximately 1709 children have been wounded, some with multiple injuries.

From 3 January to 14 January, the number of child fatalities has increased by more than 340% (see chart).

USG John Holmes stated: "The situation for the civilian population of Gaza is terrifying and its psychological impact felt particularly by children and their parents who feel

helpless and unable to protect them. It is a situation from which civilians have only minimal respite, three hours a day, with no escape as borders and crossings remain closed."

There are almost 800,000 children in Gaza, comprising 56% of Gaza's population in an area with one of the highest population densities areas in the world.



¹ Statement by Mr. John Holmes, USG for Humanitarian Affairs, 14 January 2009, Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Follow-up on Zeitun killings

Following the evacuation of 18 wounded Palestinians on 7 January (*OCHA Weekly report 1-7 Jan*), PRCS teams are still unable to enter the Zeitun neighborhood due to the lack of Israeli approval. It has been nine days since the area was first targeted; there are still an unknown number of wounded and corpses in the area.

Attacks on medical and humanitarian personnel

Twelve medical personnel have been killed by Israeli forces since 27 December. Following an incident where an UNRWA-contracted worker was killed in Israeli shelling of a UN-contracted convoy, on 9 January, UNRWA and ICRC suspended operations and staff movement throughout the Gaza Strip for a day, due to security concerns. UN Security Council Resolution 1860, approved on 8 January, called for the “unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment.”

Preventing the evacuation of wounded/Lack of access for ambulance teams

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) is receiving about 130 appeals for the evacuation of wounded per day. Many closed areas require Israeli approval for entry. However, Israeli authorities have not approved PRCS to enter several areas, mostly in northern Gaza.

PRCS reported that it takes at least six hours to receive approval to enter closed areas to evacuate Palestinian wounded. PRCS also reported cases where corpses of people who died as far back as 3 January have not yet been removed for lack of Israeli approval, and expressed its concern over the possible health impact of the decomposition of bodies in the streets.

The evacuation of wounded and safe passage of ambulances and health workers are fundamental tenets of IHL, and should be facilitated at all times.

Testimony of a Nasser Hospital paramedic given to OCHA: On 13 January, Israeli military forces opened heavy fire on the medic while en route to evacuate an elderly wounded woman in the Khuza' area of Khan Younis. He took cover in a nearby residential building and Israeli forces continued to fire, repeatedly hitting the building. The PRCS and ICRC were contacted, but were not able to reach the paramedic due to the heavy Israeli fire. By the time Israeli forces withdrew at nightfall, the injured woman had bled to death.

Allegations of Israeli military use of phosphorus

There have been reports of possible Israeli use of white phosphorus (WP). The Israeli army appears to be employing WP only as an obscurant to veil its military activities. However, due to the high population density in Gaza, this use significantly endangers the civilian population as the toxic substance is highly flammable, spontaneously igniting upon contact with air. According to the Head of Emergency Medicine at Gaza's MoH, many patients are exhibiting the same symptoms manifested in white phosphorus exposure, namely, severe flesh burning, breathing difficulties, and throat spasms. According to Human Rights Watch, the use of WP in densely populated areas of Gaza violates the requirement under international humanitarian law to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian injury and loss of life.

Palestinian militant activities

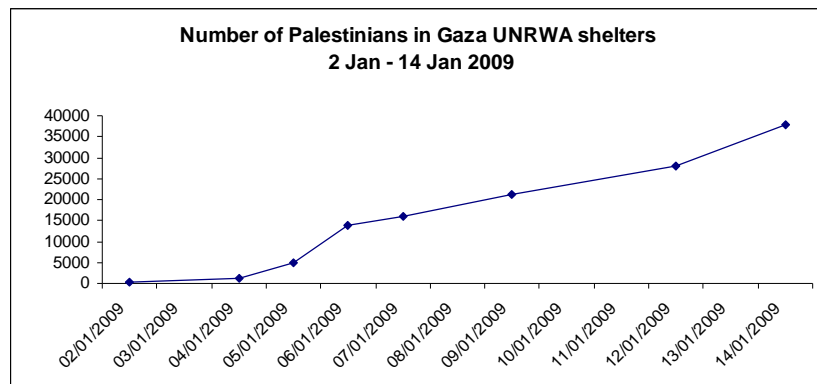
Palestinian rocket fire continues from the Gaza Strip into Israel, however the frequency of the fire decreased compared to the previous weeks. There have been three Israeli civilians killed since 27 December and another 78 injured. Ten Israeli soldiers were also killed.

