



## DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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### Bulletin on action by the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine

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on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) on the Internet at:*  
<http://unispal.un.org>

## **I. UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES LAUNCH \$613 MILLION FLASH APPEAL FOR GAZA**

*In response to the humanitarian emergency in Gaza, several United Nations Agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization launched on 2 February 2009 the Gaza Flash Appeal. The Appeal was based on assessments undertaken by humanitarian organizations two weeks earlier and supported by a rapid field assessment requested by the Secretary-General. It delineates projects to meet immediate humanitarian needs for nine months. The summary of the Appeal is reproduced below:*

Between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, citing continued rocket fire from the Gaza Strip and the end of a six-month Egyptian-brokered calm between Israel and Hamas and other Palestinian groups, Israeli forces launched a massive combined military operation in the Gaza Strip which it named "Cast Lead".

### **Extent of the casualties and destruction**

Twenty-two days of bombardment by land, sea and air, as well as ground incursions into Gaza by Israeli troops have resulted in:

- Until 28 January 2009, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, 1,336 Palestinians dead, including an estimated 430 children and 110 women; 5,450 Palestinians injured, including 1,870 children and 800 women. .
- With every other person in Gaza a child – 56 per cent of the population is under 18 – children were dangerously exposed to the fighting around them.
- Extensive damage to homes and public infrastructure throughout the Gaza

Strip, with Gaza City the worst hit. An estimated 21,000 residences have been completely destroyed or badly damaged. Nearly 51,000 people displaced in shelters.

- Damage and destruction to United Nations facilities, including schools that served as shelters and an aid warehouse, despite their locations having been transmitted to the Israeli authorities in advance.
- Extensive destruction to commercial enterprises and to public infrastructure: According to Palestinian industrialists, 219 factories were destroyed or severely damaged during the Israeli military operation. Much of the 3 per cent of industrial capacity that was still operating after the 18-month Israeli blockade has now been destroyed.
- According to Israeli sources Israelis were killed by Palestinian launched rockets. Ten Israeli soldiers were killed in the fighting during the operation. The number of wounded Israelis during the operation stood at 518 persons, the majority of whom were soldiers (336).

Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire on 17 January, which was put into effect on 18 January, followed by Hamas and other Palestinian factions later the same day. This ended the fighting, although several attacks have occurred resulting in at least one Israeli and five Palestinian killed and several rockets have been launched. On 21 January, the IDF withdrew from Gaza, and is now deployed along its border. Basic relief assistance is entering Gaza but is constrained by Israeli restrictions on the amount and type of aid.

### **The Blockade June 2007**

The Israeli military operation severely compounded what the United Nations had described as an 18 month long “human dignity crisis” in the Gaza Strip. This had been caused by the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, imposed following the June 2007 Hamas takeover of the Palestinian Authority institutions in Gaza. The blockade resulted in a large-scale systematic deterioration of livelihoods and a significant debilitation of infrastructure and basic services. These restrictions were further tightened following the Government of Israel’s designation of Gaza as a ‘hostile entity’ in October 2007. Days before the ‘Cast Lead’ operation, the blockade had all but depleted many stocks of humanitarian supplies and UN humanitarian assistance programmes faced severe difficulties in delivering relief.

### **Urgent Needs**

The Israeli military operation and the ensuing violence has left most of the population of 1.4 million people unable to exercise many of their most basic rights or have access to services amidst collapsing

infrastructure and severe shortages of power, water, shelter, food and medical services. An estimated 80 per cent of the population was already aid-dependent prior to 27 December 2008, and this figure is expected to have increased.

### **Shelter**

A joint rapid needs assessment by the UN and NGOs between 22 and 25 January found that in 48 of 61 localities where results have been gathered, about 22.6 per cent of housing units were damaged or destroyed. Of those damaged, 16.7 per cent reported light to moderate damage, 3.2 per cent reported severe damage, and 2.6 per cent reported that the homes had been destroyed. The assessment of the 48 localities found that more than 66,000 people had not yet returned to their homes and were staying with relatives or other hosts. Host families are reported to be overstretched and facing shortages of food, non-food items (mattresses, blankets) and water and electricity. Repairs to damaged houses are urgently needed to allow people to return to their own homes.

### **Health**

Rehabilitation is needed for damaged health facilities from primary to tertiary care. Issues regarding disabilities are likely to become an additional public health concern. Estimates are that as many as half of the 5,380 men, women and children injured over the past three weeks of conflict may suffer life-long impairment. According to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 40 per cent of interventions at Shifa hospital during the war required amputation; injuries often included multiple traumas with head injuries, thorax and abdominal wounds.

Repair of medical equipment remains a priority, as does the import of spare parts for medical equipment.

Rehabilitating the injured: At least US\$ 31.5 million will be needed during the first year to rehabilitate the injured and provide income support to families who have lost breadwinners, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).

## **Food**

There is a reported 20 per cent increase in food insecurity from 56 per cent to more than 75 per cent of the entire population of the Gaza Strip. The households most at risk of being food insecure are those with high unemployment rates, with many young family members, and which are more than 50 per cent female.

## **Education**

Seven schools in northern Gaza were completely destroyed and approximately 157 primary schools were partially damaged.

## **Water and sanitation**

Many of the water and sanitation systems were damaged, raising the urgency to import spare parts and machinery to carry out repairs.

## **Humanitarian Response Strategy**

On 22 January, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, at the request of the Secretary General, initiated a rapid field assessment. The 'Gaza Flash Appeal' has been compiled by humanitarian agencies based on needs

assessments undertaken in the last two weeks. Access to Gaza has remained difficult despite the recent truce and information was gathered by local staff in Gaza in close liaison with partners based in Jerusalem and Ramallah.

The 'Gaza Flash Appeal' contains projects to meet immediate humanitarian needs for nine months. The goal is to provide critical support to re-establish basic services of a reasonable standard and to prevent irreparable loss of livelihoods.

In this regard, the UN and partners will initially focus on restoring basic social services, such as water, health and education, providing emergency psychosocial support, cash injections, restoring a minimum capacity to produce fresh/nutritious foods and supporting emergency repairs of critical infrastructure. Even as assessments are ongoing, work has been initiated to conduct essential repairs to shelters, water and sanitation, health facilities, etc. The immediate import of construction materials, agricultural inputs, and spare parts are vital in this regard.

