

UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION UPDATE

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

21 SEPTEMBER 2007

UNICEF IS RESPONDING TO THE URGENT NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

- High child death toll in internal fighting
- Only minimal humanitarian aid and no commercial trade entering Gaza
- Political infighting hindering humanitarian operations
- Literacy and numeracy scores plummeting for young Palestinians



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

OVERVIEW

After a summer marked by the worst internecine violence ever seen within Palestinian society, children have returned to their classrooms wondering to what extent the political infighting – and the ongoing conflict with Israel – will hijack their education. “Will school be open today?” is now a relevant question, along with “Are the checkpoints good or bad today?”

In June, at the height of the political crisis gripping oPt, children witnessed egregious acts of violence within their own communities, including the throwing of people off buildings to their deaths, and attacks on schools, hospitals and the media. A UNICEF-supported NGO assisted 4 children who had temporally lost their ability to speak – reportedly because they had just witnessed a scene of extraordinary violence.

At this writing, Gaza’s main commercial crossing has been virtually closed for three months, letting in only the bare minimum of humanitarian aid and no commercial trade. Supplies such as computers for youth centres – not deemed “humanitarian” – yet of major importance for children – are held back from crossing. Power shortages are still being reported in various areas of northern Gaza and Gaza City, and reserves of fuel for generators, a secondary source of power critical to run health facilities, are low.

UNICEF’s programmes focus on health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, child protection and adolescent development, targeting communities where the needs are greatest. This support is needed more than ever before to help prevent a further deterioration in children’s well-being.

2. ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Health and Nutrition

WHO surveillance figures show a doubling in the incidence of low birth weight from 4.2% in June 2006 to 9.6% in March 2007. Anemia levels among children are stable but high, up to 77.4% in Rafah, Gaza. There are severe shortages in cancer and diabetes drugs and medical supplies. Maintenance of health facilities remains a challenge, with a Cat Scan machine out of order for four months and ongoing power shortages.

In Gaza, a health union comprising most health personnel is continuing with a strike that began on 26 August to protest the Ministry of Health’s sacking and replacement of officials. Health workers continue to provide primary care from 8 to 11 in the morning; and they still operate on emergency cases. Immunization services have not been affected because logistics support is strong, and workers receive allowances.

While most health workers have received full salaries from the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, hundreds of Hamas-affiliated employees have not received any pay.

Water and sanitation

A strike since 11 August by unpaid municipal workers has left garbage piling on street corners in Gaza City and Khan Younis districts.

In Gaza, people live with an average of 81 liters of water a day, while West Bankers survive on just 58 liters (as compared with the 150 liters per day the WHO says is needed to drink, cook, clean and bathe). Old infrastructure and water networks damaged by fighting badly need repairs. Schools and clinics have inadequate and insufficient water storage systems and sanitary facilities, and poorly maintained connections to networks. In impoverished communities with poor sanitary conditions, children face the risk of water-borne infections such as trachoma, conjunctivitis, dysentery and gastro-enteritis, ascariasis and hookworm. Lack of clean drinking water raises the threat of diseases such as diarrhea, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, paratyphoid and gastro-enteritis.

Education

Recent data released by UNRWA show that around 80% of fourth- to ninth-graders are failing their Math exams, and that 40% are failing in Arabic, “due to the cumulative effects of occupation, closures, poverty and violence”. A bid by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to hire 45 Math teachers garnered four

applications, reflecting what a battering the institution of education and stature of teachers has fallen after months of unpaid salaries, strikes, violence and division. Morale and interest among students is very low.

Child protection

While the monthly tolls of children killed in the conflict show a decrease compared to 2006, the total number of children killed remains high (57) and the overall context of violence persists. Between January and July 2007, 31 children were killed and 19 injured in the conflict with Israel. Some 26 children died in Palestinian internal violence, more than double the toll from internal fighting in 2006. The majority of these children are from Gaza.

