



## FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

9 January 2009, 1700 hours

The Israeli military operation has entered its fourteenth day. Israeli air, sea and ground forces continue to surround Gaza's populated areas and the Gaza and North Gaza Governorates remain isolated from the rest of the territory. The humanitarian crisis continues with serious concerns regarding the protection of civilians, especially children.

UNRWA has "put into effect a temporary suspension of staff movement throughout the Gaza Strip", a decision "compelled by incidents in which UNRWA staff, convoys and installations have come under attack". The ICRC stated that it will not be conducting relief convoys outside Gaza City on 9 January. The UN Security Council Resolution 1860, approved on 8 January, calls for the 'unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment'.

### PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Hostilities continued overnight and throughout 9 January. The Israeli military are present in the northern area, eastern border area and Rafah border area. The MoH reported fatalities on 9 January include two families killed in Beit Lahiya and Deir el Balah camp. On 8 January, an Israeli tank shell struck a house in a cooperative housing project for doctors in the Zeitoun area in Gaza City, killing a Ukrainian woman married to a Palestinian doctor and their child, the first reported foreign casualties at this point.

MoH figures as of 17.00 hours 9 January are 800 dead and at least 3,300 injured since 27 December. The danger to medical staff and the difficulty of extracting the injured from collapsed buildings makes proper evacuation and estimation of casualties difficult.

Three IDF soldiers were killed on 8 January, bringing to nine the number of Israeli armed forces fatalities to date. Palestinian militants continued to fire rockets and mortar shells into Israel.

Israeli authorities have stated that a cease-fire will be maintained daily but confirmed on a daily basis. On 9 January, the cease-fire took place between 1300 and 1600 hours.

### SHELTER

A large number of people continue to flee their homes for safe haven. As of the evening of 8 January, UNRWA was operating 27 shelters in Gaza, with more than 21,200 displaced people, up from several hundred last week. These shelters are UNRWA school buildings and other structures and have no special protection. No non-food items (NFIs) have been brought into Gaza this week as UNRWA has received approval to send only food and medicines. Supplies of NFIs in shelters remain insufficient to meet demand. The Palestinian Authority has launched a "Palestinian National Campaign for the Relief of Gaza". As part of this campaign, Palestinians in the West Bank have been asked to donate at least one day's salary for the purchase of humanitarian goods for Gaza.

According to the Rafah municipality, at least 600 houses (home to at least 800 families) are empty at night, with inhabitants leaving to UNRWA emergency shelters or houses of family members or friends. Some people return during the day, but are too frightened to stay at night.

### ELECTRICITY / TELECOMMUNICATIONS

As of today, all lines, except one northwest of Beit Lahiya, have been repaired following coordination with the Israeli authorities and are now operational. However, due to localized damage, and the Gaza Power Plant not functioning, considerable areas of the Gaza Strip remain without electricity. The Gaza Power Plant will not operate until the double-feeder line west of Netzarim is repaired: it was partially repaired yesterday. This evening, GEDCO plan to test the network in order to identify the areas which are now receiving electricity.

During the cease-fire on 7 January, Paltel managed to refuel back-up generators for its main land-line switches and main mobile phone masts; fuel will last 6-7 days and 3-4 days respectively. Problems with mobile phones remain due to damage and lack of necessary spare parts: only 35 out of 185 towers are functioning normally. Currently, 80-90% of the mobile service network is down, in addition to a huge number of fixed lines which are out of order, either due to direct damage or because of the loss of electricity. Furthermore, only one fiberoptic cable located in Khan Yunis connecting Gaza to the outside world is functioning. Damage to this cable would sever both connections with the outside world and internal telecommunication services, impairing humanitarian and medical emergency efforts.

## **Health**

The security situation continues to prevent medical staff from reaching hospitals and clinics; and WHO warns that the health care system is close to collapse due to overstretched ICUs, medical staff having to work extremely long hours (some for 24-hour shifts) under difficult circumstances, and lack of electricity and fuel. Only urgent surgery is being carried out in hospitals and all out-patient clinics are closed, except for those dealing with urgent cases.

There are concerns that chronically ill patients depending on regular treatment at hospitals in and outside the Gaza Strip are currently unable to access care such as cancer treatment or dialysis for kidney patients. Shifa Hospital is the only hospital in the Gaza Strip with specialized treatment for kidney patients. Kidney patients in the Middle Area and southern Gaza now face serious risks of blood poisoning as they cannot reach Shifa Hospital.

WHO reports 34 out of 56 primary health care centers open, but with a ninety percent reduction in visits.

## **WATER AND SANITATION**

Many water wells and sewage pumps are still not functioning due to lack of electricity, diminished fuel supplies to operate back-up generators and lack of spare parts. Due to the danger of movement and lack of fuel, solid waste is piling up in the streets of Gaza. Of particular concern is the solid waste at hospitals, posing added unnecessary health risks in an already precarious situation.

## **FOOD**

The World Food Programme reports continued shortages of chicken, fish, frozen meat, fruit and vegetables, bread and milk throughout the Gaza Strip.

Since 27 December, WFP has reached more than 60,000 beneficiaries, which represents less than a quarter of their regular caseload. 6,000 patients in hospitals are receiving an emergency food ration.

## **CASH**

The Palestinian Monetary Authority has requested approval from Israel for a cash transfer of NIS 243 million and \$16 million from Palestinian banks in the West Bank to their branches in Gaza. The money will be used to pay the 77,000 Palestinian Authority civil servants in Gaza as well as the 94,000 UNRWA special hardship case beneficiaries, UNRWA "cash for work" programme beneficiaries, and payments for UNRWA staff and suppliers. The sum includes also the European PEGASE payments for social welfare families.

## **ACCESS**

Access between northern Gaza and the rest of Gaza remains possible only at the coastal road west of the former Israeli settlement of Netzarim and is restricted to humanitarian aid (including ambulances) following coordination with the Israeli authorities.

## CROSSINGS

The Kerem Shalom crossing was open on 9 January. The Nahal Oz fuel pipeline, Erez and Karni crossings remained closed. No UN goods entered Gaza on 9 January.

On 8 January, a total of 89 truckloads including 40 for aid agencies were allowed entry to Gaza through Kerem Shalom. 223 dual-national Palestinians left Gaza via Erez.

Expected on 9 January: 40 truckloads (Kerem Shalom).

## PRIORITY NEEDS

*Protection of civilians:* Civilians, notably children who form 56 percent of Gaza's population, are bearing the brunt of the violence. As one of the most densely populated places in the world, it is clear that many more civilians will be killed if the conflict continues. Israel must respect the norms of International Humanitarian Law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality.

*Access for ambulance and rescue teams:* An unknown number of dead, injured and trapped people remain in houses which have been shelled and in areas where there are ongoing hostilities. Due to attacks on ambulances, medical staff are fearful of reaching these places.

*Electricity* is necessary for the operation of services within the Gaza Strip notably health, water and sanitation services. What is needed includes repairing damaged electricity lines, bringing in needed transformers, and allowing fixing of other transformers. Back-up generators are not meant to function more than 8 hours per day, and are not reliable following repeated and prolonged use.

*Supply of fuel:* Industrial fuel is needed to power the Gaza Power Plant, which has been shut down since 30 December. 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. However, due to the security situation, delivery of fuel to its intended destination is proving difficult.

*Wheat grain* is essential to provide flour for local bakeries and humanitarian food distribution to the population of Gaza. The Karni crossing conveyor belt is the only mechanism which can facilitate the import of the amount of grain required in the Strip at this time.