The appeal will also include projects addressing safety of movement (marking and clearing unexploded ordnance), removing rubble, repairing priority infrastructure to the extent possible, and securing access to services. Finally, it will include a component to support the building of a protective environment in which the full respect for the individual, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law.

Following the 'Gaza Flash Appeal' an assessment of early recovery needs for a 24-month period will be completed by the

Palestinian Authority with support from UN agencies and partners. This plan will be built on the initial humanitarian response that will ensure the reliable continuity of services and provide a basis for future development.

### **Essential conditions for successful implementation of the emergency assistance phase**

1. Ensured sustained provision of basic commodities including wheat grain in bulk, food aid, fuel (including for the power plant) and cooking gas, medical supplies.
2. Uninterrupted and predictable movement of humanitarian staff (including United Nations, Red Cross and Crescent and NGOs) into and out of the Gaza Strip.
3. Shielding the emergency relief operation from political interests and attempts to control the implementation and delivery of assistance.
4. An expanded list of goods to be imported including equipment, spare parts and construction materials and also, commercial goods and cash to allow for the private sector to function and reduce Gazan dependency on aid.

According to the Palestine Trade Centre (Paltrade), Gaza requires an estimated minimum of 850 truckloads of market-triggered imports per day to start any sort of economical revival, far above actual amounts.

### **Humanitarian Access into Gaza**

Since the ceasefire on 18 January, an average of 75.5 truckloads per day have crossed through Kerem Shalom representing a 7 per cent increase from the period during

the military operation. Only on two days did the number of truckloads exceed 120. As of 28 January, approximately 30 international staff working with NGOs were in Gaza, along with approximately 22 international staff working with the UN. Currently, there are outstanding requests to enter Gaza for over 200 people and this number is growing by the day. Since the ceasefire, many staff of international NGOs have been denied entry into Gaza. Between 5 November 2008 and 18 January, no staff of international NGOs were allowed to enter Gaza, except for a number of medical emergency staff.

### **Funding Mechanisms**

This Flash Appeal is for US\$ 613 million. It builds upon, and supersedes, the Initial Response Plan and Immediate Funding Needs document of 15 January, which requested \$117 million in urgent humanitarian funding. It includes those portions of the Initial Response Plan which are still relevant, and can be carried forward, as well as new and revised projects, all of which will be counted in the 2009 Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for the occupied Palestinian territory. As with the Initial Response Plan, agencies have been encouraged to adapt and revise their existing project proposals in the 2009 CAP as much as possible.

The Flash Appeal is \$613 million, comprising the revised Gaza component of the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2009 CAP, of which approximately \$209 million is made up of new projects, \$270 million highlighted existing CAP projects, and \$134 million budget increases of those existing highlighted projects, bringing the total Occupied Palestinian Territory CAP 2009 to approximately \$876 million.

## **II. UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN EXPRESSES DEEP CONCERN ABOUT WOMEN AND CHILDREN CASUALTIES OF GAZA WAR**

*The following statement by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was issued on 6 February 2009 in Geneva.*

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is deeply concerned about the recent military engagement in Gaza between Israel and Hamas (January 2009), which has resulted in heavy civilian casualties and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza including the killing and injuring of a large number of women and children.

The Committee calls on the parties to the conflict to fully implement the current ceasefire and to comply with resolution 1860 (2009) of the Security Council.

The Committee recalls that international human rights and humanitarian law apply in all circumstances and at all times and to all parties involved – and that the right to life should be respected even in the course of hostilities. The Committee notes with deep concern that the human rights of women and children in Gaza, in particular to peace and security, free movement, livelihood and health, have been seriously violated during this military engagement.

Recalling the preamble to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination against Women, which reaffirms that “the cause of peace requires the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields”, the Committee urges the parties to the conflict to involve women in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000) of the Security Council in the decision-making process on the promotion and maintenance of peace and security at all levels.

It further calls on all State parties to support international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza and more especially to facilitate the provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance including food and medical treatment, especially to women and children.

In light of its earlier practice concerning consideration of States parties (Decision 18/III) and communications (Rule 60 of the Committee’s Rules of procedure), the Committee decided that the expert from the State party concerned should not take part in the decision-making on the statement.



### **III. SECRETARY-GENERAL DEMANDS IMMEDIATE RETURN OF HUMANITARIAN GOODS SEIZED BY HAMAS**

*The following statement was issued on 6 February 2009 by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (SG/SM/12089, PAL/2111):*

The Secretary-General demands that Hamas immediately release the UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] consignment of humanitarian goods it seized last night, in the second such incident this week, and to refrain from interference with the provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance in Gaza. UNRWA has suspended the import of humanitarian goods into Gaza until the aid is returned and guarantees of no future such occurrences are provided.

The Secretary-General reiterates the Security Council's call, in its resolution 1860 (2009), for the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical treatment. All parties must refrain from interfering with, or hampering the provision and distribution of, urgently needed humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Gaza.

### **IV. UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND ASSESSES IMMEDIATE PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF GAZA WOMEN**

*In the aftermath of the Israeli attacks on Gaza, the United Nations Population Fund commissioned the Gaza-based Culture and Free Thought Association to carry out a quick survey to assess the situation of women in Gaza and to gauge urgent priority as well as medium and long term issues they might be confronted with. Excerpts of the executive summary, which was issued on 8 February 2009, are reproduced below:*

#### **(1) Women's psychological difficulties during the war**

The war affected the entire Gaza population, men, women, and children, and resulted in immediate psychological problems such as fear, anxiety, panic attacks, feeling of insecurity, sleeping and eating disturbances, depression and sadness, and expecting death any minute.

#### **(2) Fear**

All women who were interviewed experienced extreme feelings of fear and still feel this fear even after the declaration

of a truce and end to hostilities. Women feared more for the lives of their loved ones such as husband, children, family, etc. more than they fear for their own lives. This is attributed to the social structure which makes women think that the others are the real reason for their existence, and that their lives have no value without their families.

Women ranked fears for their own lives only second. They expected to die any minute be it through gun fire or, indirectly, through lack of access to health services especially those women with pre-existing conditions. I.e. one cancer patient feared she could not buy drugs during the crisis.

