



United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - UNOCHA

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA AND CENTRAL ASIA - ROMENACA

## Regional Humanitarian Update

January 2009

The Humanitarian Update is a monthly publication from UN OCHA's Regional Office in Dubai, reporting on the main humanitarian events in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia. For more information on Iraq or OPT, please visit [www.ochaIraq.org](http://www.ochaIraq.org) and [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org)

## Highlights

On 20 January, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited the Gaza Strip to demonstrate solidarity with the affected population and assure them of the full support of the United Nations and the international community. On visiting the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) compound that was bombed by Israel, Mr Ban reiterated his call for a full investigation and to make those responsible accountable. He also met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and visited the town of Sderot in southern Israel, a frequent target of Hamas rocket attacks.

At the request of the Secretary-General, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. John Holmes, and UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Roberterry, also visited Gaza on 22 January to launch the joint assessment of the immediate needs of the civilian population. Given the scale and urgency of the needs, the UN and partners are initially focusing on restoring basic social services, such as water, health and education, and supporting emergency repairs of critical infrastructure. Mr. Holmes subsequently paid a one-day visit to Egypt for meetings with representatives of the Government of Egypt and the League of Arab States, UN officials, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other humanitarian agencies.

The Needs Assessment launched by Mr. Holmes concluded with the Gaza Flash Appeal that was launched on 2 February. The Appeal, amounting to US\$613 million to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of 1.4m people in Gaza, includes projects that will immediately save lives, and others that will ensure essential repairs of key infrastructure to cover the period until recovery and reconstruction activities can begin. Some 106 projects by non-governmental organizations and 82 UN projects are included. For more information, please visit [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org) or [www.humanitarianappeal.net](http://www.humanitarianappeal.net)

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## Regional Response to the Gaza Crisis

The Gaza Crisis has had a large impact on the broader region, both in terms of responding to the needs of the people of Gaza, and demonstrations in support of the Palestinian people. Access for humanitarian goods and personnel into Gaza continues to be extremely problematic (see map overleaf for the quantities of aid passing through the three main crossing points). The majority of aid that was sent from Arab and Muslim countries was channelled through Egypt by air, sea and land at El Arish before crossing into Gaza. The Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) managed the flow of this assistance. Accordingly, it upgraded its office and facilities in El Arish and Rafah with support from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Medical supplies were sent to Gaza through Rafah, whereas Al Ouja international crossing between Israel and Egypt was largely dedicated to food aid and other relief items. The World Health Organization (WHO) helped ERCS manage the channelling of medical supplies through Rafah. It also facilitated the work of medical organizations sending personnel through the same border crossing. The World Food Programme (WFP), which is leading the Gaza Logistics Cluster, established a satellite cell in El Arish to facilitate the passage of goods into Gaza for participating UN Agencies and NGOs, in close partnership with the Egyptian Red Crescent. The cell also collects relevant information from the Egyptian, Israeli and Palestinian authorities on assistance crossing border points, which is accessible to all aid agencies on the Logcluster's website ([www.logcluster.org/gaza09a](http://www.logcluster.org/gaza09a)).

A major constraint is that many donations arrived in El Arish without proper documentation or indication of a consignee. This has impaired their transfer to Gaza. As of 31 January, 3,000 Metric Tonnes of humanitarian supplies, which had crossed into Israel via Al Ouja was stockpiled at the Kerem Shalom terminal due to lack of clearance to enter Gaza. This situation has prompted border authorities at El Ouja not to accept humanitarian cargo that has no proper documentation. Many truck drivers had no other options but to return to El Arish and unload their shipments at the Municipal Stadium. An estimated 12,000 Metric Tonnes of humanitarian supplies have accumulated at the Stadium as a result. As of 5 February, the Rafah crossing has been closed, leaving the avenues for channelling aid into Gaza even more limited. Agencies sending aid to Gaza should coordinate with the Humanitarian Country Team for the Occupied Palestinian Territory or respective humanitarian cluster and sector leads over which assistance is appropriate and what requirements they should meet.

