

GAZA SITUATION REPORT 116

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- In an effort to ease the current tensions between Palestine and Israel, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon traveled to the Middle East region for an unscheduled visit on 20 and 21 October, to meet with Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, as well as with other senior officials. "I am here to encourage and support all efforts to lower tensions and prevent the situation from spinning out of control." The UN chief expressed his condolences to the families and loved ones of all the victims of the hostilities. "No society should have to live in fear," he said. "No society can afford to see its youth suffer in hopelessness." Mr. Ban stressed that if action is not taken fast, the dynamics on the ground may only get worse, "with serious repercussions in and beyond Israel and Palestine." Upon his return from the Middle East, Mr. Ban said in a press briefing there is "still time to step back from the brink," despite anger and polarization in the region. "This is at heart a political conflict that will require a serious negotiation process by two partners willing to make the necessary compromises to reach the long-desired goal of a two-state solution." The Secretary-General joined the Middle East Quartet's discussions in Vienna, Austria on 23 October by video conference regarding the current situation. His Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, was there to represent him in person. Furthermore, the Secretary-General indicated that UN envoys plan to visit Israel and Palestine in the near future. The Secretary-General's visit to the Middle East region followed a video message released on 19 October to the Israeli and Palestinian people, particularly the youth, in response to the dangerous escalation in violence across the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel.
- On 22 October, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East. "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has, once again, entered a dangerous phase," Mr. Eliasson said. "From 1 to 21 October, 47 Palestinians and 7 Israelis have been killed. More than 5,000 Palestinians and some 70 Israelis have been injured." In a press release of his briefing statement, Mr. Eliasson highlighted the first priority as de-escalation, with a reminder that the "violence is rooted in the absence of a genuine political narrative and political horizon." He also emphasized that efforts must be "amplified from all quarters" to restore hope that peace is still possible. "We must urgently achieve real progress towards a negotiated two-State solution," said the Deputy Secretary-General.
- "There is only one flag that belongs to all of us," said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his message on United Nations Day, 24 October. This year marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the UN charter, in 1945. To mark this anniversary, more than 300 monuments and buildings in more than 75 countries were illuminated in UN blue. The UN chief underlined that seven decades after its founding, the United Nations remains "a beacon for all humanity." "The United Nations works for the entire human family of seven billion people, and cares for the earth, our one and only home. And it is the diverse and talented staff of the United Nations who help bring the Charter to life," he said. Mr. Ban also highlighted that this 70th anniversary is a moment to recognize the dedication of those who serve the UN, and to honour the many "who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty." Noting that no single country or organization can address today's challenges alone, the UN chief stressed that the world faces many crises, and the limits of collective international action are painfully clear. The Secretary-General added: "The timeless values of the UN Charter must remain our guide. Our shared duty is to 'unite our strength' to serve 'we the peoples'." Mr. Ban shared a UN Day event with the UN family in Jerusalem during his visit to oPt, ahead of the global observance date.
- UNRWA has released the results of its poverty assessment home visits undertaken during the third quarter of 2015. These follow earlier results the Agency reported after it resumed home visits in May through the new Poverty Assessment System (PAS) after one year of interruption. Since the PAS rollout on 31 May and up to 30 September 2015, an additional 5,792 families (15,697 persons) were added to the existing food assistance case load of 877,000 refugees. It is expected that eligible applicant families will start receiving food assistance in the current round (October - December 2015). The total number of families visited by Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP) social workers since the beginning of the PAS is 19,297. New Assessments have already commenced in October for 25,000 families who are due for an RSSP visit. The types and numbers of applications to be visited in the new batch include over 11,500 first applications (those who have never applied to the PAS and UNRWA has no record of a prior application from the family), almost 1,200 special first applications (those filled by women who are administratively linked to other individuals' registration number but wish to be assessed and receive assistance separately) and over 12,000 restudy applications (families who are currently receiving food assistance and have come due for a new cycle of assessment). Applicant families assessed as not poor will have the opportunity to lodge an appeal form within 21 days from the date they are notified of their PAS result. In case the appeal is successful, the PAS result would be overturned and the family would start receiving UNRWA assistance in the round following the communication of the appeal decision. The introduction of a robust appeal mechanism is one of the key improvements of the new PAS to enhance the quality and accuracy of the eligibility assessment.
- With winter approaching, Gaza's rainy season has also started to make an entrance. The downpours almost annually create heavy floods in the streets of the Gaza Strip, particularly in the over-crowded eight refugee camps located across the coastal enclave. For this reason, as part of its emergency preparedness measures, UNRWA Gaza's Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) is implementing infrastructure projects in all camps to reduce stormwater flooding and safeguard and improve the environmental and living conditions for Palestine refugees. In September 2015, ICIP completed its works in Rafah, southern Gaza, where it improved the infrastructure conditions through the development of sewage, drainage and water systems in the Rafah camp and at Salah El Din road – the main road across Gaza. The principal objective of the completed projects in Rafah and the other on-going flood prevention projects is to collect stormwater and channel it towards existing agricultural areas, to create infiltration bonds to reduce the pollution of ground water, and to recharge the groundwater aquifer.
- In early October, 336 young females graduated from UNRWA's Young Women Leadership Programme (YWLP). The YWLP is implemented by the UNRWA Gender Initiative in partnership with the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution in 24 Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) across the Gaza Strip. The programme aims at improving the skills of female graduates in management, administration, human rights, English language, Information Technology (IT) and job requirements. Following the training, the graduates have the chance to apply their skills in a three-month internship at different Non-Government Organizations, private companies and CBOs that are partnering organizations of the Gender Initiative. Due to severe restrictions on the movement of goods and persons as a result of the Israeli-imposed blockade on Gaza, the enclave's economy has collapsed and is