Women also feared what they thought would be even worse than death, to become disabled and, thus, dependent on others in their daily lives. This, they feared, could be used as an excuse for their husbands to leave them. A young man also expressed his preference to die fast rather than dying the “slow death” of a disabled person.

For everybody, night time was the worst due to electricity cuts and the intensive military operations.

### **(3) Feelings of insecurity and inability to protect others**

Women, just like men and children, lost all sense of security and protection. No place was safe, be it inside the house or outside. The random bombing of houses and the utilization of phosphoric bombs further exacerbated the feeling of insecurity.

As such, women felt helpless and embarrassed for not being able to provide protection for their children; a role they believe is one of their main responsibilities. The feeling of inability to play that role of caregiver contributed to the psychological suffering of women, especially married ones. One woman reported the reversal of roles whereby her 9-year-old son kept reassuring her that everything will be fine when he saw her crying.

### **(4) Nervousness and overreaction**

Women became very nervous when dealing with their children, screamed at their little children with or without reason and sometimes beat them.

## **(8) Reproductive health services**

Interruptions of facility-based medical care services ranged from partial to complete. Clinics were not able to function properly and some were forced to shut down. But even where clinics managed to offer services, women were often unable to actually reach them, especially in the “hot spots”.

Most of the women who made it to the clinics despite ongoing hostilities did not actually come for their own personal medical needs, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, but rather to bring their children.

After the war, the number of women seeking medical care at the clinics increased to three times the normal rate, with women seeking medical care for joint pains, headaches, burns, breathing problems, etc.

### **(9) Pregnant women**

Pregnant women were particularly affected, facing difficulties related to their medical situation, such as pre-term deliveries, continuous feelings of pain, miscarriage, deliveries in unhealthy environments, etc.

Pregnant women who were close to their due-dates were very worried about not being able to reach a hospital once they would go into labour, and some women were forced to give birth at home due to the fact that ambulances were unable to reach certain areas. One woman reported that she taught her daughter who was in her third pregnancy trimester how to cut the umbilical cord in case she would not be able to reach a clinic.

## **(10) Women's needs for Social and Psychological support**

### Immediate:

Humanitarian aid such as shelter, food, water, clothes.

Social and psychological support in order to enable women to deal with their children, and to maintain their health during war and times of crisis.

Recreational and entertaining activities.

### Medium/long-term

Income generation programmes especially for those who lost their breadwinners, through launching job creation projects for women.

Medical centres providing health and reproduction health care.

### Preparedness/Contingency Planning

Safe shelter during war.

Medical awareness and first aid instructions to help women deal with certain injuries during war.

### **Recommendations**

Launching short, medium, and long term programmes to ensure suitable and efficient interventions that meet women's needs need to focus on:

### Immediate

1. Provision of social and psychological support for women, using different methods such as relaxation exercises, painting, writing, handcrafts, talking sessions and support groups. Also, arranging home visits to women to provide support either individually or by forming support groups in their neighbourhoods.

2. Social and psychological support for women and their entire families.

### Medium-Term

3. Diagnostic and healing programmes.

4. Developmental programmes aiming at empowering women, including awareness, educational, training programmes to provide women with life and administrative skills to face future difficulties.

5. Job creation programmes for graduate women, and semi-skilled women.

6. Create and/or strengthen coordination and networking between service-provider organizations in order to avoid duplications and overlapping of the provided services.

7. Maintain gender balance in every intervention programme.

8. Provide suitable professional training for the teams which will be implementing all intervention programmes.

## **V. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT VISITS GAZA, ISRAEL**

*Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy conducted a field visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel from 2 to 6 February 2009 to ascertain the situation of children. At a press conference at United Nations Headquarters on 9 February 2009, she briefed the press on the humanitarian situation there. Joining the press conference via video link, John Ging, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza described the situation on the ground. Following is the text of the press release:*

Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Secretary-General's Special representative for Children and Armed Conflict, reiterated the call for Israel to open its border crossings with Gaza and to expand the list of items to be allowed in – especially regarding school supplies – saying that around 400 trucks per day would be needed to meet humanitarian needs arising from the recent conflict, and over 1,000 trucks would eventually be needed once reconstruction began.

According to Ms. Coomaraswamy, who briefed correspondents at a Headquarters press conference on her recent visit to the region, fewer than 200 trucks were permitted to enter Gaza on a typical day, and some items useful to children, such as paper, needed to produce school books, had not been allowed in.

“We need to rebuild schools,” she added, saying that on her tour of the Occupied Palestinian Territory she had seen several schools “flattened”, including the American International School, known widely to be a place of secular learning. Already, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had established a board of inquiry to investigate the circumstances around damages sustained to school operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Ms. Coomaraswamy's four-day visit to the region had provided a chance to assess the situation faced by children during the conflict in Gaza and the southern Israeli town of Ashkelon, where she had spoken to both Palestinian and Israeli authorities, as well as children on both sides. She noted a great need for psychosocial support among children, especially those that had witnessed violence at close range, sometimes against their own parents and siblings. She had also sensed a building demand for accountability on the part of aggressors.

“There is so much anger and despair, especially in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in Ashkelon, that there is absolute demand for some kind of an accounting process”, which might take the form of an “independent investigation”, she said. Youth in the West Bank were so consumed by anger over the latest conflagration that her planned talk on Gandhi and non-violence had not gone over very well, suggesting the need for a legal process to channel such volatile emotions.

Commenting on her visit to Ashkelon in southern Israel, which, she observed, was “well mobilized” to deal with crises, she voiced hope that Israeli authorities would build on their capacity to tackle “rule of law issues” by conducting an investigation of their own. She also remarked on the virtue of being cautious when under fire, saying:

“There is a duty of precaution under international law to be absolutely cautious, so that even when there is fire coming, there would be a second investigation to be absolutely certain about what is going on”.

With regard to Hamas, she called upon the group to halt the indiscriminate firing of rockets and to respect the integrity of international aid, referring to the two incidents last week where Hamas personnel had stolen humanitarian supplies belonging to UNRWA. In response to the theft, the Agency had stopped distributing aid to Gazans.