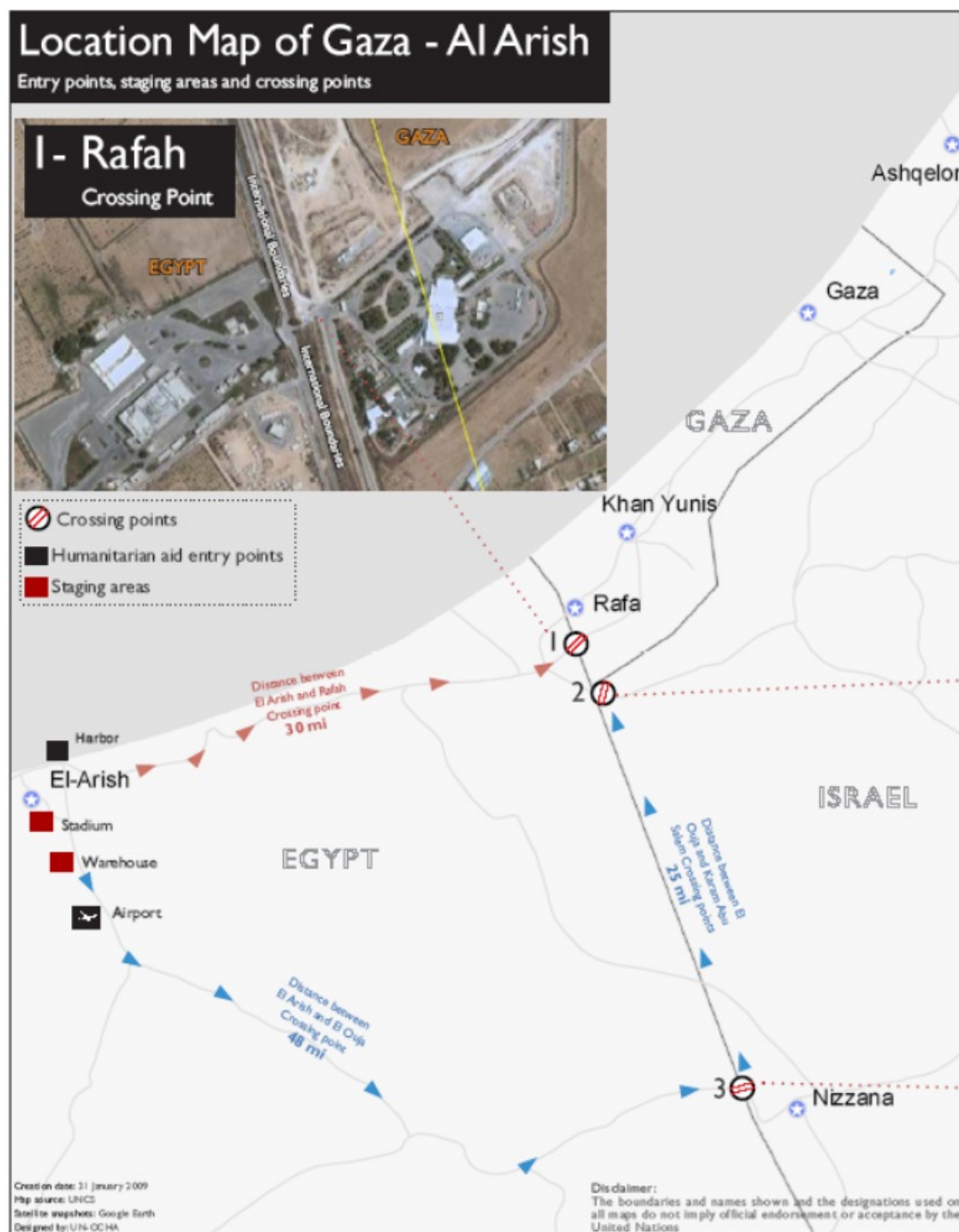
In the United Arab Emirates, a donor meeting was held on 12 January at the behest of HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister, to review the humanitarian situation in Gaza and evaluate the best and fastest means of delivering assistance to the civilians who are suffering. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Dr Anwar Gargash, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and attended by UAE Minister of State H.E. Reem Al Hashemi, H.E. Sana'a Darwish, Humanitarian Advisor to HH Sheikh Hamdan, 19 Ambassadors of donor countries, and senior representatives of UN agencies, UAE officials and the Red Crescent Authority. Participants were briefed about the latest humanitarian situation and major requirements by senior representatives of the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

On 17-18 January, Kuwait hosted the Arab Economic, Social and Development Summit. Much of the Summit was dominated by discussions on Gaza, during which the Emir of Kuwait pledged US\$34 million for UNRWA operations. This was followed by an announcement of US\$ 1 billion by the King

Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for the reconstruction of Gaza. The way in which these resources will be allocated has not yet been finalised. In addition, the draft resolution of the Summit called for increasing employment rates in the Arab world, focusing on national efforts in the development of human resources, putting socio-economic policies that would reduce poverty by half by 2015, and introducing an emergency Arab food security programme.

Syria's First Lady, Ms. Asma Al-Assad, officially supported UNRWA's "For the Children of Gaza" campaign, which was launched on 12 January in cooperation with a number of partners from the public, private and civil society sectors. The campaign aims to raise funds in support of the children of Gaza and to raise awareness amongst the children of Syria regarding the unnecessary violence and loss of life.

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