



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

19 January 2009, 1700 hours

The cease-fire, declared unilaterally by Israel on 18 January, and later the same day by Hamas and other Palestinian factions, appears to have been holding so far. The Israeli army began a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip on the evening of 18 January, although ground troops remain in certain areas. The coastal road has reopened and movement is possible between the northern and southern parts of the territory for the first time since the start of the ground offensive on 3 January.

The cease-fire follows twenty-three days of bombardment by land, sea and air which have left over 1,300 Palestinians dead and a large number of people severely injured. Extensive damage has been caused to homes and public infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip. Supplies of basic foodstuffs and fuel, and the provision of medical, water and sanitation services remain critical.

Needs and damage assessments are now a priority, as is the recovery of bodies that have been inaccessible due to hostilities. At this stage, the initial response will focus on the re-establishment of basic services to the population of Gaza, including water, health, food, cash assistance, school and psychosocial support. This will include addressing safety of movement (e.g. marking and removing unexploded ordinance), removing rubble and repairing priority infrastructure, in addition to securing access to primary education and health services.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

The cease-fire has allowed rescue services to recover some of the dead from under the rubble. By midday 18 January, ICRC and Palestinian Red Crescent Society teams had retrieved approximately 100 bodies, and an additional 14 bodies were recovered on 19 January.

One Palestinian farmer was killed on the morning of 18 January in Khuza'a east of Khan Yunis following the Israeli-declared cease-fire. Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) figures as of 1600 hours 19 January are 1,314 Palestinians dead, of whom 412 are children and 110 are women. This figure will likely increase as rescue workers retrieve more bodies. No new injuries have been reported today: the number stands at 5,300, of whom 1,855 are children and 795 are women. It is still not possible to determine the number of Palestinian male civilian casualties.

Nine Israeli soldiers have been killed since 27 December. According to the Magen David Adom national society, four Israelis have been killed, four critically injured, 11 moderately injured and 167 lightly injured since 27 December.

OCHA's casualty figures do not include the number of Palestinians or Israelis treated for shock.

SHELTER

There are reports of widespread destruction of houses, infrastructure, roads, greenhouses, cemeteries, mosques and schools in the Az Zaitoun, Tufah, Sha'af, Jabalia, Tal Al Hawwa, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia areas in the northern Gaza Strip. According to the ICRC, "a number of areas, including parts of Beit Lahia, looked like the aftermath of a strong earthquake", while Al Mezan Centre field workers report that "entire urban blocks have disappeared" in North Gaza and eastern suburbs of Gaza City. Construction materials must be allowed into Gaza without delay in order to allow repair and reconstruction. Since June 2007, construction materials have not been permitted entry into Gaza, adversely affecting UN projects, in particular UNRWA and UNDP which were forced to suspend more than \$100 million in construction projects due to lack of materials.

Those displaced have started returning home. As of the evening of 18 January, 4,662 displaced persons had left the emergency shelters. However, 46,234 Palestinians remain in the UNRWA shelters throughout the Gaza Strip.

CARE International provided 7,500 blankets on 18 January, and another 6,570 blankets on 19 January, to cover the shortage of blankets in UNRWA shelters. UNRWA reports remaining shortages of tinned meat, over 22,000 mattresses, and 23,000 blankets and hygiene kits for shelters.

The second semester for 200,000 children in UNRWA schools was scheduled to begin on 17 January. Following the cease-fire, a priority is to resume schooling and to free up the 44 schools that are being used as emergency shelters.

HEALTH

Primary health care is resuming following the cease-fire, except in those clinics that have been destroyed. Antenatal care resumed on 18 January with 70 percent attendance. On 19 January, the MoH started distribution of vaccines to its 34 primary health care clinics that provide vaccination services. Hospitals and intensive care units remain overwhelmed due to the number of war injured who still require treatment. WHO reports that 21 medical facilities have been damaged since 27 December. The Al Quds PRCS Hospital and Al Fata Hospital, both of which were damaged by shelling on 15 January, remained closed on 18 January. Repairs to the hospitals are on-going.