In July, a triple homicide committed on three young sisters in Gaza was perceived by local residents as “honor killings”. A fourth woman was killed in another “honor killing” at the end of the month, also in Gaza.

Reports of settler attacks against children include a 10-year-old child killed when he was run over by a settler in Hebron, and assaults on three children, also in Hebron, for refusing to give a female settler their puppy. Unexploded ordinance has killed 5 children so far all year, compared with 5 deaths for all of last year.

At end-July, some 375 Palestinian children were being held in Israeli detention, including 10 under administrative detention. Nablus, in the northern West Bank, saw the highest number of child detentions. In July, at least 60 people were affected by house demolitions, the majority of them children.

Adolescents

The ongoing conflict has had a particularly damaging impact on adolescents, who comprise a large, vulnerable and volatile group. With few opportunities for positive, productive activity, many are caught in the direct line of hostilities. The occupation and the internal Palestinian fighting are having a profound impact on Palestinian adolescents, heightening their vulnerability to abuse, violence and exploitation.

Most adolescents have no access to learning or recreational programs outside schools, and spend the majority of their time at home. There are around 300 youth clubs in the West Bank and Gaza, but most lack funding, and are poorly managed and equipped. Programs offered by these youth clubs are usually limited to simple sporting activities.

Adolescents who are two or three levels below their normal grade often end up dropping out of school and joining the unskilled labour market. Several UNICEF counterparts say this plays a role in pushing youth to join militant factions. Worsening socio-economic conditions point to the likelihood that the numbers of adolescents vulnerable to abuse, violence, and exploitation will increase.

3. UNICEF ACTION

Health and Nutrition

UNICEF has delivered essential medicines including antibiotics, antifungals, bronchodilators, eyedrops and steroids for young children to Gaza, and pre-positioned more supplies in both Gaza and the West Bank for emergencies.

Equipment to prevent neonatal sickness – a major cause of child mortality in oPt, has been delivered to 150 primary health clinics. Supplies included phototherapy machines to treat jaundiced babies, ECG machines to monitor heartbeats, and tools to measure oxygen levels and blood pressure. UNICEF also upgraded laboratories in Gaza and Ramallah with equipment to improve quality assurance capacity for analyzing salt samples collected from routine or market surveys. UNICEF also provided premix for flour fortification.

Water and sanitation

Residents living near the waste water treatment plant that collapsed in Beit Lahia in March finally agreed to let work continue on reinforcing the embankments, following intense negotiations including UNICEF. From the outset of the crisis, which killed five people and displaced more than 2,000 residents, UNICEF has coordinated

the sector response, providing the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility with support to strengthen infrastructure, while pumping water surplus into safer, newly dug emergency ponds. Around 80% of the project is complete.

Since June, UNICEF has also supported improvements in sanitation facilities at 6 schools in Gaza and constructed 3 desalination units in Jordan Valley schools. Construction on 3 water networks and one well in Tulkarem, in the northern West Bank, is ongoing.

Since the beginning of the year, UNICEF has provided daily drinking water to 343 schools and 32 health facilities in Gaza, constructed 4 desalination units for 3 clinics and 1 hospital, and provided 92 water tanks for 58 schools and 32 health facilities. Sanitation facilities have also been constructed or rehabilitated in 52 schools and 8 clinics in both Gaza and the West Bank. Eight water networks have been refurbished, 5 wells have been constructed, and 450 water tanks delivered to 450 families in Gaza and Tulkarem, in the northern West Bank. UNICEF continues to provide spare parts for emergency repairs as well and fuel as needed.

Education

With programme delivery so contingent on political infighting, UNICEF's focal point for project implementation within the MoEHE worked quickly to establish temporary mechanisms that would allow for training programmes to continue. This includes new arrangements to pay service providers, including trainers, directly.

To help improve teaching skills and children's learning, UNICEF implemented two workshops for 60 trainers on math and science teaching approaches to go with interactive teaching kits developed jointly by MoEHE and UNICEF. The trainers will then conduct a second round of training at the directorate level. A training package and guidebook is being developed by experts at MoEHE.

