



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

10 – 16 March 2009

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The blockade on the Gaza Strip continues in addition to rudimentary rocket fire by Palestinian militants into Israel and air strikes on Gaza by Israeli forces. The tunnels on the Egyptian-Gazan border, which have become an alternative channel for transfer of commodities banned through the official Gaza crossings and a source of arms smuggling according to Israeli officials, were attacked by Israeli forces, thus reducing the overall amount of goods entering Gaza. Violent exchanges between Israeli forces and the militants inside the Gaza Strip reportedly caused six Palestinian injuries, including one child.

Humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza has increased, but the overall levels remain below what is urgently required. Humanitarian partners in the oPt have continued focusing their advocacy on easing access of goods and personnel into Gaza. A “Framework for the Provision of Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza” document by the Humanitarian Country Team, is intended to serve as a set of “minimum standards” for access of humanitarian goods and personnel.

UNDP REPORT “INSIDE GAZA - ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE GAZA STRIP RESIDENTS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATIONS” HIGHLIGHTS THE FOLLOWING:

- 65% of Gazans live below the income poverty line and 37% live in extreme poverty;
- 66% of the unemployed are extremely poor; an increase from 56% prior to the recent Gaza conflict;
- Over 1 million of roughly 1.4 million, or 75% of the Gazan population, feel insecure for one of three reasons: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (42%); Israeli control over borders (27%) which prevents movement of persons and goods; and inter-Palestinian tension;
- Most households in the Gaza Strip have suffered from limited access to basics such as food, water, electricity, sanitation, and money, but their highest need now is personal security;
- Nearly 40% of the surveyed households were displaced as a result of Israeli military operations;
- 25% of the Gaza households believe that psychosocial support is the most needed assistance and 49% consider that psychosocial support is by far the most important need for children at present.

The survey for the report was conducted between 25 January and 1 February 2009, using random sampling of 1,815 households in the Gaza Strip. <http://www.undp.ps/en/focusareas/crisis/surveyerf.pdf>

ACCESS INTO THE GAZA STRIP / CROSSINGS ¹

Commodities Import

- A total of 671 truckloads of goods including 121 from humanitarian agencies (18%) were allowed entry into Gaza this week compared to 1080 last week, representing an average of 121 truckloads per open day compared to a daily average of 246 received in the third week of July 2008.
- The imported commodities included: food (520 truckloads, 68%), medical supplies (16 truckloads, 2%), hygiene/cleaning supplies limited to chlorine, tissues, diapers, (84 truckloads, 11%) and non-edible consumables such as blankets, mattresses and, for the first time since 28 October 2008, clothes (33 truckloads, 4%). 14 truckloads containing education/stationery supplies and 4 truckloads with agricultural raw materials (fertilized eggs) were allowed entry.
- No livestock, industrial/electrical appliances, vehicles/ transports, packaging applications or construction materials were allowed entry.
- Items banned by the Israeli authorities last week included jam, biscuits and tomato paste, resulting in 498 boxes of USAID cargo and 2,488 boxes of World Vision cargo stopped from delivery to Gaza. According to COGAT, food parcels containing these foodstuffs, as well as tea, sweets and date bars, will be rejected in the future.

FUEL

- No petrol or diesel were allowed entry into Gaza last week via Israel. However, Palestinian Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA) reports that the amount of fuel being transferred through the Egyptian-Gaza border tunnels has increased with nearly 50,000 litres of diesel and 30,000 litres of petrol transferred into Gaza per day. Since last week, diesel has become more available on the open market while petrol remains less available. Petrol and diesel prices have decreased (down from 8 and 5 NIS/litre to 4 and 3 NIS respectively, compared to the previous week).
- 675.5 tonnes of cooking gas were allowed into Gaza during this week compared to 420 tonnes allowed in the previous week, representing 39% of the estimated weekly needs according to GSOA.
- A total of 2,235.450 litres of the Power Plants' industrial gas was allowed, representing 71% of the required weekly needs as determined by the Power Plant authority.

CROSSINGS STATUS

- Sufa crossing remained closed. However, COGAT (Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories) has informed OCHA that Sufa is no longer a crossing point between Gaza and Israel.
- Karni crossing remained closed.
- Karni grain conveyor belt was operational on 2 days. The cement lane (last open on 29 October 2008) remains completely closed.
- Nahal Oz fuel pipelines were partially opened on 5 out of 6 scheduled days. COGAT informed OCHA that the working days has been reduced to five days per week (Sunday to Thursday)
- Kerem Shalom crossing was partially open on all the scheduled days.
- Rafah border crossing was closed for cargo on all days.

1. Information on the status of border crossings and numbers of trucks crossing is compiled by OCHA Gaza, based on data provided by the Gaza Ministry of National Economy, UNRWA, UNSCO and Paltrade (Palestine Trade Centre) and cross-checked with data received from COGAT and covers the period 10 to 16 March.

Exports. No exports from Gaza were allowed out during the week.