WHO warns of the risk of an outbreak of epidemic disease due to unrecovered bodies, many now severely decomposed, and due to the sewage flowing in Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia.

Handicap International estimates that up to 50 percent of people injured during the latest Israeli military operation have sustained severe injuries such as fractures, amputations, burns and head injuries that will require rehabilitation in order to prevent permanent disability. Others face a significant risk of becoming permanently disabled due to secondary complications such as infected wounds, contractures or secondary amputations. Handicap International warns that, "Early rehabilitation, along with specific prevention information, mobility devices, and basic health care such as appropriate and timely wound dressings, is essential to prevent most of these complications. Post-injury rehabilitation is critical in order to prevent these war-wounded persons from becoming disabled."

Altogether, over 120 foreign doctors are believed to have entered Gaza since 27 December to provide assistance. The Director of Hospital Services in Gaza has stated that no more medical personnel are needed at the present time

WATER AND SANITATION / ELECTRICITY

Since 18 January, CMWU and GEDCO technical teams are working to assess and repair damage to the electricity, water and wastewater networks.

An initial assessment in northern Gaza has revealed that at least 22 local transformers were damaged in North Gaza, as were six kilometers of copper cable coming from Israel. The Gaza Power Plant is still only partially functioning due to local damage in power lines and the shortage of industrial fuel.

FUEL

On 17 January, UNRWA delivered 58,500 litres of diesel to municipalities for solid waste disposal and 3,200 litres to UNRWA health centres throughout Gaza. On 18 January, UNRWA transported a generator to Nahal Oz to allow pumps to resume operations and delivered 90,000 litres of industrial fuel to the power plant.

Cooking gas was last allowed into the Gaza Strip on 8 January, while diesel last entered the territory on 7 January.

FOOD

While access to shops has improved in most areas due to the partial withdrawal of Israeli troops, the Gaza population continues to face difficulties accessing food due to the shortage of food items on the market, the increase in prices and the lack of banknotes. On 18 January, UNRWA distributed food parcels to 2,272 families. Since 27 December, WFP has succeeded in reaching 143,880 regular beneficiaries, or 54.2 percent of its regular caseload, with 1,680 Mt of food (52 percent in Khan Yunis, 43 percent in Gaza and 5 percent in the Middle Area).

ACCESS WITHIN THE GAZA STRIP

On 18 January, Israeli presence at Netzarim was withdrawn, clearing the coastal road and allowing regular movement between the northern and southern parts of Gaza.

CROSSINGS

The Kerem Shalom, Rafah and Karni crossings were open on 19 January.

On 18 January, 97.5 truckloads, including 69.5 for aid agencies, entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom. Nearly 70,000 litres of industrial fuel also crossed into Gaza through Kerem Shalom. 90,000 litres of fuel were pumped into the Gaza filling point of the Nahal Oz pipeline. Thirty-eight truckloads were transferred into Gaza through the Karni conveyor belt. At Rafah crossing, eleven truckloads of medical supplies, 23 doctors and eleven ambulances were allowed entry to Gaza, while 28 medical cases were evacuated out of Gaza.

FUNDING

For the list of immediate funding needs, visit:

http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_crisis_cap_funding_2009_english.pdf

PRIORITY NEEDS

Opening of crossings: The number of trucks allowed into the Gaza Strip needs to be increased, including those for the private sector. Additional crossings must be opened urgently, including Karni for the provision of bulk grain and Sufa for construction materials. Basic construction materials need to be allowed into the Gaza Strip to allow repair of public infrastructure and of private homes.

Cash/liquidity: Cash has still not entered the Gaza Strip and is urgently needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid. A system must be established that ensures the regular and predictable monthly transfer of the necessary cash. Without a functioning bank system in Gaza, recovery efforts will be vastly undermined.

Supply of fuel: Nahal Oz crossing must remain open as it is the only crossing which can facilitate the transfer of sufficient amounts of fuel to restart and maintain operations of the power plant, and restock other types of fuel needed in the Strip.

Operational security for humanitarian agencies working in Gaza: Although open conflict has subsided, explosive remnants of war is limiting access of humanitarian workers in certain areas. Security is key to ensure efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance to the population.