Joining the press conference via videolink, John Ging, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, told correspondents the Agency was ready to resume today the distribution of aid, after Hamas had returned the food and blankets taken from the Agency’s storehouse, along with all items taken from 10 aid trucks at the Kerem Shalom crossing two days later. He added, however, that, because the border was expected to be closed on Tuesday, the day of the Israeli elections, the transfer of supplies would most likely begin again on Wednesday.

Responding to the suggestion by one correspondent that UNRWA, by its harsh treatment of Hamas, was seeking to “mute” the calls by the United States Congress for an independent audit, Mr. Ging emphasized that the Agency was already subject to the United Nations audit rules. Still, he added, it was “hardly credible” that UNRWA would jeopardize its aid efforts to 1 million refugees for the purpose of an audit.

Meanwhile, Israel’s restrictive border policy was forcing the Agency to buy plastic bags at the local market in order to distribute

its food packets because it had run out of its own, Mr. Ging said. In terms of food aid, of the estimated 900,000 people queuing for food, only 30,000 could be served before supplies ran out.

Israel’s policy was also obstructing the teaching of human rights in UNRWA schools, he said, since related textbooks could not be printed because paper was not allowed in. The new human rights curriculum had been developed jointly by UNRWA, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Red Cross, and was being taught, for the first time, as a subject in its own right at UNRWA schools. “We want these kids to come up with a civilized outlook, with a mindset that is oriented towards peace and tolerance. And we’re being obstructed,” said Mr. Ging.

Lending support to Ms. Coomaraswamy’s suggestion of an independent investigation of events of the recent conflict, Mr. Ging said that UNRWA was conducting its own probe, which he hoped could feed into a wider enquiry. However, more than 50 installations had been damaged during the conflict, and UNRWA’s small legal office must conduct witness interviews, which he acknowledged would take time.

Throughout the briefing, both Mr. Ging and Ms. Coomaraswamy expressed concern at the emotional toll wrought by the recent conflict on Palestinian and Israeli children alike. Mr. Ging said each UNRWA school had a counsellor on staff, and that 50 more were being hired to join the 200 already working for the Agency to handle children’s psychological problems. The Agency was also planning to ramp up its recreation programme, which so far had not

been given the resources he believed it deserved. “We’re reprioritizing all of our efforts and energy into children,” he said.

Sharing her impressions of life in the region from an emotional perspective, Ms. Coomaraswamy noted that the areas where Palestinians lived, particularly the Gaza Strip, was densely packed. The area’s crowded environment could also contribute to a sense of being trapped, which was made worse because it was difficult to get out. At the same time, in Ashkelon, frequent in-school security drills were making Israeli children petrified to go to school.

She intended to submit a detailed report of her visit, and would brief the Security Council on the findings. On the list of the Security Council’s “six grave violations against children in conflict” was the denial of humanitarian access, she stressed, saying that the current blockade on Gaza fell into that category of violations. Responding to a query on whether children were taking up arms, she acknowledged some anecdotal reports on the subject, but said the United Nations had found no evidence that that was happening.

## **VI. UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION TO HELP RESTORE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, JOURNALIST SAFETY IN GAZA**

*In a press release dated 10 February 2009, the Director-General of UNESCO confirmed that 6 UNESCO projects had been included in the Gaza flash appeal that was launched on 2 February 2009. The text of the press release is reproduced below:*

The Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura has confirmed that six UNESCO projects – five focusing on education, one on the safety of journalists and freedom of expression – have been included in the United Nations Gaza Flash Appeal launched in Geneva on 2 February by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes.

The UNESCO projects, totalling approximately three million U.S. dollars, were selected following a UNESCO assessment mission to Gaza on 1 and 2 February 2009, headed by the UNESCO Chief of the Office for the Palestinian Territories, Louise Haxthausen, together with UNESCO education and culture programme specialists.

During the mission to Gaza, UNESCO donated 16 protective vests, helmets and press signs to Palestinian media professionals to increase their safety and protection.

The Director-General told representatives of UNESCO member states, late last week that the five educational projects “aim to help restore quality educational services at all levels, in particular in secondary and higher education, which are too often neglected in the humanitarian response.”

Reports show that seven schools in northern Gaza were completely destroyed during the fighting and that more than 150 primary schools were damaged. All schools in the territory were closed between

27 December and 24 January, causing over half a million learners from pre-school to university to miss classes.

All of Gaza's 14 public and private universities are also reported to have been affected and the main building of the Islamic University was completely destroyed. The laboratories and libraries of several other universities have been destroyed and several learning institutions are affected by the death of students and teachers.

A sixth UNESCO project focuses on strengthening the safety and protection of journalists and enhancing press freedom in the Gaza Strip. It aims to increase the access to information through capacity-building, the provision of protective equipment and the establishment of a professional support network. Increased awareness about the rights of the media, reporting and monitoring on the violations against press freedom, and psychosocial support and hotline for media professionals are expected to mitigate the deterioration of press freedom and of access to information in the Gaza Strip.

"In the present context of a humanitarian emergency, UNESCO's priority concern is to assess, plan and deliver as 'one' in close cooperation with other UN agencies, funds and programmes, as well as with other non-governmental humanitarian actors on the ground," said the Director-General. "But clearly, there are major needs for long-term reconstruction that must be addressed as well," he added.

In his presentation, Mr. Matsuura noted that UNESCO's rapid assessment mission to Gaza had taken place within the framework of the overall UN-led assessment effort. Its purpose was to contribute to UN

efforts and provide data related to the state of the education system and cultural heritage sites in Gaza.

"Based on this assessment mission, UNESCO will refine its projects included in the UN Flash Appeal and start assisting the Palestinian Authority in drafting the Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan," Mr. Matsuura explained. This plan, focused on needs and priorities for long-term reconstruction, will be launched during an international donor conference in Cairo, Egypt, on 2 March 2009.

During the meeting, the Director-General announced his decision to scale up UNESCO's response capacity in Gaza and to establish a project antenna within the United Nations Development Programme compound in Gaza City for the duration of the implementation of the projects identified. He also informed member States that the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) had agreed to the rapid deployment of an education specialist to the UNESCO Office in Ramallah. Finally, Mr. Matsuura announced the immediate release of a total of US\$ 165,000 to commence operations in the affected areas.

