

Humanitarian Bulletin

occupied Palestinian territory



Overview

The precarious living conditions in Gaza increase the danger of a new escalation of hostilities - UN Secretary General

Between 7 July and 26 August 2014, the Gaza Strip experienced the deadliest and most devastating round of hostilities since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967. Two years on, most people and institutions are still struggling to cope with their immense losses. The seven weeks of conflict worsened an already poor humanitarian situation driven by the years-long Israeli blockade and aggravated by the internal Palestinian divide, both of which still remain in place today.

This Humanitarian Bulletin highlights some of the challenges faced by the health system in Gaza; in addition to the enormous regular caseload, approximately 900 people injured during the 2014 war require care for some form of permanent disability, and facilities that were destroyed or damaged are awaiting full rehabilitation. In the Shifa hospital alone, there are currently more than 3,800 patients waiting for surgery, some scheduled for as far in advance as 2018, generating frustration, unnecessary pain and risks associated with delayed care.

Another issue of concern in the Gaza Strip is the lack of adequate sanitation infrastructure, which, compounded by the severe electricity shortage, has resulted in the daily discharge of around 90 million litres of untreated or partially treated sewage into the sea. The contamination of seawater poses a serious health risk, particularly for those using beaches for recreation or consuming seafood obtained from the areas most affected. The precarious infrastructure also generates a constant threat of sewage flooding in areas adjacent to reservoirs and pumping stations, as occurred last May.

During his visit to Gaza on 28 June, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, reiterated

his call to Israel to lift the blockade and to the Palestinian leadership to end the internal political divide. While addressing the fragile humanitarian situation he emphasized that "[t]his situation cannot continue. It feeds anger and despair. It increases the danger of a new escalation of hostilities, which can only bring further suffering to the people of Gaza."

The potential for fresh escalation of violence also exists in the West Bank and Israel, despite a significant decline in attacks and clashes during the second quarter of 2016. This was illustrated in a widely condemned attack perpetrated by two Palestinians on 8 June in a commercial centre in Tel Aviv in which three Israelis were killed. In its wake, the Israeli authorities cancelled over 83,000 permits issued previously for the month of Ramadan, mostly for family visits in East Jerusalem and Israel; the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that this measure may amount to collective punishment. However, the earlier announcement that permit requirements would be waived for West Bank Palestinian males aged above 45 and below 12, and females of all ages, was maintained, allowing tens of thousands to access East Jerusalem for the traditional Friday prayers at Al Aqsa Mosque.

Access restrictions and settlement expansion have been among the main drivers of humanitarian vulnerability and a source of frustration among West Bank Palestinians. This Bulletin addresses the situation in a Palestinian suburb of East Jerusalem, Az Za'ayem, as a result of the erection of the Barrier in 2005 and the recent closure of a main road connecting the village to the city. These measures have forced some 240 families to leave for areas with better access to services and livelihoods. Another article analyses official Israeli data for 2015 indicating a sharp increase in the ratification of "state land" declarations, which is a step that paves the way for the allocation of land for settlement expansion or for the retroactive "legalization" of unauthorized outposts.

In his briefing to the Security Council on 30 June, the UN Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov stated: "Palestinian frustration cannot be washed away; it cannot be vanquished by aggressive security measures, arrests or punitive home demolitions... But nor will the violence and terror, fuelled by resentment, bring about a Palestinian state".

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