



Overview:

Humanitarian vulnerability should be addressed irrespective of political agreements

As the period allocated for the achievement of a framework agreement between Israelis and Palestinians is set to expire, the major drivers of humanitarian vulnerability across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) remain unchanged.

The fragile humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which worsened in July 2013 following the shutdown of the illegal tunnels with Egypt and the partial closure of the Rafah crossing, continues. The delivery of basic services remains severely impaired, mainly due to the shortage of fuel, previously smuggled at subsidized prices through the tunnels and now purchased from Israel at higher cost and in limited quantities. The situation is exacerbated by the import restrictions imposed by Israel in the context of the longstanding blockade.

One of the services most impacted across Gaza is the management of solid waste. The fuel shortage has forced service providers to reduce the number of collections, resulting in waste being burned on the streets or dumped on roadsides. Health and environmental risks are posed by the widespread burning of refuse, the stench emanating from rubbish dumps, the insects and vermin attracted to these areas, and ground pollution.

In the West Bank, settlement activities remain a major driver of humanitarian hardship. New settlement activities took place in March 2014 in the northern Jordan Valley and the hills east of Jerusalem on land claimed by Palestinians as private property. These activities are particularly worrying as they occurred in the vicinity of highly vulnerable Palestinian communities threatened with forcible displacement.

These developments coincide with the release of new data by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics indicating that the number of 'building starts' of housing units in settlements during 2013 increased by 124 per cent compared with the equivalent figure in 2012.

Since the beginning of the year, there has been an increase in violent clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian schoolchildren near and inside schools in the West Bank. In many cases, these clashes are triggered by schoolchildren throwing stones at Israeli settlers parking close to schools or speeding along the roads used by children on their way to and from school. The clashes often result in injuries to children, in addition to interruption to classes and psychosocial distress.

It is imperative to address the root causes of humanitarian vulnerability to avoid further deterioration in the situation. Lifting the restrictive measures that affect Palestinians access to land, development, markets and resources will significantly mitigate human suffering and consequently humanitarian needs.