"I very much hope member States and donors will respond positively to this urgent demand for financial support so that we can help the people of Gaza at this time of great distress. Despite the political and operational constraints, this support will be crucial so that we can respond, in our fields of competence, to emergency and early recovery needs", concluded the Director-General.

**VII. SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSES THE OPENING OF THE  
2009 SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE  
EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS  
OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

*The following is the text of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks delivered on 11 February 2009 at the opening of the 2009 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in New York (SG/SM/12097-GA/PAL/1112):*

I congratulate you and your colleagues in the Bureau on your unanimous re-election to the leadership of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I would also like to express my appreciation for the Committee members' unfaltering commitment to the very important mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

This year began with the rapid escalation and conflict in Gaza, which has caused tremendous suffering and hardship. We all know the tragic results. At least 1,300 Palestinians lost their lives and some 5,300 were injured. Fourteen Israelis were killed and more than 530 were injured.

The heavy bombardment and fighting in the densely populated areas of Gaza reduced homes, schools, hospitals and marketplaces to rubble. Hundreds of thousands of civilians, including children, have suffered deep psychological trauma. Many Gazans are now dislocated, having lost family members and homes. Some 90 per cent of Gaza's population now require food aid.

The civilian populations in both Gaza and southern Israel bore the brunt of the fighting, destruction and suffering. People who had already endured much hardship for many years have been subjected to even greater misery. They now face an uncertain future with anxiety and despair.

Despite the unilateral ceasefires announced by both sides, the situation remains fragile, and there has been further violence. Efforts are under way, under Egyptian leadership, to transform the unilateral ceasefires into a durable and fully respected ceasefire, as called for in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

As you know, I visited the Gaza Strip on 20 January to demonstrate my solidarity with the people of Gaza. I also wanted to inspect the extent of destruction and visit personally with the men and women of UNRWA, United Nations agencies and other aid organizations. They worked heroically and steadfastly under perilous conditions, and I commend their resilience and devotion.

What I saw left me shocked, but more determined than ever not only to address Gaza's humanitarian and reconstruction needs, but also to achieve the end of the occupation that began in 1967, the establishment of a Palestinian State, to coexist alongside Israel in peace and security, and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israel and all its Arab neighbours.

During and after my visit to Gaza, I made clear that attacks such as the repeated shelling and destruction of United Nations facilities were unacceptable. I protested such attacks in the strongest possible terms



and demanded a thorough investigation into every single one of them. I expect to receive a full explanation of each incident, and that those responsible will be held accountable for their actions. I am initiating a United Nations Board of Inquiry into the casualties and damage at UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] and UNSCO [Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East] facilities in the Gaza Strip. I have also raised with the Security Council the issue of an inquiry into the broader question of the conduct of the parties to this conflict during the hostilities.

The United Nations has launched a flash appeal for humanitarian assistance. Home to some 1.5 million Palestinians, more than half of whom are children, Gaza needs to be brought back to a level of normality. There must be unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance, as called for by Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Children should be able to go back to school without fear. Homes and buildings need to be repaired or rebuilt so that displaced families can return.

The international community will discuss the challenges of humanitarian assistance, early recovery and reconstruction at a meeting in Cairo early next month,

which will feed into the work of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. The United Nations is working very closely with Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, as well as key partners, Egypt and other Arab countries, the European Commission, the World Bank, Norway as Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, Turkey and the members of the Quartet.

Another critical challenge is the re-opening of all Gaza crossings in order to allow full access for humanitarian goods, and eventually commercial traffic, based on the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

In addition, Palestinians need to achieve reconciliation under the leadership of President [Mahmoud] Abbas, within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. The peace process must be revitalized and negotiations should resume leading to a lasting settlement of the conflict, based on relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

I renew my pledge to do all I can to ensure that this goal is achieved. The international community must also do its part. This is now more urgent than ever.

## **VIII. GAZA BOARD OF INQUIRY BEGINS WORK**

*The following statement was issued on 12 February 2009 by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (SG/SM/12099):*

The Secretary-General wishes to announce that the United Nations Board of Inquiry into incidents in Gaza has commenced its work in New York today, and is expected to travel soon to the region.

The Board is led by Ian Martin (United Kingdom) and includes, as its other members, Larry Johnson (United States), Sinha Basnayake (Sri Lanka) and Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Eichenberger (Switzerland).

The Board of Inquiry will review and investigate a number of specific incidents that occurred in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 19 January 2009 and in which death or injuries occurred at, and/or damage was done to, United Nations premises or in the course of United Nations operations. The Secretary-General expects

that the Board will enjoy the full cooperation of all parties concerned.

The Board of Inquiry will report to the Secretary-General upon completion of its investigation. The Secretary-General will review the report, and decide at that point what further steps to take.

## **IX. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION ASSESSES HEALTH NEEDS IN THE GAZA STRIP**

*The World Health Organization on 16 February 2009 issued a report that assessed the health needs of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in light of the urgent humanitarian crisis. The following is the executive summary of the report:*

The Gaza Strip has been the setting for a protracted political and socio-economic crisis. Recent events have resulted in a severe deterioration of the already precarious living conditions of the people in Gaza and have further eroded a weakened health system.

During the last Israeli military strike between 27 December and 18 January:

- 1,380 Palestinians were killed, of whom 431 were children and 112 women. At least 5,380 people were injured, including 1,872 children and 800 women. Among the casualties, 16 health staff were killed and 25 injured while on duty. Injuries were often multiple traumas with head injuries, thorax and abdominal wounds. Israeli fatalities were 14, and 183 were injured.

- Vital infrastructure has been compromised or destroyed, resulting in a lack of shelter and energy sources, deterioration of water and sanitation services, food insecurity and overcrowding.

An estimated 100 000 people were newly displaced; 49 693 of them were residing in 50 shelters organized by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the remaining being sheltered with host families. Fifteen hospitals and 41 primary health care (PHC) clinics in the Strip were damaged during the strike. Twenty-nine ambulances were damaged or destroyed. 21 out of 56 Ministry of Health and 3 out of 17 UNRWA PHC centres were closed during part or all of the period of the crisis.