UNICEF also provided emergency education training and supplies that will benefit up to 65,000 children and 1,375 teachers in the new school year, including remedial worksheets, teaching kits and stationery. Training included new, more child-friendly methodologies and management of school activities.

Child protection

In August, the number of children receiving in-depth counseling increased by 81% compared with July, and 27% more parents participated in psychosocial support sessions.

With the 2 additional teams established this year, there are now 14 UNICEF-supported psychosocial teams across oPt providing support to families in the aftermath of an emergency. In 2007, 2,662 home and hospital visits have been carried out by the teams; 13,375 children have been trained on how to better protect themselves and cope with violence; and 1,295 children have had in-depth counseling. Some 13,600 children have participated in festivals organized for them to meet with peers, play and release stress.

Three socio-legal defense centers in Gaza and two in the West Bank provided 2,197 children and families with legal, psychological and social support, including through 652 calls received via a toll-free helpline. Calls peaked during the fighting in June. Two more centres could open shortly, pending additional funding.

Over 258,000 Palestinians, including 61,658 children in 11 high risk areas were provided with information on the danger of unexploded ordinance, explosive remnants of war, small arms and weapons, and equipped with the skills to protect themselves and their families.

Adolescents

In the aftermath of the June clashes, UNICEF and its partners received reports that girls and women were being turned away from youth clubs. The local management committees and field coordinators in centres funded by UNICEF have expended considerable effort including visiting families, talking to parents, and establishing separate activities for girls and boys, to mitigate this trend. While reports of restricted female access to youth centres continue, girls' participation at UNICEF-supported centres is between 52% and 57%.

To provide adolescents with a measure of fun in an otherwise violent and stressful summer, UNICEF supported sports and recreational activities at 100 different locations across the West Bank. Through the project, around 10,000 young people were able to play and interact with the peers, helping mitigating stress and frustration. Some 450 facilitators also received training and improved their capacity in managing such activities for adolescents. Forty-four of the locations will continue with sports activities for the remainder of the year, benefiting up to 2,640 more adolescents.

Since June, both structured and unstructured after-school learning and recreational activities are continuously being run in the 14 adolescent-friendly spaces that were established and equipped through UNICEF support with computers, library books, sports and music equipment. The structured sessions are conducted by 90 trained facilitators and include language, math and life skills sessions for adolescents who are either school dropouts, or who are 2-3 grade levels below their peers. Over the last three months around 18,700 adolescents have participated in the different sessions at the learning centers and many thousands more have used the computer, library, sports and music facilities.

4. APPEAL REQUIREMENTS AND RECEIPTS

UNICEF's CAP is budgeted at USD 25.8 million, based on the needs assessment framework completed in November 2006. The breakdown is as follows:

TABLE 1: 2007 APPEAL REQUIREMENTS AND FUNDING BY SECTOR (as of September 21, 2007)				
Sector	Target (US\$)	Funded (US\$)	% Funded	Unfunded (US\$)
Health and nutrition	8,292,500	2,144,769	26%	6,147,731
Water and sanitation	4,345,100	2,126,472	49%	2,218,628
Education	6,337,300	2,435,992	38%	3,901,308
Adolescents	3,158,640	3,026,953	96%	131,687
Child protection	3,131,815	2,847,591	91%	284,224
Total*	25,265,355	12,581,777	50%	12,683,578

*The total includes a maximum recovery rate of 7%. The actual recovery rate on contributions will be calculated in accordance with UNICEF Executive Board Decision 2006/7 dated 9 June 2006.

As of 10 September, UNICEF had received 46% or almost USD 11.8 million of its USD25.8 million funding target. UNICEF expresses its gratitude for funding provided by the Governments of Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Finland, Austria, and the Republic of Korea; the Canadian International Development Agency, the European Commission Humanitarian Office, and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund; and UNICEF National Committees in France, Germany, United States, United Kingdom and Japan.

Details of the occupied Palestinian Territories' emergency programme can be obtained from:

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