Halt in hostilities

During the reporting period, Israeli forces implemented daily three-hour 'lulls' in hostilities on humanitarian grounds to allow the civilian population to access basic supplies and medical services. However, humanitarian agencies have expressed concerns that the daily changes in the time schedule make it difficult for the population to know when it is safe to venture out for supplies.

More than 35,000 displaced Palestinians seek refuge in UNRWA shelters

The rise in the number of Palestinians seeking shelter at UNRWA facilities sharply accelerated after the Israeli ground operation began on 3 January. On 8 January, there were approximately 16,000 Palestinians staying at UNRWA facilities. By 14 January, 41 UNRWA facilities were providing



shelter for 37,937 displaced persons. Although the total number of displaced Palestinians remains unknown, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights has estimated 80,000–90,000 people displaced, including up to 50,000 children.

UNRWA has provided drinking water, bread and tinned meat to all shelters. Although three truckloads of UNRWA designated non-food items (NFIs) have been brought into Gaza this week, there is still a shortage of blankets, mattresses, hygiene kits, and generators at UNRWA facilities.

Gaza Health

With thousands of Palestinian wounded being treated at health-care facilities, World Health Organization (WHO) has voiced concerns that the health care system is overstretched due to the continuous Israeli military bombardment on and near medical facilities, the large and continuous influx of wounded persons, lack of access to the wounded, shortages of clean water and fuel and power.

During the week, the Gaza European Hospital, El Nasser Paediatric Hospital, Sabha Al Harazin, Dora Paediatrics hospital and Hala Al Shawa Primary Health Care centres (PHCs) were damaged from shelling or artillery fire. On 11 January, Israeli missiles destroyed a partner clinic of Danish Church Aid and Christian World Service.

The disruption of vaccination programs, lack of clean water, damaged sanitation systems, along with high population density, greatly increase the risk of disease outbreaks.

Pregnant women and newborns at risk

The UN Population Fund has warned that continuing violence and displacement present serious risks to more than 40,000 pregnant women in Gaza. Lack of access to critical health services, including emergency obstetric care, could mean the difference between life and death for many women and their babies. In normal circumstances, hundreds of pregnant women require care by qualified health providers every day in Gaza, and an average of 30 women undergo Caesarian section—a procedure not readily available because of the conflict. Stress, trauma and poor nutrition could also result in life-threatening complications for the estimated 41,000 women who are likely to be pregnant at any time in Gaza.

As of 13 January, 28 of 58 MoH PHCs closed due to heightened security risks. Only urgent surgery is being conducted in hospitals and all out-patient clinics are closed, except for those dealing with urgent cases.

More power available to hospitals

In the last reporting period (1-8 January), the lack of fuel and electricity available to hospitals, and the possibility of hospital generators breaking down in the face of 24-hour power cuts were reported. This week the situation vis-à-vis hospital power supply has largely stabilized. According to WHO, the power plant is able to provide all hospitals with 3-4 hours of electricity per day, and UNRWA is supplying hospitals with additional fuel; most hospitals have ancillary fuel reserves to run back-up generators for five days.

Medical supply logistics

At this point, only medical supplies that have been confirmed at zero stock are being prioritized for sending into Gaza. It is requested that no further donations be procured unless through prior coordination with WHO, to help reduce pressure on the Central Drugs Store. In the first week of the crisis, WHO and MAP (Medical Aid for Palestine) identified the need for an additional storage and sorting warehouse.

Gaza Crossing Activity

Since Israeli military operations began on 27 December, there has been a sharp increase in the number of truckloads entering the Gaza Strip. From 9-13 January, a total of 367.5 truckloads entered through Kerem Shalom, and 41 truckloads of medical supplies and food items entered through Rafah.

