



FIELD UPDATE ON GAZA FROM THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

24 February – 2 March 2009, 1700 hours

While international donors gathered on 2 March for a conference in Sharm Al-Sheikh in Egypt to raise funds to help rebuild the Gaza Strip, aid agencies continued to experience restrictions and delays in delivering aid supplies to Gaza. Restrictions on food types, clothing and schoolbooks are being experienced daily. To date, reconstruction materials are still prohibited. Key crossings remain closed or partially closed.

In response to access constraints, humanitarian partners have prepared a joint framework of principles to guide the provision of humanitarian assistance to Gaza (“Framework for the Provision of Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza”). This Framework clarifies the minimum requirement to ensure an operating environment conducive to provide basic humanitarian assistance and addresses the access requirement for meeting initial early recovery needs. It is drawn on well-established international humanitarian principles. The Framework has been shared with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to ensure practical implementation.

During the reporting period, violent incidents in and around Gaza continued, with seven rockets fired towards Israel and four air-to-ground missiles fired on tunnels at the Gaza-Egyptian border, causing three Palestinian casualties. In addition, five Palestinians were killed in two tunnel collapses.

ACCESS INTO THE GAZA STRIP / CROSSINGS

Israeli authorities continue to limit the amount and range of goods allowed into the Gaza Strip. More than 80 percent of all goods currently allowed into Gaza are basic foods. A range of essential goods, including supplies and equipment needed for rebuilding, are not being allowed into the territory.

In the past week, 50 Early Childhood Development Kits and 57 boxes of children’s toys from UNICEF were prevented from being transported to Gaza by the Israeli authorities. According to COGAT, the Israeli civil-military liaison body, the toys were not a humanitarian priority.

The Logistics Cluster continues to negotiate with the Israeli authorities on behalf of the humanitarian community regarding transport of goods into Gaza. The Logistics Cluster continues to request clearance from COGAT for transportation of UNICEF stationery items, MAP UK medical equipment and FAO veterinary supplies.

On 26 February, nine trucks carrying pre-fabricated school buildings and 10,000 student kits were allowed into Gaza. On the same day, COGAT lifted the recent suspension of the import of macaroni, chickpeas and lentils. However, the 124 pallets of macaroni which have been held up in El Arish since 16 January and 30 metric tonnes of chickpeas which have been delayed since 5 February have still not been allowed into Gaza.

Between 24 February and 2 March, the Sufa crossings remained closed. The Rafah crossing was partially opened on 24 February. The Karni crossing also remained closed, except for the single conveyor belt which was operational on three out of six scheduled days. The Kerem Shalom crossing was open on five out of six scheduled days. The Nahal Oz fuel pipelines were open on five out of six scheduled days.

Between 24 February and 1 March, 393 truckloads, including 211 for aid agencies, entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing. 74 truckloads of grain were transferred into Gaza through the Karni conveyor belt. Over 337 patients were transferred through Rafah between 22 and 24 February. 326.5 tonnes of cooking gas and 1,766,650 litres of industrial fuel entered through the Nahal Oz pipelines. According to the Palestinian Gas Station Owners Association, these figures represent 22 percent of actual weekly needs for cooking gas and 65 percent of weekly needs for industrial fuel.

PROTECTION

According to the Independent Commission of Human Rights, legal access to detainees is currently not possible; since the destruction of known prisons during the hostilities, people are now being detained in unknown places.

Access to resources remains impossible in certain agricultural areas due to the unspecified and unclear expansion of the buffer-zone and the no-go zone. The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee reports that 18 to 20 percent of agricultural land remains inaccessible.

MINE ACTION

Briefings on unexploded ordnance safety for UN and NGO staff are ongoing. The inability to import specialist equipment and materials required to destroy or disarm ordnance, as well as the lack of a suitable area in which UXO can be stored or demolished, remain the key constraints to operations.

SHELTER

As of 2 March, one non-school UNRWA emergency shelter remains open in Jabalia, hosting one family. As of the end of February, UNRWA's assessment of refugee families with destroyed or damaged homes indicates that a total of 2,350 families need to have their home reconstructed, including 1,800 families whose homes were completely destroyed and 550 families whose houses were damaged beyond repair. In addition, 500 families have homes needing major repair; and 10,000 families have homes needing minor repair. These figures are likely to rise as the survey is still ongoing. UNDP cash distribution to families eligible for cash assistance has been interrupted due to the lack of available cash in Gaza. As soon as cash is available, the distribution will resume. Distribution of non-food items by various organizations is ongoing. Families staying in their damaged houses as well as affected families staying with host families continue to receive assistance. Priority needs include kitchen sets and materials for repairing/rebuilding houses.

HEALTH

According to ICRC's operational update of 26 February, certain drugs, including for cancer treatment, and certain types of X-ray films are still lacking. The stock of disposables is also dwindling. Electricity supplied to hospitals remains unreliable, as do backup generators.

Approximately 100 new amputees have been registered at the Artificial Limb and Polio Centre in Gaza City since mid-January, and 10 have started treatment, according to ICRC.

UNICEF remains concerned that the nutritional status and general health of children in Gaza is likely to deteriorate given the dependency of Gazan families on food aid and cash assistance, as well as the lack of access to clean tap water.

According to UNFPA, women in Gaza are in need of greater psychosocial support following the recent hostilities.

WATER AND SANITATION

Water and sanitation infrastructure remains in a hazardous state as essential materials such as pipes and spare parts continue to be prevented entry to Gaza. Thousands of people still without access to running water depend on water trucked to their homes. As of 2 March, the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), Gaza's water utility, reports that 50,000 people still do not have access to piped water and an additional 100,000 receive water approximately every 7-10 days, including in parts of Beit Hanoun, Jabalia, Gaza City and Rafah. This situation will not improve until the necessary materials are allowed into Gaza.

