



Statement by Mr. Max Gaylard, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator  
for the occupied Palestinian Territory

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Yesterday witnessed the most intense fighting to date in the Gaza Strip, with Israeli ground forces advancing deeper into densely populated areas, particularly Gaza City with an estimated population of 500,000 people. Intense Israeli shelling hit the main UNRWA compound in Gaza City and three hospitals - Al Wafa, Al Fata, and Al Quds. Two ambulances were also hit by Israeli fire. The Al-Quds hospital was surrounded by Israeli forces and the administrative and pharmacy buildings of the hospital were shelled and badly damaged. Fires broke out and all of the patients and staff were evacuated. The patients were later transferred to Shifa hospital.

This is not the first time that Gazan health facilities have been attacked and damaged. Sixteen health facilities have been damaged and sixteen ambulances have been damaged or destroyed since the start of the Israeli military operation on 27 December 2008 and 13 health workers have been killed and 22 have been injured. Medical relief workers face extremely dangerous conditions when trying to reach injured Palestinians in combat zones or areas made inaccessible by the Israeli army. Densely populated Palestinian areas have been turned into combat zones, causing significant risk to the civilian population, including hospitals, medical facilities and emergency relief workers.

The dangers posed by Israeli bombardment and fighting between the Israeli army and Palestinian militants compound the already difficult situation of the Gaza health system. Hospitals are already overwhelmed due to the volume of injured Palestinians and the severity of their wounds. There is limited space in Intensive Care Units, shortages of staff, medicines, equipment, power and clean water.

The situation for hospitals, medical workers and the injured in Gaza is alarming and deteriorating. Hospitals must be protected and remain neutral areas under any circumstances. Civilians and the injured must have access to medical care.

Violations of international humanitarian law by one party to a conflict offer no justification for non-compliance by other parties. Allegations of violations must be fully investigated and those responsible held to account.