

## GAZA SITUATION REPORT 149

23 June 2016



14 June - 21 June 2016 | Issue 149

• The Under this year's theme, [Will You Stand #WithRefugees](#), 20 June marks World Refugee Day, commemorating the strength, courage, and resilience of millions of refugees around the world. Today, there are approximately five million [Palestine refugees](#), or 40 per cent of those in the world's protracted refugee situation; 1.3 million of them live in Gaza, a 365-square-kilometre-enclave living under a blockade which entered its tenth year in June 2016. Electricity and fuel shortages, food insecurity, extreme water pollution, repeated armed violence and an ongoing political paralysis are the daily reality. To ask people and governments from around the world to stand with refugees, on 20 June the [UN Refugee Agency](#) launched its petition [We Stand #WithRefugees 2016](#). UNRWA Gaza reiterates this call to ask governments to ensure that refugees have access to education and healthcare, a safe place to live, development of their skills and the chance to positively contribute to their communities. "I wish one day the world leaders will stand by us, the refugees; not only in Gaza, but everywhere, and help us settle down and have a decent life. We are tired, it's enough," is the message from 75-year old Jamila Hashisho who lives in Beach camp, in Gaza city.

• The blockade on air, land and sea on Gaza entered its tenth year in June 2016; together with recurrent cycles of conflict and armed violence, it has a profound socio-economic and psychosocial impact on the lives of the people in Gaza. While in 2005, before the blockade, Gaza was able to export 9,319 truckloads of goods (e.g. textiles, furniture, vegetables), this number fell to 113 in 2015, as the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) reports. The blockade has created high unemployment and aid dependency rates: over 80 per cent of the people of Gaza depend on humanitarian assistance, and unemployment in 2015 stood at an average of 41 per cent and for youth at 61 per cent, according to PCBS. UNRWA works to address these issues through its regular operations. For example, whilst in 2001 the Agency injected US\$ 7.9 million into its Job-Creation Programme and created short-term employment opportunities for 10,913 beneficiaries in Gaza, this number rose to US\$ 27.1 million in 2015, involving 32,000 Palestine refugees. In total in 2015, the Agency created over 29,000 jobs, reducing unemployment by 6.2 per cent. In 2015, the blockade created US\$ 8.6 million extra costs for UNRWA. To learn more about the blockade on Gaza and the UNRWA response, please consult the attached fact sheets.

• On 14 June, the European Union (EU) Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Mr. Johannes Hahn, and delegation, visited the Gaza Strip. Accompanied by the UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General, Ms. Sandra Mitchell, the Commissioner was briefed by the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Bo Schack on the Agency's operations in the enclave; due to the EU's interest in business and trade, the European delegation also met with the head of UNRWA's microfinance programme in Gaza as well as a small business owner who is supported by the Agency. The delegation also visited the small scale desalination plant project organized by the [UN Children's Rights and Emergency Relief Organization \(UNICEF\)](#). On 21 June, UNRWA also received the Head of Mission of the Danish Representative Office in the occupied Palestinian territory, Mr. Anders Tang Friberg. He was briefed by the UNRWA Director of Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, and visited an UNRWA project.

• On 21 June UNRWA in Gaza for the second time this year commenced distributing clothes to vulnerable children who have lost their fathers during the 2014 conflict. The distribution will last for three days and is organized through UNRWA-supported Community-Based Rehabilitation Centres, Women Programme Centres, and UNRWA Relief and Social Services area offices across Gaza. In total, 1,000 children will benefit from this distribution, and every child will receive a package of summer clothes, including trousers, a t-shirt and a jacket. Overall, UNRWA supports approximately 8,000 vulnerable children who lost their fathers through various activities, including psycho-social support, legal consultation for the mothers, educational assistance through private education centres, and material support such as stationery and clothes.

• As a result of long-term unemployment in Gaza, 37 per cent of Gaza's youth (age 15-29) report their desire to emigrate abroad as opposed to only 15 per cent in 2010, according to a [Youth Survey](#) conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). The main reasons are of economic nature: 43 per cent state poor living conditions as main factor, 19 per cent unemployment, and 20 per cent want to seek a better job abroad. The largest group of youth who desire to emigrate are those with higher education (42 per cent). The compounded effects of the blockade have also had a less visible, but profound, palpable psychological impact on the people of Gaza. Over years, the population showed resilience in the face of repeated conflicts, destruction, loss and declining socio-economic conditions; yet the UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme (CHMP) reports that Palestine refugees in Gaza are experiencing increasingly higher levels of stress and distress. Media reports of suicide cases across Gaza, once unheard of, are becoming a more regular occurrence, suggesting that the coping capacity of Palestinians is being eroded. The UNRWA QMHP maintains a network of 250 psychosocial counsellors in UNRWA schools as well as 23 counsellors and 5 legal advisors at health centres to address the psycho-social impact of blockade and conflicts, particularly among UNRWA students.