Humanitarian personnel access

- UN personnel movement into and within Gaza depends, among other factors, on the availability of armored vehicles, numbers of which are severely restricted. Currently, there are 17 vehicles still awaiting the Israeli authorities' clearance for entry into Israel.
- The Israeli clearance procedures for access into Gaza by INGO personnel continue to be very lengthy, hindering INGOs service and delivery capacity.
- A number of INGOs operating in Gaza have been requested to register with the de facto Hamas authority in Gaza, often in addition to the registration already obtained from the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah. Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) is currently conducting a survey on NGOs access to Gaza.

LOGISTICS

The Logistics Cluster continues to advocate for increased entry of humanitarian goods into Gaza. The Logistics Cluster requested a clearance from COGAT for transportation of UNICEF stationery items, Early Childhood Development Kits and children's toys; UK MAP medical equipment; FAO veterinary supplies and 704 packets of washing powder for World Vision.

The Cluster has presented a number of proposals to the Israeli authorities, namely: to use sea containers for the purpose of transportation of humanitarian cargo and permission for the exit/return of empty containers; to double-stack pallets on trucks and for the installation of lighting at the crossing on the Gaza side of Karem Shalom to allow operations after dark.

The Cluster also maintains a constantly updated list of delivered/held up/refused humanitarian cargo. Information collected includes quantity of items, organization, date of entry, date stopped/delivered etc. The list is available from the Logistics Cluster on request. <http://www.logcluster.org/gaza09a/UNJGECC>.

PROTECTION

Procedures for Gaza children receiving medical treatment outside the Gaza Strip need urgent attention as the monitoring mechanisms, particularly for unaccompanied children, are inadequate. Another area of concern is the issue of alleged disappearances. Upon finalization of the database of war casualties, the numbers of disappeared versus killed will be clarified. In addition, the Protection Cluster has identified that lengthy delays in legal procedures concerning inheritances of people killed during the war contribute to further deterioration of the economical situation of their families.

ELECTRICITY/FUEL

Approximately 90% of the Gaza population suffers from intermittent power supply, with power cuts of between four and five hours daily. The Gaza Electricity Distribution Company reports an overall energy deficit of 19% in the Gaza Strip as of 15 March. On Monday 16 March, due to technical failure, the Gaza Power Plant has been forced to shut one turbine, bringing power generation to 30MWs. Gaza city and middle area are most affected, with scheduled power cuts increased to 8-12 hours/day. The broken unit is being repaired, but a source at the plant suggests that such failure could have been avoided if spare parts were available.

EARLY RECOVERY

Following the publication of the PA's Palestinian National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza 2009-2010, four groups (Governance, Livelihoods, Utilities and Environment) have now been established under the umbrella of the Early Recovery Cluster. The objective is to prioritise early recovery and transitional reconstruction efforts in each area as and when access improves.

WATER AND SANITATION

Some 50,000 people still remain without access to water through the public network, while 100,000 others experience intermittent supply of water. ACF, CARE, Oxfam and PHG continue to deliver water by tankers to affected neighborhoods. Lack of materials and equipment for the WASH sector continue to hamper repairs and rehabilitation efforts.

During a recent sampling in January/February, data on watery diarrheal diseases among children 0-3 years old, attending UNRWA facilities, was compared to the corresponding weeks last year. An increase of 18 % in the incidence of the disease was reported, assumed to be related to war-related damage to the water supply systems. The epidemiological surveillance system in Gaza Strip resumed functionality on 20 January.

EDUCATION

The need to provide psychosocial services for school children and teachers has led to the establishment of a subgroup, facilitated by Sharek Youth Forum and involving approximately ten organizations, including Gaza-based universities. Preparations for the training and capacity building of 354 Gaza school and NGO counselors are well underway.

Access of supplies into Gaza remains a key obstacle for a number of education interventions, ranging from school repairs and rehabilitation to provision of training material for teachers and counselors.

FOOD SECURITY / AGRICULTURE

- The availability of most basic foods is at an acceptable level for both fresh and dry foods but this is highly volatile. Problems remain for selected items. Fresh chicken and meat, cleaning material and cooking gas were found to be unavailable or in short supply as of 10 March 2009.
- Shortages of animal feed and gas have contributed to the increase in the price of chicken in the market from 12 to 17.25 NIS/kg.
- As of 10 March, the total stock of wheat flour in Gaza mills is 10,900 mt, which is sufficient to cover the needs of the total population for approximately 24 days (i.e. until 3 April 2009).
- A statement issued by the IDF Spokesperson's Office on 11 March announced the decision to restrict fishing to three nautical miles from the coast. Since 2002, fishermen have been restricted to 6-8 nautical miles despite the 20 nautical miles agreed by the Israeli Government under the Oslo Accords and 12 miles following by the commitments by the Government of Israel under the Bertini Commitments. Limiting sea areas causes over-fishing and threatens the livelihoods of over 3,000 fishermen in Gaza who rely on fishing to support their families.
- Severe restrictions on agricultural inputs continue to delay recovery and rehabilitation efforts of land, greenhouses, nurseries, roads, wells and irrigation networks. The import ban on live animals constrains breeding efforts in the livestock sub sector and makes the market prices of red and white meat, including beef, lamb and chicken, unaffordable for the majority of consumers.

Shelter/Health/Nutrition/Coordination NTR