
URGENT FUNDING REQUIRED TO ADDRESS UNPRECEDENTED DESTRUCTION IN THE GAZA STRIP

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18 December 2014**Gaza**

More than twice as many refugee family homes in Gaza were damaged or destroyed during this summer's conflict than had initially been estimated, according to the technical assessment just completed by UNRWA. "Based on satellite imagery and preliminary field work conducted immediately after the conflict we estimated about 42,000 refugee family shelters had been affected by the war, we now know that over 96,000 homes were damaged or destroyed, more than double what we expected to find" said Robert Turner, Director of Operations for UNRWA in Gaza.

Damage is spread throughout the Gaza Strip with the largest concentrations in the areas along the Eastern boundary, areas physically occupied by Israeli forces during the fifty-day conflict. The assessment process itself involved almost 700 social workers and engineers working in virtually every neighbourhood in Gaza to compile the data.

Over 7,000 refugee homes were completely destroyed, affecting some 10,000 families. An additional 89,000 homes suffered damage, about 10,000 of them major damage (more than US\$ 5,000). "These numbers are huge and represent both a major challenge to the Agency as it works to provide transitional shelter and repair and reconstruction support, and clear physical evidence of the ferocity and wide-spread nature of the conflict" added Mr. Turner. "You can see from the map of damage, now here was safe."

UNRWA has estimated total funding required to provide rental subsidies to families with no alternative shelter, reconstruction of destroyed homes and repair for those with damage will cost some US\$ 720 million. To date, some US\$ 100 million has been pledged, leaving a gap of US\$ 620 million. According to Robert Turner "the main concern right now is not only the scale of the requirement but the pace at which we will be able to address the needs. Unless the situation changes urgently, we will run out of funds in January, meaning we will not be able to provide rental subsidies to many affected families nor provide the support required to carry out repairs. The impact of UNRWA ceasing payments to affected families would be dramatic: Tens of thousands of refugee families will find themselves with inadequate shelter and no support during the hardest months of winter, this is not a situation we – nor the refugees – wanted to find ourselves in."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA's services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency's General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA's core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 56 million.

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