- Access to health care was severely restricted and hampered by security constraints. Maternal and child health services at the PHC level were disrupted. Despite the critical conditions, maternity assistance for normal deliveries was provided as well as specialized health care for obstetric and neonatal complications, though many times in improvised settings within health facilities where maternity wards and operating theatres were transformed into trauma units. The consequences are unclear in terms of

maternal and child morbidity and mortality among the 3,500 deliveries that were expected to have taken place during the 23 days of military operations. Findings from a recent United Nations Population Fund assessment indicate that, during that period, there was an increased number of miscarriage cases in the surveyed hospitals (Shifa, Al Aqsa, Naser, Rafah) and an increase in neonatal mortality in Shifa Hospital, in Gaza City.

- Specific concerns exist for the chronically sick. It is estimated that, during the military operation, 40 per cent of the chronically ill interrupted their treatment. These concerns were exacerbated by the virtual halt of referrals of ordinary patients outside Gaza, as life-threatening injuries had a higher priority in an overwhelmed system. Elective surgery and non-urgent routine medical interventions were delayed or interrupted during the crisis. This indicates that a growing number of patients, mainly with chronic conditions, are awaiting treatment.

The state of Gaza's health services was already precarious before the military strike. The strict closure of the Gaza Strip since mid-2007 resulted in intermittent shortages of fuel, electricity and water and led to reduced services at PHC and hospital level. Materials needed for rehabilitating and building health facilities were prevented from entering Gaza. Gaza's internal political turmoil and extensive health worker strikes added to the reduced health service delivery and public health programmes capacity.

The quality of health care has been further affected by deterioration in the functionality of medical equipment due to the lack of maintenance and spare parts, as well as by shortages of drugs and medical supplies and restricted training opportunities for medical staff that were already at poor levels pre-crisis. Routine operations were affected and many elective interventions suspended. Consequently, the need for referrals outside of Gaza grew, restricted by delays and denials of passage.

## **X. UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL**

*On 18 February 2009, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority Robert H. Serry, briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The following are excerpts from the briefing (S/PV.6084).*

The Council is meeting at a difficult but also formative moment for the future of the Middle East. A number of realities have to be squarely addressed if peace is to be advanced: the severe humanitarian, economic and political repercussions of the Gaza crisis; continued Palestinian divisions;

a new political situation in Israel; the inconclusive results of last year's Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; unmet Road Map obligations, especially regarding settlements; and the freeze in indirect Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

The challenges are daunting, but peace can prevail – and it must. In the year ahead, the international community will need to be united and determined, and it must intensify its efforts. In this regard, the Secretary-General takes heart from the active engagement of the Security Council, including through resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). The Secretary-General also welcomes the clear statements of intent and early engagement of President Obama and his new Administration, including the appointment and deployment of Special Envoy Mitchell. The United Nations and its Members, including those gathered in the Quartet, have political responsibilities that need to be shouldered.

But Israelis and Palestinians need to shoulder their responsibilities too. Palestinians must face the challenge of reconciliation. We note the resumption of direct Fatah-Hamas contacts in recent weeks and look forward to the planned meeting of all Palestinian factions in Cairo on 22 February. We urge them to find common ground in Cairo so that the many outstanding issues can be tackled and unity achieved, leading to a united Government and paving the way for the conduct of presidential and legislative elections. We urge all regional and international parties to create an environment conducive to the success of Egypt's efforts. As the Quartet agreed in December, restoring unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) principles would be an important factor in progress towards the fulfilment of the Quartet's principles – more so in the context of a durable Gaza ceasefire. As the Secretary-General informed the Council last month, the United Nations will work with a united Palestinian Government encompassing Gaza and the West Bank under President Abbas.

On the Israeli side, the challenge ahead is the formation of a new Government after elections on 10 February produced a result with no clear winner. Following consultations with party leaders, President Peres is expected to commission one of them to try to form a coalition Government, a process which could take several weeks. Prime Minister Olmert will continue to lead the Government until a new coalition is formed. Any Israeli Government should abide by Israel's commitments, including to implement its Road Map obligations and to pursue continuous final status negotiations on all core issues without exception, as was reaffirmed by the parties before the Quartet in Sharm el-Sheikh last November.

Even as we await the outcome of these internal processes, an immediate priority is to address the situation in Gaza, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009). Egypt is conducting talks with Israel and Hamas aimed at achieving a durable and sustainable ceasefire. I visited Cairo on 3 February and reiterated the Secretary-General's support for these efforts, as backed by the League of Arab States. We still await progress in the efforts under way.

It is clear from the experience of last year's *tahdiya* that a ceasefire regime will only be durable if there is broader progress, including an exchange of Palestinian prisoners for the release of Israeli captive Gilad Shalit, continued cooperation and action to prevent resupply of weapons to Gaza, the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, and Palestinian unity – steps which would also pave the way for the longer-term recovery and reconstruction of Gaza. A coordinated international response to concrete progress on these issues would be crucial, in sharing information regarding implementation and

in assisting in crisis prevention and management, in support of Egypt's efforts.

I emphasize these points because, one month since unilateral ceasefires were declared, a proper ceasefire regime is still not in place, and there is an ever-present danger of a return to the unsustainable conditions of last year, or even of renewed and more devastating violence. Since the end of major hostilities, in attacks that are as irresponsible as they are unacceptable, Palestinian militants have fired 15 rockets and 12 mortars towards Israel and detonated an explosive device against an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) jeep on the Israeli side of the fence. The Israeli army has conducted 19 air strikes in Gaza. One Israeli soldier was killed by Palestinians and another three soldiers and two civilians have been injured. Six Palestinians, including one child, were killed by the Israeli army, and another 30 Palestinians, including 8 children, were injured. There is an urgent need for all acts of violence to cease, and for full respect of international humanitarian law by all parties. I should also add that there have been reports of a number of worrisome incidents of Hamas in Gaza purportedly taking revenge on alleged collaborators, which has led to the death of at least one activist from a rival movement.

In the month since major hostilities ceased, a daily average of some 146 truckloads have entered Gaza. That is four times what entered Gaza in December 2008 but only a third of what entered in May 2007. The Gaza Strip remains desperately short of basic household, commercial and industrial goods and supplies, as more than 90 per cent of all imports during the reporting period were food and medical supplies. Only 52 per cent of needed industrial fuel and 23 per cent of the

necessary quantity of cooking gas entered the Strip during the reporting period. The total ban on the import of petrol and diesel, in place since 2 November 2008, has continued, except for small quantities delivered to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Twelve trucks carrying bulk paper to print UNRWA teaching materials have not been able to enter Gaza, leaving 60 per cent of children in UNRWA schools without required textbooks. There have been no exports for 13 months, save for one solitary truck, with flowers for export to Europe, which left Gaza last week after third-party intervention.