• In its efforts to address the impact of the frustrating socio-economic conditions in Gaza on Palestine refugees, particularly related to high unemployment, UNRWA sustains a variety of job-related interventions such as its Job Creation Programme, technical and vocational trainings for youths, or construction activities. In 2015, the Agency expended US\$ 93.4 million across contracted construction projects and self-help shelter assistance, generating a total of 6,844 full-time job-equivalents (FTEs) in the construction sector over one year. This is a 35 per cent rise compared to 2014, mostly related to the Agency's large-scale shelter self-help repair programme following the 2014 conflict, but also due to its infrastructure construction activities. UNRWA estimates that these FTEs contributed to reduce overall unemployment in 2015 by 1.5 percentage points. In May, the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) finished the construction of a school in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza, as well as a school in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. Further, it issued payments for 201 refugee families to repair their damaged shelters, for 108 families to reconstruct their totally destroyed homes and for almost 8,000 families who are still displaced to receive transitional shelter cash assistance. UNRWA is currently also implementing 13 construction projects under its Emergency Preparedness activities, including the construction of battery rooms, solar systems, and shower units, in UNRWA schools across Gaza.

• The salary crisis in the public sector in Gaza continues and is one of the main sources for regular protests and demonstrations. In May, as in previous months, only 40 per cent of

salaries were reportedly paid. Employees of the de-facto government have not received full salaries since October 2014, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Overall, according to the [2015 Socio-Economic and Food Insecurity report](#), it is estimated that 35 per cent of Gaza households faced a regular delay in the payment of their salaries (public or private), while another 26 per cent faced a loss of salary. Given the fragile and dire socio-economic conditions in the Gaza Strip – including extreme poverty, food insecurity and high unemployment, delay or loss of salary have a profound impact on the lives of families. In general, the Gaza workforce is characterized by high labour informality and precariousness, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS); in quarter one of 2016 as much as 69 per cent of private sector workers had no contract. This is accompanied by increasing part time/seasonal positions, 16.7 months average duration of employment, and more than 75 per cent of employees in the private sector receiving less than the minimum wage.

• The UNRWA Commissioner General, Mr. Plerre Krähenbühl [visited Brussels from 13 to 16 June](#) in the framework of the long-standing partnership between the EU and UNRWA and to discuss the EU's yearly contributions to the Agency's services. During his visit, the EU and UNRWA agreed to renew their joint declaration for the period from 2017 to 2020. The decision to renew the agreement comes at a time when UNRWA faces unprecedented operational challenges – 60 per cent of Palestine refugees are living in zones of armed conflict or occupation and face increasing levels of poverty, isolation and despair – and serious financial pressure to meet the growing needs of the refugee population. During his visit, Mr. Krähenbühl engaged with several European Union stakeholders, including, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini and Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides. He also briefed the European Parliament Foreign Affairs and Development committees on the situation of the approximately 5 million Palestine refugees in the Agency's five fields of operation (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza).

## THE UNRWA SHELTER UPDATE



### This Week

UNRWA was able to disburse over US\$ 4 million in funding available for the first instalment for reconstruction. The funds will reach a total of 330 families across Gaza this week. *A comprehensive shelter update will be issued in the next weekly situation report.*

## BLOCKADE ON GAZA



In June 2016, the blockade on Gaza entered its tenth year. The United Nations has repeatedly highlighted the illegality of the blockade as a form of collective punishment under international law and called for the lifting of the blockade, which continues to hamper freedom of movement of persons and goods. The blockade, in addition to recurrent armed violence and conflict, today remains the principle causes of the socio-economic and psychosocial crisis in Gaza. The restrictions on movement of people and goods continue to collectively punish the civilian population, affecting every aspect of life in Gaza, undermining the local economy and threatening the enjoyment of most human rights, in clear violation of Israel's legal obligations under international law. In addition, since restrictions have been imposed by the Egyptian authorities from June 2013 onwards, also the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt remains closed except for a few days per year.

## GENERAL

**Operational environment:** During the reporting week demonstrations took place regarding internal Palestinian divisions, coinciding with the ninth anniversary of the division between Hamas and Fatah. Protests also took place towards UNRWA, mostly to demand the payment of rental subsidies.

On 14 June, a dispute took place between two families in Jabalia, northern Gaza; they reportedly used edged weapons and seven injuries were reported, including one person with serious injuries. The police made several arrests.

On 16 June, a Palestinian working with an international organization in Gaza was reportedly arrested by Israeli forces at Erez crossing when crossing back into Gaza.

On 18 June, an Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) reportedly exploded accidentally when a Palestinian was handling it in an open area in Shujaiya, east of Gaza city. The person reportedly sustained shrapnel wounds.

On 19 June, an abandoned building which was reportedly targeted during the 2014 conflict collapsed in Shujaiya, east of Gaza city; no injuries were reported.

On 19 June, a 40-year old Palestinian male reportedly committed suicide by throwing himself off a third floor building in Khan Younis camp, in southern Gaza.

On 20 June, a fire reportedly broke out inside a store in Shujaiya area, eastern Gaza city, due to an electricity malfunction. Local authorities reportedly brought the situation under control; no injuries were reported.