Although Israeli authorities have alleged the looting of food aid by Hamas militants, there has been no reported theft or misuse of these supplies, and humanitarian organizations have emphasized that careful mechanisms for monitoring aid flows are in place, although the ongoing conflict makes such monitoring difficult.

Nahal Oz was closed for all but one day during the reporting period. On 13 January, 20,000 litres of Industrial fuel was imported from Israel into Gaza.

The Erez crossing was closed during the week; no medical cases were allowed exit to Israeli hospitals.

The conveyor belt located at Karni crossing, which the only available mechanism for the import of wheat grain remained closed during the week. This has resulted in the depletion of wheat grain stocks, forcing all six mills in the Gaza Strip to shut down.

Total Truckloads entered into Gaza, 9-13 Jan

CROSSING	Date	Total Truckloads
Kerem Shalom	09 Jan	42
	11 Jan	93.5
	12 Jan	94
	13 Jan	97
Kerem Shalom Total		326.5
Rafah	09 Jan	14
	10 Jan	9
	11 Jan	18
Rafah Total		41
Grand Total		367.5

Gaza food shortage despite sharp increase in food imports

Despite the escalation in violence, from 7 to 13 January, more than twice as much food entered Gaza (436 truckloads) than in November (81) and December (100) combined - during the period of the Egyptian brokered "truce."

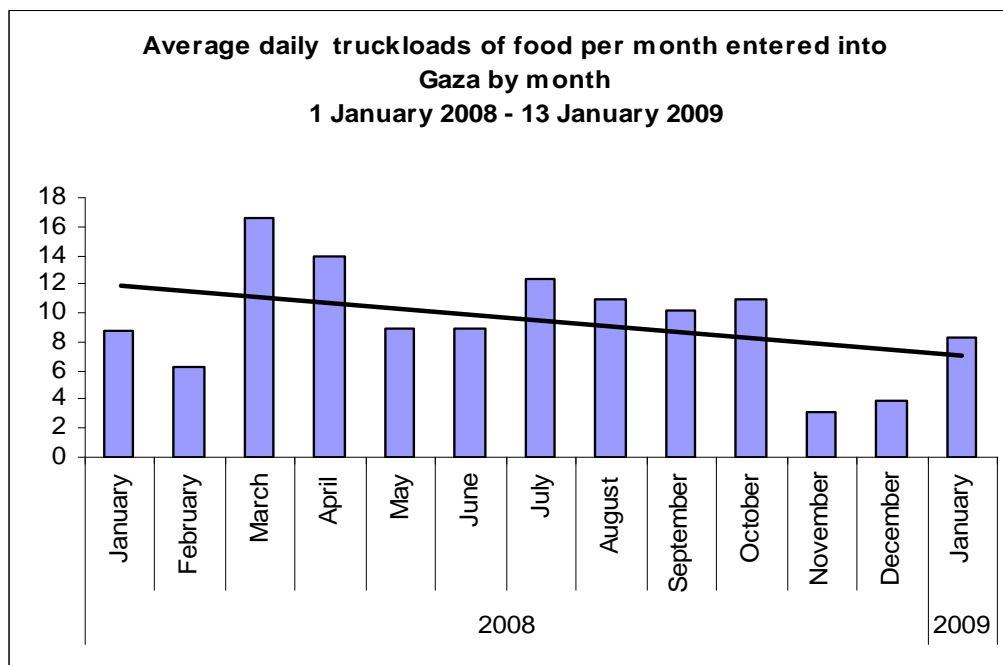
The increase in food imports does not meet the needs, which have risen as a result of the military operations. Basic food items still remain scarce to unavailable, particularly chicken, fish, frozen meat and milk. Only 12 of the 47 mills and bakeries are open.

Due to heightened security risks in conflict zones, local production of fruit and vegetables is limited. Shortages of cash, cooking gas and fuel, and frequent power cuts have exacerbated already difficult conditions brought on by the Israeli blockade.

Food Truckloads entered into Gaza, 7-13 Jan

	ITEMS	Total Truckloads
Human Food Products	Bread	2
	Canned food	38
	Cooking oil	9
	Dairy products	59
	Flour	250
	Food	10
	Miscellaneous	23
	Biscuits	4
	Juice	2
	Oil -undefined	2
	Potato plants	14
	Rice	14
	Sugar	2
	Sunflower oil	2
	Water kits	5
	Human Food Products Total	

Humanitarian aid organizations continue to face difficulties in distributing assistance of depleting stocks due to the security situation.