unable to absorb the thousands of qualified graduates who enter its labour market every year. Whilst the average unemployment rate stands at 41.6 per cent, the highest rate is recorded among female refugee youth at 71.2 per cent, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Since the launch of the YWLP in 2011, the programme has provided training to 4,315 young female graduates. The aim of the programme is not only the professional development of female graduates, but also to raise their stance in the community and in their homes by helping them to gain self-confidence.

- In mid-October, UNRWA Gaza's Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP), provided urgently needed financial support to 1,000 orphan children and their families (US\$ 300 each) to help them meet their basic needs, such as food, school stationery and clothing items. In Gaza a child is considered an orphan when without a father and less than 18 years old. The financial support distributed in October is one of many components of the comprehensive UNRWA protection programme for orphan children and their mothers, who belong to the most vulnerable in the Gaza community, and who have little means to meet their basic needs or earn a decent living. UNRWA provides a wide range of services to these families, including awareness sessions on the legal rights of orphans, psycho-social support, academic consultation and career advice as well as recreational activities. Due to the frequent armed conflicts, the number of orphans in the Strip has steadily increased. According to a recent survey conducted by RSSP, the summer 2014 conflict alone left an additional 1,262 refugee children in Gaza as orphans. Today, the UNRWA orphan project supports 5,599 children and 301 families.

- UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, has recorded his first "Ask the Director" (ATD) episode, now airing on UNRWA TV. ATD is a program that addresses questions from refugees in Gaza, and is one of the Agency's Communications with Communities (OwC) tools. Questions are submitted and collected via UNRWA Gaza's staff portal, which includes a mechanism for questions from the public. It is worth noting that the majority of UNRWA's personnel in Gaza are refugees themselves and live within refugee communities. The program also affords the Director an opportunity to highlight key issues and news of interest to Palestine refugees in Gaza. In his first episode, Mr. Schack shares his background, his first impressions on the ground, and his vision for UNRWA operations in Gaza. Amongst other topics, Mr. Schack also elaborates on the status of the Agency's emergency shelter program, repair and reconstruction in Gaza and the class formation criteria in UNRWA schools. The interview (with Arabic dubbing) can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/3CqUcWzO4rA>.

- **Shelter update**

the next UNRWA shelter update will be provided in the edition scheduled for 4 November, 2015.

GENERAL

Operational environment: The situation in Gaza remains volatile. There is fear that the violence occurring in the West Bank and Jerusalem will have negative repercussions for the Gaza Strip. As well, violence near the Erez crossing and the perimeter fence, is adding to an already tense atmosphere.