## UNRWA'S RESPONSE

**Gaza Palestine refugee football team: talent and hope**



Members of the Gaza refugee football team during a training session at a local playground in Maghazi, central Gaza. Photo credit: © UNRWA 2015. Photo by Mohammed Hinnawi.

With determination and persistence, a group of Palestine refugee teenage boys and their UNRWA trainers are running loops on a local playground in Maghazi, central Gaza, under the blazing, almost burning, sun. Their goal: representing Gaza's refugee children at the upcoming [Norway football cup](#), an international football tournament taking place from 26 July to 1 August 2016 in Oslo.

Abdallah Jaber is one of the 13 UNRWA students and team members who will travel to Oslo; since September 2015, he and his fellow team members have devotedly trained three times per week, not even stopping during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, during which drinking water is not permitted between sunrise and sunset.

"There are no words to describe how excited I am to participate in the Norway cup. Gaza has been living under a blockade for many years, and most people are not allowed to leave Gaza; this is a unique chance for us to go out and see other places, and talk to children from other countries," Abdallah said.

Every day, he says, he is dreaming and imagining what places outside of Gaza look like. Soon, he will be able to see it with his own eyes. He wishes, though, that the blockade would be lifted so it could be easier for his family to travel with him to Oslo and watch him play there.

"I want the whole world to see how talented we are here in Gaza, and maybe someone will see us play and adopt the most talented players to play in a famous sports team in the future," Abdallah dreams. "It will be a difficult competition, but we trained hard, and we can do it!" added his friend, Bilal Abas.

The tournament in Norway takes place every year; and the Gaza team has been a steady participant since 2010 with the exception of 2014 due to the devastating summer conflict.

Over 1,660 club sports teams from all over the world are participating in the competition in Norway; on average 450 matches are taking place every day on over 66 different fields.

The Gaza refugee football team is a strong competitor. Last year - as well as in 2012 - the team won the competition and came back with a prize.

Through participation in the Norway cup, UNRWA also aims to enhance refugee children's sports skills and team spirit, providing them with a safe space for recreational activities and opportunities to fill their free time and create new friendships.

#### SUMMARY OF MAJOR INCIDENTS

During the reporting week, Israeli forces reportedly fired towards Palestinian areas along the perimeter fence and towards Palestinian boats on a daily basis. On 15 June, ten fishermen were reportedly arrested in one such incident. No injuries or damage were reported.

On 14 June, an Israeli Armed Forces aircraft reportedly fired one missile at a target in Bureij, central Gaza. No injuries were reported.

On 15 June, four Israeli bulldozers reportedly entered approximately 70 metres east of Rafah, in southern Gaza, reportedly to conduct a clearing and excavation operation. They reportedly withdrew on the same day.

On 20 June, a 13-year old Palestinian female was reportedly seriously injured in Rafah, southern Gaza, due to a stray bullet reportedly fired from the Egyptian side.

#### FUNDING NEEDS

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall, projected for 2016 to stand at US\$ 74 million. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

Following the 2014 conflict, US\$ 247 million has been pledged in support of UNRWA's emergency shelter programme, for which an estimated US\$ 720 million is required. This leaves a current shortfall of US\$ 473 million. UNRWA urgently appeals to donors to generously contribute to its emergency shelter programme to provide displaced Palestine refugees in Gaza with rental subsidies or cash assistance to undertake repair works and reconstruction of their damaged homes.

As presented in UNRWA's occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Emergency Appeal for 2016, the Agency is seeking US\$ 403 million to meet the minimum humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees in the oPt. The Agency requires US\$ 355.95 million for programme interventions in Gaza, including US\$ 109.7 million for emergency food assistance, US\$ 142.3 million for emergency shelter assistance, US\$ 60.4 million for emergency cash-for-work assistance, US\$ 4.4 million for emergency health/mobile health clinics and US\$ 3.1 for education in emergencies. More information can be found [here](#).

#### CROSSINGS

Longstanding restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza have undermined the living conditions of 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza. [Israel prevents all access to and from the Gaza Strip by sea and air](#). [Movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza](#) is restricted to three crossings: Rafah crossing, Erez crossing and Kerem Shalom crossing.

Rafah crossing is controlled by the Egyptian authorities and technically allows for the movement of a number of authorized travelers, Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases only. Erez crossing is controlled by Israeli authorities and technically allows for the movement of aid workers and limited numbers of authorized travelers, including Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases. Kerem Shalom crossing, also controlled by Israeli authorities, technically allows for the movement of authorized goods only.

- Rafah crossing remained closed during the reporting week.

- Erez crossing is usually open six days a week. This week it was open for National ID holders (humanitarian cases, medical cases, merchants and UN staff) and international staff from 14 to 16 June and from 19 to 21 June. On 17 June it was open for pedestrians only. It was closed on 18 June.

- Kerem Shalom crossing is the only official crossing open for the transfer of goods into and out of the Strip and is usually open five days a week. It was open from 14 to 16 June and 19 to 21 June. It was closed on 17 and 18 June.

<http://www.unrwa.org/newroom/emergency-reports/gaza-situation-report-149>