



SITUATION REPORT FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

6 January 2009, 1800 hours

The Israeli military operation entered its eleventh day, with the civilian population of Gaza continuing to bear the brunt of the violence. Israeli air, sea and ground forces continue to surround Gazan populated areas. The Gaza and North Gaza governorates remain isolated from the rest of the Strip. Internal movement within the Strip is extremely difficult because of ongoing hostilities and the destruction of essential infrastructure. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate.

VIOLENCE

According to the MoH, the total number of casualties as of 1800 hours today has risen to at least 640 Palestinians killed and 2,850 injured. Ongoing hostilities and the dangers involved in medical crews accessing casualties make it increasingly difficult to compile an accurate and up-to-date account of casualties.

Among the main incidents reported:

- Early reports suggest that at 15.45 on 6 January 08, three artillery shells landed outside the UNRWA Jabalia Prep C Girls School, resulting in at least 30 fatalities and 55 injuries, of which 15 are reported to be critical. The school is currently being used as a shelter for those fleeing hostilities.
- At 2330 on 5 January, three Gazans were killed in an UNRWA school in Gaza City. They were among over four hundred people who had earlier in the evening fled their homes in Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza and had been given refuge in the UNRWA school. The school was clearly marked as a UN installation. UNRWA has protested the killings to the Israeli authorities and is calling for an immediate and impartial investigation.
- Mid Morning 6 January, the UNRWA health clinic in Bureij camp was damaged and ten persons were injured when a missile hit an adjacent building. Seven of the injured were UNRWA staff, the other three being patients. Three of the injuries are reported to be serious.
- On 4 January, approximately 100 members of the extended Al Samuni family were evacuated from their homes to a building to the east of Gaza City. In the early hours of 5 January, the house was repeatedly shelled. Three children who reached Shifa Hospital by civilian car were pronounced dead on arrival. According to survivors an unknown number of dead and injured remain under the rubble, as medical authorities have been unable to reach them.
- In the early hours of 5 January a shell hit a house in Beach Camp killing at least seven members of the Abu Aysha family. Overnight shelling of residential houses in the Bureij Camp have left at least five dead and 16 injured. In another incident, a pregnant Palestinian woman and her four children were killed.
- On 5 January, the al-Awda hospital in northern Gaza was damaged by two shells which landed in a busy car park close to the emergency room. The entrance of the emergency room was damaged, along with some of their stores.
- A WFP logistics contractor's warehouse holding 360 tonnes of food was hit as of 5 January, killing one person and critically wounding two others.

Four Israeli soldiers were killed in two separate incidents on 5 January. Over 40 Qassam and Grad rockets were reportedly fired on Monday from Gaza at southern Israel with no injuries reported.

SHELTER

Over 14,000 Palestinians are now staying in 23 emergency shelters as of this morning, with numbers quickly growing. UNRWA's aid stocks for the shelters are depleting. UNRWA is in need of food and non-food items (NFIs) for these shelters, particularly blankets and mattresses, and is requesting organizations to share NFIs currently available. Local procurement of these items is hampered by the supply shortage on the local market due to the 18-month long blockade on the Strip. Additionally, bringing in any new items is difficult due to the bottle-neck at Kerem Shalom crossing. Yesterday, ICRC provided 350 hygiene kits to UNRWA for people in shelters. This is enough for 6,300 people over 10 days

ELECTRICITY / TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Gaza power plant is still not functional. Following coordination with the Israeli authorities, the 215,000 litres of industrial gasoline which arrived yesterday have been transported from Nahal Oz to the power plant: however, this does not mean that all areas depending on the power plant will receive electricity immediately as most lines were damaged.

Of the seven damaged electricity lines coming from Israel and Rafah, two have been repaired . GEDCO has received approval from the Israelis to repair the other lines from Israel. As of yesterday, an additional electricity line located east of Khan Yunis is no longer functioning.

The Palestinian telephone company, Paltel, warns that due to continued electricity cuts, the shortage of fuel and other constraints all land lines, cell phones and the internet might be cut within one to two days.