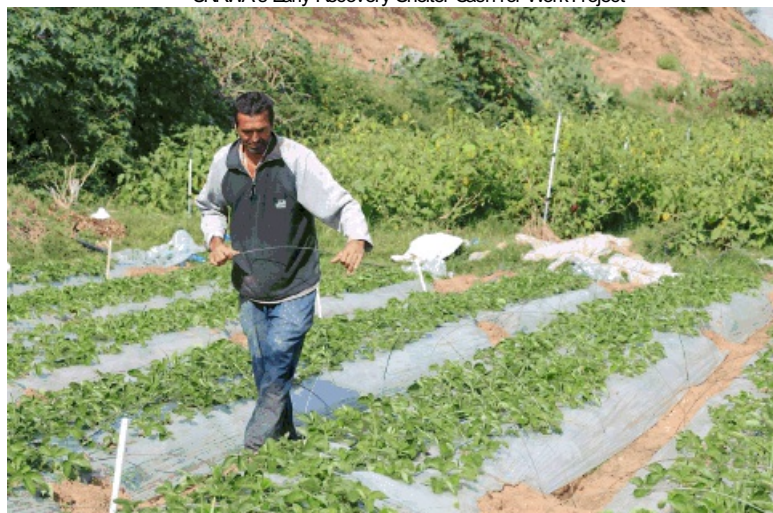
Protests were held on a daily basis during the reporting week regarding the situation in the West Bank and Al Aqsa Mosque. Many of these protests were held in Gaza city, with other demonstrations near the fence (see major incidents section). Other protests were held in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli jails and with journalists who were injured during the previous weeks' protests, including a press conference. On 23 October, the Hamas Movement held a rally in Nuseirat Camp, in the middle of Gaza, to honour the families of those killed during previous conflicts.

On 21 October, the Al Sabreen Movement held a funeral procession for one of its members, who was killed the day before. Shooting in the air was heard and two injuries were reported. On the same day, a dispute in which edged weapons were used took place between two families. The Police arrested several persons and one injury was reported.

On 22 October a 25 year-old Palestinian male passed away at Shifa hospital from his injuries when he set himself on fire in Deir El Balah earlier in the month. On 23 October, a dispute took place in one family in Nuseirat Camp. Firearms were used and three injuries were reported. Police arrested several persons.

UNRWA'S RESPONSE

"Even with this short employment, I got my life back"
UNRWA's Early Recovery Shelter Cash for Work Project



Marwan Al Adham's family is one of 578 Palestine refugee families who accepted a temporary employment opportunity through UNRWA's Early Recovery project. Photo: UNRWA 2015, Tamer Hanan

In September 2015, UNRWA launched an early recovery Shelter Cash for Work (SCFW) project in Gaza. The project provides refugee families who lost their shelters during the summer hostilities of 2014 with a short term employment opportunity. SCFW is part of the Agency's continuous effort to secure available funds in response to the shelter needs of Palestine refugee families in Gaza.

Through this pilot project, all registered Palestine refugee families whose shelters were identified by UNRWA as uninhabitable are eligible to participate in an optional three-month employment placement in the unskilled category in UNRWA approved hosting institutions that themselves are undertaking early recovery activities, directly related to the effects of the 2014 summer hostilities.

Up to two opportunities per family household are offered and participants earn US\$266 per month, which is slightly higher than the monthly Transitional Shelter Cash Assistance payment which ranges from US\$200-\$250 per month depending on family size. UNRWA created this SCFW scheme in response to the huge shortfall in its US\$720 million Gaza reconstruction programme; that shortfall currently stands at US\$ 493 million.

Forty-eight year old Marwan Al Adham and his family are one of 578 refugee families who applied to participate in UNRWA's SCFW project. "For me, it is better to work rather than stay home waiting for UNRWA to pay me the rental fees, farming is my life, and this is why I accepted to sign and to get a three-month employment chance," commented Marwan who is working on a strawberry farm. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the 2014 hostilities in Gaza damaged 120 dunums of cultivated land, sub-pipelines of drip irrigation networks and the agricultural well, thereby preventing farmers from using significant areas of their land and negatively impacting their income. This affected livelihoods, markets and nutrition.

Eligible families are not obligated or required to participate in the SCFW initiative. The scheme is entirely voluntary. It is an alternative option to help those affected to meet their needs. Marwan Al Adham was living with his wife, five daughters and three sons in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza when the 2014 summer hostilities started. The family decided to leave their house and to take shelter at UNRWA Al Fakhoura School in Beit Lahia. When the conflict was over, Marwan returned to his house and found that it was completely destroyed.

Marwan says he was prepared to work for his earnings than receive rental assistance. "I was fine to receive the money from UNRWA and work, therefore, when Relief and Social Services Area Office in Beit Lahia contacted me and explained that I can get a chance to work in lieu of the rental subsidy I was satisfied with that," he said.

Marwan started his work on 28 September and will continue through December.

