



## Humanitarian Situation Report #4

27 April 2007

# Beit Lahia Waste Water Treatment Plant

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### Overview

It is now one month since effluent from an emergency filtration basin at the waste water treatment plant in Beit Lahia flooded the nearby Bedouin village of Um Al Nasser on 27 March killing five people and injuring 25 others. The immediate priority was to relocate the displaced families to a secure site while also undertaking measures to reinforce the banks of the main sewage lake to ensure there was no repeat flooding.

The emergency relief phase is now over. While assistance continues to the families living in a temporary camp, the priority is now on increasing the capacity of the existing waste water treatment plant while also simultaneously starting work at the site of the proposed new treatment plant in eastern Jabalia.

### Camp Management

According to UNRWA a total of 267 families are present in the camp. Of these, 139 families are eligible for assistance from UNRWA on the grounds that their homes were destroyed, damaged and/or soiled. The remaining 128 families moved to the camp in the aftermath of the flooding and have remained there in spite of the fact that their homes were not affected in any way. These families no longer receive assistance from UNRWA and are being encouraged to leave the camp.

On the basis of an UNRWA engineering survey, the homes of 29 of the 139 families are considered structurally unsound and will require major repair work. In the meantime the affected families have been offered rental assistance in order to move out of the camp and so far seven families have accepted.

At a UN/NGO Operational Coordination Group meeting in Gaza City on 16 April, UNRWA confirmed that the majority of needs were being covered however some consumables distributed towards the end of March were running low and in particular hygiene kits and women's clothes. UNRWA also called for increased cash assistance to enable families to determine their own needs. In the last week:

- Caritas Association has distributed hygiene kits to the 139 eligible families.
- The PA has started providing cash assistance of \$600 for 236 displaced and non displaced families.
- The World Council of Churches is providing \$100 cash assistance to 283 displaced and non displaced families.
- On 28 April the Emirates Association will start distributing hygiene kits, kitchen utensils and \$100 cash assistance coupons to the families on the UNRWA distribution list.



- Psychosocial support continues to be offered to children in the area through UNICEF's implementing partners, the Al Qattan Foundation, Gaza Community Mental Health Programme and the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR).
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported at a health coordination meeting in Gaza on 24 April:
  - The incubation period for any endemic diseases has now passed and there have been no outbreaks of any communicable diseases since the floods.
  - Scabies and other skin diseases remain a persistent problem however this has always been the case in the Um Al Nasser locality.
  - 77 water samples have been taken from tankers, taps and wells in both the village and the camp since 27 March and in all cases the water quality has been determined "satisfactory".
  - The Medical Relief Services (MRS) health clinic in Um Al Nasser has now reverted back to normal operating hours while the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) is considering announcing the end to the emergency period.

## Longer Term Work

### *Relocation site for Um Al Nasser residents*

In the immediate aftermath of the flooding, the PA informed the residents of the Bedouin village that they would be relocated to a new site. In the weeks since, disquiet has built up among the residents that an area has still not been identified. Residents are concerned that as the embankments continue to be reinforced, the new filtration basins come on line and the threat of any renewed flooding dissipates that they will remain in the Um Al Nasser village with all its long standing problems.

Frustration at the lack of activity on the land issue reached a peak on 15 April when Spanish NGO, Action Contre le Hambre (ACH) was forced to suspend its pumping operations for two days due to direct threats from the community. As a result the PA appointed a Committee under the chair of the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Housing to address the land issue as a priority.

A meeting took place in Um Al Nasser on 23 April between the Committee, and members of the village council to reassure the residents that the PA remains committed to identifying a suitable plot of land. The Deputy Minister in a meeting earlier this week with UN agencies pointed out that significant costs would be involved in the relocation project not least in terms of the associated infrastructure requirements, and requested financial support.

### *Mitigation steps to reduce flooding and construction of new plant*

Unless residents actively intervene to prevent pumping activities at the existing Beit Lahia waste water treatment plant there is no threat of imminent flooding, largely as a result of ongoing structural work in relation to both the existing treatment plant as well as the proposed new site in eastern Gaza:

- Over 5 km of embankments around the main effluent lake have now been reinforced both vertically and horizontally as a result of work undertaken by ACH, UNICEF, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) and the municipality. A technical team will shortly carry out an assessment to look at the current strength of the embankments and if additional work is required.
- Following the interruptions between 15 and 16 April pumping has resumed from the main lake with a maximum daily pumping rate of 10,000 m<sup>3</sup>. This rate is expected to increase as additional basins are completed.



- One of two new filtration basins is now operational at the Beit Lahia plant with the second basin due for completion by early May. Due to the presence of clay residue in the area of the new basins, the effectiveness of the filtration process will be reduced and consideration is currently being given by the PWA to digging a third basin. Each basin will have a filtration capacity of 8,000 m<sup>3</sup> per day.
- Work is currently ongoing on three of the nine intended filtration basins at the new treatment plant in eastern Jabalia and these are expected to be completed by June 2007. The additional six basins are scheduled to be operational by October 2007.
- Once the basins are ready at the new plant, the terminal pumping station at Beit Lahia will then pump the effluent from the lake down transmission lines to Jabalia. Approximately 80-90 % of the transmission lines are now in place while some outstanding equipment including valves for the lines are pending from Israel.
- Work is continuing at the new plant on a 24 hour basis. Previously work had not been permitted by the Israelis after 7 pm due to the proximity of the new plant to the border however the recent expansion of the Palestinian security presence in the area has satisfied Israeli concerns and 24 hour operations resumed from 20 April.