...

The United Nations is in constant dialogue with the Government of Israel with regard to humanitarian conditions and access into Gaza, in pursuance of the approach outlined by Under-Secretary-General Holmes in his recent briefing to the Council. While we appreciate Israel's stated readiness to address humanitarian needs, we have not yet seen truly open crossings for required access, which is so crucial given the extent of the needs in Gaza. Meeting the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza is Israel's obligation under international law.

The United Nations continues to take concrete steps to ensure the integrity of its humanitarian operations in Gaza. On 6 February, UNRWA suspended operations after Hamas confiscated food aid and blankets. Following the return of the confiscated goods, distribution resumed on 9 February. We call upon Hamas not to interfere in the operations of the United Nations.

The United Nations mine action team on the ground is working to render unexploded ordnance safe and has made significant progress in ensuring the safety of the civilian population and enabling humanitarian operations to provide much-needed aid. The removal by unknown persons to an unknown location of several unexploded aircraft bombs from a local police traffic compound underscores the need to identify a secure site to which unexploded ordnance can be transported and secured. The United Nations is seeking the return of those hazardous materials.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority is preparing a Gaza early recovery and reconstruction plan, which is to be presented at the conference to be held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March, which the Secretary-General looks forward to attending. The Palestinian Authority's plan will constitute the basis for donor pledges. Ahead of the presentation of the plan, we welcome the initiatives of Prime Minister Fayyad to provide immediate assistance to the civilian population in Gaza, with United Nations assistance. Those include \$50 million in cash transfers for temporary shelter, \$11 million and \$6 million for electricity and water pipeline repairs and a \$600 million housing loan guarantee scheme to supplement cash assistance.

The Board of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General into incidents in Gaza has commenced its work in New York and is expected to travel soon to the region. The Board will review and investigate a number of specific incidents that occurred in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009 in which death or injuries occurred or damage was done to United Nations premises. The Secretary-General expects that the board will enjoy the full cooperation of all parties concerned.

The situation in Gaza must not distract us from the overall political process or the challenges on the ground in the West Bank. It is a testament to the efforts of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad that relative calm and security were maintained in the West Bank during the Gaza crisis. That has preserved the important law-and-order gains made in 2008 for the well-being of the Palestinian people. In fulfilment of their road map obligations, Palestinian security forces have resumed actions to disarm militants. We note that a commission of inquiry has been established with regard to the death under unclear circumstances of a Hamas member in Palestinian Authority custody.

There is a continuing need for donors to deliver quickly on pledges, as the Government is still obliged to meet regular monthly budgetary commitments through interim measures. The amounts anticipated for Gaza's recovery and reconstruction are, of course, in addition to the Palestinian Authority's existing salary, pension and other social safety net commitments.

On the ground, Israel has eased certain closure measures, although curfews were imposed on 17 January on Nablus and Qalqiliya. Over 150 Palestinians have been arrested by the IDF and there have been three fatalities, including one child, and 96 injuries, including 22 children, from IDF actions

Illegal settlement activity continues, prejudicing final status negotiations and undermining Palestinians who seek a negotiated peace. According to one monitoring group, there was a 69 per cent increase in the number of new structures built in settlements in 2008 over the previous year. Planning to seize over 1,700 dunums of Palestinian land for the

expansion of the settlement of Efrat has been reported. On 2 February, the Israeli Government submitted a proposal in the High Court to evacuate the settlement outpost of Migron, built on privately owned Palestinian land, by relocating 45 settler families to permanent structures in another settlement, Givat Binyamin. Meanwhile, there have been a number of Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians, including a shooting attack on 12 February that injured seven Palestinians, five of them children, as well as continued incidents of settlers attempting to force Palestinians off their land by blocking access, placing trailers or clearing for cultivation.

Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order. The barrier continues to be constructed within occupied Palestinian territory in deviation from the Green Line and contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

As the Council is aware, I and my colleagues report the same basic points regarding settlements in every briefing. The approach taken since Annapolis to ensure the implementation of Road Map commitments to freeze settlement activity, including natural growth, and remove outposts has not worked. That is a clear challenge that must be addressed. In that context, in the aftermath of the Gaza crisis and the continuing political uncertainties,

official communication between the Israeli and Palestinian Governments is limited. The bilateral negotiation process on the core issues, on which so much effort was expended during 2008, is for now effectively on hold.

...

The Secretary-General believes that a comprehensive regional approach to peace, as embodied in the Arab Peace Initiative and the resolutions of the Security Council, is required if bilateral efforts are to bear fruit. He looks forward to a collaborative finalization of plans for an international conference in Moscow.

The Secretary-General intends to actively engage his regional and international partners, including in the Quartet, on the way ahead. We look forward to an active and systematic international effort at conflict resolution – one which combines the weight, resources and legitimacy of the Quartet's members and partners and ensures that a process that has been described as irreversible is just that. The Secretary-General remains firmly committed to doing everything he can to achieve an end to occupation and an end to conflict, resulting in two States living side by side in peace, within secure and recognized borders, and comprehensive peace in the region, in accordance with the Security Council resolutions.

## **XI. SECRETARY-GENERAL WELCOMES \$40 MILLION QATARI CONTRIBUTION TO MEET GAZA EMERGENCY NEEDS**

*The following statement was issued on 23 February 2009 by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: (SG/SM/12110, PAL/2112):*

The Secretary-General is honoured to accept the generous sum of \$40 million as a contribution from the Emir of Qatar to United Nations humanitarian agencies for programmes to meet the emergency needs of civilians in Gaza.

The Secretary-General is particularly grateful to Qatar for allocating \$10 million from the pledge to go to the United Nations

Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). CERF provides fast, reliable, equitable and targeted humanitarian assistance to emergencies around the world.

The contribution is especially welcome, as it comes at a time when global humanitarian needs are expected to grow in the light of the interconnected challenges of the food crisis, the global financial crisis, climate change and intensifying armed conflicts.