The funding for this project is earmarked and part of the emergency response. The funding cannot be used for other activities and does not affect the resources available for other programmes, or the family's eligibility for other UNRWA work opportunities.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR INCIDENTS

During the reporting week, Israeli forces fired at Palestinian boats on 20 and 23 October, and at Palestinian protestors near the fence, on an almost daily basis.

On 25 October, Israeli troops positioned at the fence east of Deir Al Balah, middle Gaza, reportedly opened fire towards Palestinians farmers, forcing them to leave the area. No injuries were reported.

On 20 October, militants fired one rocket towards Israel. The rocket dropped short. On 21 October, militants fired one rocket towards Israel. The rocket landed in an open area in the Sha'ar Ha Negev Regional Council. No injuries or damage were reported in either incident.

On 19 October, approximately 70 civilians, including youth, held a demonstration east of Al Bureij Camp near the fence, in solidarity with Al Aqsa Mosque and the situation in the West Bank. Some of the protesters reportedly threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli forces reportedly responded with gunfire and tear gas. No injuries were reported, however four Palestinians suffered from tear gas inhalation.

On 20 October, the Israeli forces positioned at the perimeter fence east of Eastern Cemetery, opened fire and shot flare lights towards Palestinian areas. No injuries were reported.

On the same day, approximately 150 civilians, including youth, who were waiting for released prisoners from Israeli jail, held a demonstration in the vicinity of Erez crossing, in solidarity with Al Aqsa Mosque and the situation in the West Bank. Some of the participants approached the fence and reportedly threw stones towards Israeli forces' observation posts. Israeli forces reportedly responded with gunfire and tear gas. Two Palestinians were injured and eight suffered from gas inhalation.

Also on 20 October, approximately 100 civilians, including youth, gathered nearly 300 metres from the fence. Some of the participants approached the fence and reportedly threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli forces reportedly responded with gunfire and tear gas. One Palestinian was killed, seven injured and three suffered from gas inhalation. On 21 October, a similar incident involving approximately 50 civilians, including youth, also gathered nearly 300 metres from the fence. One Palestinian was injured and another suffered from gas inhalation.

On 23 October, approximately 150 civilians, including youth, held a demonstration near Erez crossing, in solidarity with Al Aqsa Mosque and the situation in the West Bank. Some of the participants approached the fence and reportedly threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli forces reportedly responded with gunfire and tear gas. Twenty-four persons were injured and 52 suffered gas inhalation. On the same day, approximately 100 civilians, including youth held a demonstration east of Shejaya, near Nahal Oz crossing, in solidarity with Al Aqsa Mosque and the situation in the West Bank. Again, some of the participants approached the fence and reportedly threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli forces responded with gunfire and tear gas. Sixteen persons were injured, including four of the medical crew and 23 who suffered gas inhalation. A similar incident on the same day involved approximately 300 civilians, including youth, who gathered nearly 300 metres from the fence. Fourteen persons were injured and eight suffered gas inhalation. Also on 23 October, approximately 100 civilians, including youth, held a demonstration near the fence east of Al Faraheen area, in solidarity with Al Aqsa Mosque and the situation in the West Bank. Some of the participants approached the fence and reportedly threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli Forces responded with gunfire and tear gas. Seven persons were injured and 15 suffered gas inhalation.

FUNDING NEEDS

Thanks to generous donors, UNRWA has overcome its immediate and most serious financial crisis and was able to partially bridge the US\$ 101 million deficit in its General Fund; to date, a shortfall of US\$ 2.61 million remains.

In response to the unprecedented needs faced by Palestine refugees, and the continuous financial shortages and unstable financial footing of the Agency, UNRWA is currently exploring options for additional funding, but is also implementing a series of austerity measures aimed at decreasing costs where possible while preserving essential services to refugees.

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.

As presented in UNRWA's oPt Emergency Appeal, the Agency is seeking US\$ 366.6 million for its 2015 emergency operations in Gaza, including US\$ 127 million for emergency shelter, repair and collective centre management, US\$ 105.6 million for emergency food assistance, and US\$ 68.6 million for emergency cash-for-work. Read more in the [2015 oPt Emergency Appeal](#).

CROSSINGS

- The Rafah crossing was closed between 20 and 27 October.
- The Erez crossing was open for National ID holders (humanitarian cases, medical cases, merchants and UN staff) and international staff on 20, 21 and 22 October and on 25 and 26 October. It was closed on 23 and 24 October.
- Kerem Shalom was open from 20-22 October and on 25 and 26 October. It was closed on 23 and 24 October.

<http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/emergency-reports/gaza-situation-report-116>