Gaza electricity and fuel

The situation vis-à-vis Gaza's electricity improved only slightly during the reporting period. At the beginning of the period (9 January), approximately 70 percent of Gaza's population was without electricity. Although much of the damage incurred to main power lines during the previous weeks' of fighting were repaired on 8 and 9 January, a number of factors contributed to the continued lack of electricity. In particular, localized damage to ancillary power lines within the electricity infrastructure and logistical difficulties in delivering fuel to the power plant in the face of continued Israeli military bombardment were contributing factors. By 14 January, 60% of Gazans were without electricity.

Water and Sanitation

As of 14 January, approximately 500,000 people had no access to running water, and the rest of the population only receive water for a few hours, two to three times per week. Gaza's water utility, the CMWU, has reported that much of the damage to water and waste water systems incurred have not been repaired because of the danger in reaching damaged lines. Many water wells and sewage pumps are not functioning for lack of electricity, fuel supplies to operate back-up generators, and spare parts.

Sewage flooding in Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya was reported during the week. Due to heightened security risks, UNRWA was unable to deliver fuel to the Beit Lahiya wastewater treatment plant to alleviate pressure on the banks of the sewage lagoon. Up to 15,000 people are directly at risk. Two years ago, five people were killed and 2,000 displaced when the lagoon overflowed. In addition to the risk of flooding, untreated sewage poses a serious risk of the spread of water-borne disease.

During the week, UNRWA distributed 25,000 litres of fuel to the CMWU, and 45,000 additional litres to several municipalities for solid waste collection. UNICEF has distributed 550 family kits for water purification for 33,000 people. PRCS has provided 29,952 bottles of drinking water (1.5 litres each) for distribution to the public. On 13 January, the Palestinian Water Authority provided four truckloads of spare parts to CMWU.

Protests against Israeli operation in Gaza continue in the West Bank

Daily protests against the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip, along with anti-Barrier demonstrations, continued in the West Bank throughout the reporting period. Some demonstrations turned violent, with Israeli soldiers opening fire upon Palestinian stone-throwers with live ammunition, rubber-coated metal bullets and tear gas. In the course of these clashes, 37 Palestinians, including 12 children, were injured by Israeli security forces. Many protesters suffered from teargas inhalation. In addition, Palestinian security forces injured six Palestinians in demonstrations protesting the Gaza offensive and Palestinian security forces.

A total of three Palestinians were killed and 51 others injured in Israeli-Palestinian related violence during the reporting period. One of the fatalities was a 17 years old boy killed in disputed circumstances.

On 11 January, following stone throwing by Palestinians, the Israeli army imposed a 12-hour curfew on Az Zubeidat village in the Jordan Valley. All males aged 10 years and above were ordered to stand in the village's courtyard for four hours; some of the men were assaulted. Soldiers carried out a search operation in village houses; property damage was reported.

Israeli authorities imposed a general closure on the West Bank on 9 and 10 January, preventing all Palestinians holding valid permits from entering East Jerusalem and Israel, excepting urgent medical cases and those working with UN and international agencies. Only Palestinians over 50 years old with permits were allowed to reach Jerusalem for the Friday prayer. There were 98 Israeli military search operations, during which 72 Palestinians were arrested. The majority of Israeli searches occurred in the Nablus governorate, with 65 search operations.

Israeli authorities declare the area beyond the Barrier a closed military area

The Israeli military authorities have issued a military order declaring the area between the Barrier and the Green Line in Hebron Governorate a closed military area. Palestinians wishing to access their land behind the Barrier will now require IDF-issued 'visitor' permits, which are dependent on providing land ownership title deeds recognized by the Israel authorities. Access will be channeled through ten Barrier gates. In the northern West Bank the area between the Barrier and the Green Line has been closed since October 2003: according to research conducted by OCHA and UNRWA, only about 20% of those who used to work the land in this area now receive permits.