HEALTH

Hospitals continue to run on back-up generators for the fourth consecutive day. Only three out of 56 MoH primary health care clinics are currently open. Restrictions on movement and the dissection of Gaza are the main reasons for the closure of many clinics. Fuel available for generators at primary health care services and the central drug store, including cold rooms for vaccine storage, is estimated to be enough for five days.

According to the MoH, six medical staff have been killed and 30 injured, while 11 ambulances have been hit.

Over the last 24 hours, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) has not received Israeli approval for any of its coordination requests to reach those killed or injured. Nonetheless they have recovered 140 wounded and 22 dead.

The ICRC surgical team which entered on 5 January brought in 1000 units of tetanus oxide for MoH hospitals.

WATER AND SANITATION

According to the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), 800,000 people in North Gaza, Gaza and the Middle Area have no running water as of 6 January. Those who still have running water face problems in purifying water as well as risking the additional danger of a contamination of the water network due to waste water leakage. Sanitation services (including solid waste disposal) are not functioning due to the fighting.

FOOD

Cooking gas is in short supply throughout the Strip with people relying on wood ovens or electricity, where available, or are burning alternatives where available. People continue to have problems obtaining food, including basic items such as rice, flour and oil. Bakeries have not received wheat flour since the beginning of the ground operation. As a result, only nine bakeries remain operational with queues lengthening for the allotted 50 small pita bread piece allowance. Prices have nearly doubled since the offensive began compounding the cash shortage. The Bakeries' Owners' Association has appealed to UNRWA for wheat flour so they can continue operating.

Prior to the current operation, 80 percent of the Strip's population was already reliant on food distribution from UN and international organizations. UNRWA food distribution resumed under extremely difficult circumstances after 13 days of suspension on 1 January and is reaching close to 20,000 a day with 2-3 months' dry food supplies. Neither UNRWA nor WFP were able to distribute on 6 January due to the prevailing security situation.

CROSSINGS

Kerem Shalom was open today with approximately 50 truckloads expected to arrive into Gaza. A total of 41.5 truckloads, including 40.5 from humanitarian aid agencies, was allowed entry through Kerem Shalom on 5 January. These comprise 31 of flour for UN agencies, 8 of food supplies from Arab donors, and 1.5 of medical supplies for ICRC.

The Nahal Oz fuel pipelines and Karni conveyor belt used for grains were closed today.

Rafah crossing was partially open today for the transfer of medical supplies and the evacuation of medical cases. On 5 January, 10 truckloads of medical supplies were allowed entry and 18 medical cases were allowed out. According to the MoH, 133 patients have been transferred through Rafah for treatment outside of Gaza since 27 December.

PRIORITY NEEDS

Supply of fuel: Industrial fuel is needed to power the Gaza Power Plant, which has been shut down since 31 December. The replacement of transformers which were heavily damaged is also urgently needed, as well as coordination to allow technical teams to fix other damage. Nahal Oz crossing must remain open as it is the only crossing which can facilitate the transfer of sufficient amounts of fuel to restart and maintain operations of the power plant, and restock other types of fuel needed in the Strip. The continuous switching off and on of the plant is seriously damaging its machinery and could lead to a collapse of some of its vital components.

Distribution of cooking gas: Though cooking gas was pumped from the Israeli side of Nahal Oz to the Palestinian side, it has not yet been picked up due to fears of being targeted. Coordination is urgently needed for the collection of cooking gas from stores along the border area and from Nahal Oz, and subsequently for the distribution of the gas which is essential for bakeries and home-cooking of bread and other food.

Wheat grain, essential to provide flour for local bakeries and humanitarian food distribution to the population of Gaza. The Karni Crossing conveyor belt is the only mechanism which can facilitate the import of the amount of grain required in the Strip at this time. This crossing remains closed.

Cash has still not entered the Gaza Strip and is urgently needed, including for the UNRWA cash distribution program to some 94,000 dependent beneficiaries, as well as its “cash for work” programme, salaries for its staff and payments to suppliers.

Internal movement within the Gaza Strip: Movement within the Strip is restricted and dangerous. It is essential that patients and ambulances have access to hospitals, that agencies access warehouses to conduct distributions, and that damage to public services can be repaired. Bakeries also need access to cooking gas.