## **XII. UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS ON PALESTINIAN PREGNANT WOMEN GIVING BIRTH AT ISRAELI CHECKPOINTS**

*In its resolution 2005/7 of 14 April 2005, the Commission on Human Rights requested the High Commissioner to report on “the issue of Palestinian pregnant women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints owing to denial of access by Israel to hospitals”. The following are excerpts of the 2008-2009 update report (A/HRC/10/35):*

...

7. The United Nations does not maintain a systematic monitoring and reporting mechanism on the issue of Palestinian women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints. UNRWA Gaza and West Bank Field Offices reported that they do not monitor the issue. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs noted that births at checkpoints are not an indicator that it monitors or records systematically. Nevertheless, in its reply, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs mentioned that it reports on births at checkpoints on an ad hoc basis when a casualty results from the incident (i.e., injury or death) in its Protection of Civilians Weekly Reports. In this regard, the Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs pointed out that these reports are not comprehensive as its field staff may not be receiving information on every incident.

...

9. Impediments to accessing health-care services due to movement restrictions were highlighted in the information provided by WHO. From 25 to 29 July 2008, alongside several military operations, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) severely restricted Palestinian movement throughout the Hebron Governorate in the southern West Bank. Restrictions included the closure of two major junctions, Al Fawwar and Al Fahs, for an average of four hours a day. The closure of Al Fawwar junction blocked



the only access point for some 150,000 people to Hebron City, while the closure of Al Fahs prevented commercial trucks from entering the industrial zone in Hebron/H2 from accessing Road 60.

10. On 27 July 2008, the IDF closed the Beit Kahil Bridge with an earth mound for one day, effectively cutting off the population of Beit Kahil, Tarqumiya and Idhna (with a combined population of 60,000) from Hebron City. Consequently, a 24-year-old woman from Tarqumiya was forced to give birth in a car while waiting for an ambulance to transport her to a hospital.

11. In the same location, a similar incident occurred on 28 August 2008. A WHO mental-health team witnessed and reported that, due to an earth mound, the IDF closed the only accessible road to the community centre. A woman had to deliver in her husband's car since they could not pass the obstacle to reach the hospital on time due to the closure of the road.

12. Another incident involved a 21-year-old woman, married with one child, resident of Qusra in the Nablus District. On 4 September 2008, seven months pregnant, she started to bleed severely. At close to 1 a.m., she and her husband left for the nearest hospital in Nablus, but Israeli soldiers did not permit them to pass through the Huwara checkpoint because they did not have the requisite permit to cross by car. As a result, she delivered at the checkpoint a stillborn baby.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3/</sup> Naheel 'Awni 'Abd a-Rahim Abu Rideh gave her testimony to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem; see [www.btselem.org/english/testimonies/20080904\\_Nahil\\_Ridah\\_Ridah\\_forced\\_to\\_give\\_birth\\_at\\_checkpoint.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/testimonies/20080904_Nahil_Ridah_Ridah_forced_to_give_birth_at_checkpoint.asp).

13. In January 2009, a 25-year-old pregnant woman from Al A'sawiya (Jerusalem) was delayed by soldiers at Zayem checkpoint, which controls access to East Jerusalem through the Barrier. The woman, who held a Jerusalem ID and was travelling in a car with Israeli plates, informed the soldiers upon arrival that she was in labour. According to the woman, she was delayed for two hours, during which her waters broke. After being allowed through, she delivered in the car while en route to the hospital, where she was rushed into the emergency room.

14. Movement restrictions impact on the lives of Palestinian women not only during childbirth, but also during prenatal and post-natal care. In that regard, the situation of the villages of Azzun Atmeh in the Qalqiliya District and Barta' Al Sharqiya in the Jenin District has been highlighted by WHO. In Azzun Atmeh, a village completely surrounded by the Wall whose only access is through a gate guarded by the IDF, the main obstacles impeding access to quality health care and affecting the regular provision of health services is the presence of the Wall and the search procedures that the residents, including patients, are subject to upon entering and leaving the village. Accessing secondary health-care services, especially while the gate is closed, means an added risk of the deterioration of health status in urgent cases and pregnant women. The risk of unattended delivery is also compounded by the fact that no midwife is available in Azzun Atmeh.

15. Barta' Al Sharqiya is a totally enclosed enclave in the Jenin District in the West Bank, where entry and exit to other districts in the West Bank are accessible through two gates. Accessing secondary health-care services, especially after the gates are closed (from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.) is a

complicated process. This can pose a life-threatening risk for patients who need urgent lifesaving treatment. Special coordination with the Israeli soldiers at the gates is required for ambulances and patients entering or exiting Barta' Al Sharqiya. This often results in delays in transporting patients and potentially leads to health complications. Moreover, no drugs or vaccinations are allowed into the village without prior coordination with the Israeli soldiers. UNRWA used to provide mobile clinic services but has been facing problems in entering the village due to Israeli search procedures at the entrance gate.

16. According to the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, an estimated 2,500 births per year face difficulties en route to a delivery facility. Many Palestinian women have developed various higher-risk coping mechanisms in reaction to movement restrictions and for fear of being unable to cross Israeli checkpoints in a timely manner to reach health-care services. Consequently, birth location patterns have been affected drastically. The trend is reported to occur even if it results in a lower standard of health care (e.g., births attended at home or

in doctors' clinics). The risks presented by checkpoints, road closures and other obstacles are reported to have led to an increase of 8.2 per cent in home deliveries, further compounding the risk to women's health and to their babies. The Palestinian Ministry of Health has assessed the proportion of deliveries outside health facilities as high as 13.2 per cent.

17. To conclude, the critical impact of the closure regime (e.g., the Wall, checkpoints, road closures, earth mounds, etc.) on Palestinian women's access to adequate prenatal, natal and post-natal medical care remains a matter of serious concern, impairing the fulfilment of the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. It should also be noted that Israeli policies on closure may, in certain instances, amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment under article 16 of the Convention against Torture. Finally it is reiterated that the issue of pregnant Palestinian women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints must be understood within the context of the broader regime of the Israeli occupation and associated restrictions on movement, impacting as they do on all aspects of life in the occupied territories.