On 28 February, the NGO GVC entered a Brackish Water Desalination Plant into the Gaza Strip through Kerem Shalom crossing. This plant will provide 50 m³ of drinking water per hour which will benefit approximately 22,000 refugees in the Al Bureij camp.

FOOD SECURITY / AGRICULTURE

According to the ICRC operational update from 26 February, farming families make up some 27 percent of the population. Approximately 43 percent of farmland lies within the buffer zone imposed by Israel that extends up to one kilometre into Gaza. In addition to the regular military operations carried out in the buffer zone over the past 18 months, the recent hostilities dealt an additional blow to farmers as cultivated land was ruined. Many irrigation systems, water wells, warehouses and greenhouses were damaged or destroyed.

Most of the population relies on imported frozen poultry meat for animal protein owing to severe shortages of animal feed and heating gas for chickens since November. Sustaining a trend of unrestricted import and low prices is critical for revitalizing the animal production sub-sector and making animal protein more affordable for the population. The price of red meat remains unaffordable, at 65 NIS/kg compared with 60 NIS/kg in December, owing to the high loss of animals during the hostilities (6,281 cattle, sheep and goats according to a rapid needs assessment) and continued restrictions on live animal imports through commercial crossings. The so-called Buffer Zone - which would normally be used for grazing - remains inaccessible, causing herders additional hardship. Veterinary drugs and vaccines are also in short supply, which puts the animal population at risk of disease, and more importantly, poses a public health risk.

A FAO field and market survey conducted on 11 February 2009 found that many agricultural inputs are urgently needed, particularly fertilizers; seedlings; iron bars for animal shelters; plastic shelter covers; wheat for animals; warming gas, feeders and drinkers for poultry; and live animals. Moreover, materials such as cement, iron bars for water ponds and irrigation and water mainline pipes are severely needed to begin land and rural road rehabilitation/reconstruction. Without this critical first step, the resumption of the agricultural calendar will be difficult.

Fishermen and farmers continue to be affected, with one farmer injured by Israeli boats during the reporting period. Fishing is still restricted to three nautical miles from the coast, which prevents sufficient catches and limits profit. The damage inflicted on Rafah's fishing stores during the hostilities has nearly halted fishing activities in Rafah. Fishing nets, rope, tiding twine, gas mantles and floats are in short supply.

EDUCATION

Access restrictions to Gaza continue to hinder efforts to support education services. In addition to shortage of piped water in many schools and overcrowding, children are lacking education and recreation materials. School repairs, education supplies and psychosocial support for children remain a priority in the education sector. A school based psychosocial support technical group consisting of organizations interested in psychosocial programming in schools was formed to develop a framework and plan to meet the immediate psychosocial needs.

ELECTRICITY / FUEL

According to GEDCO, Gaza's power utility, the power deficit throughout the Gaza Strip as of 2 March remains at 19 percent. Ninety percent of the Gaza population receives intermittent electricity. The following scheduled power cuts remain in place, in addition to unscheduled power cuts: 4 hours of power cuts per day in Rafah, and 5 hours of power cuts per day in the rest of the Gaza Strip. According to GEDCO, 10 percent of the population does not receive electricity due to complete damage to the network in certain areas. These areas will not receive electricity until GEDCO receives the needed materials.

Transformers have still not been allowed into Gaza. The equipment has already been purchased but authorization from the Israeli authorities is needed to bring it into Gaza.

No petrol or diesel was allowed into Gaza during the week. Petrol and diesel were last allowed into Gaza via Nahal Oz for public use on 2 November 2008. According to the Gas Station Owners Association, no fuel has been transferred into Gaza through the tunnels under the Gaza-Egyptian border since 26 February. Most gas stations remain closed.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The Gaza Businessmen Association estimates damage to the industrial sector at over \$250 million. The Private Sector Coordination Council's (PSCC) preliminary damage assessment report dated 25 February highlights that more than 700 establishments claimed damage from the recent hostilities in Gaza (268 reported complete damage and 432 partial damage).

The industrial sector was the most affected, with 297 establishments damaged, causing losses of more than \$84 million, followed by the trade sector (including small shops/stores), which reported preliminary damages of about \$24 million. The construction materials sub-sector sustained an estimated \$27 million worth of damage - with 20 ready-mix concrete factories damaged (out of 29 available factories) - causing 70% loss to the sub-sector's potential capacity. An additional 39 construction-related establishments were damaged. Activities of the handicraft, textile, construction and paper sectors have completely halted and their establishments shut down due to severe damage and/or unavailability of raw materials.

Only 258 private sector establishments (out of more than 2,400 establishments in 2006) from the key sectors in the Gaza Strip are partially operating, employing around 1,878 workers (out of more than 65,000 workers in 2006).

PRIORITY NEEDS

Opening of crossings: All crossings into Gaza must be operational, and the amount and range of commodities allowed into the Gaza Strip need to be increased. The following items in Gaza are critically needed:

- *Spare parts and fuel* for the Power Plant, hospitals and water and sewage treatment facilities;
- *Construction materials* to rebuild destroyed schools, hospitals, clinics and homes.

Humanitarian access to Gaza: It is critical that full and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza be granted. International agencies continue to be denied access to Gaza.

Cash/liquidity: Although cash has entered the Gaza Strip, a constant influx is needed to reactivate the private sector and prevent increasing dependence on aid.