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Situation Report on the Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip – No. 6 8 January 2009

The following information is based on reports from member states, the UN Country Team for the occupied Palestinian territory, humanitarian partners and authorities involved in the humanitarian response.

1. General Overview

1. The humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate as the Israeli military operation in Gaza entered its thirteenth day. The number of casualties increased, humanitarian aid workers were hit by fire and despite a temporary unilateral suspension of military activities by Israel between 1300-1600 hrs (1100-1400 hrs GMT) on 7 and 8 January, access for the provision of humanitarian assistance to Gaza and within Gaza has been further constrained.

2. As at 1400 hrs GMT, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 758 Palestinian fatalities due to the fighting, including a high number of civilians (of whom 257 (34%) are children and 56 (7.4%) are women). At least 3,100 Palestinians had also been injured since 27 December, including a high number of civilians (of whom 1,080 (34.8%) are children and 452 (14.6%) are women). Mediciens Sans Frontiers (MSF) characterised the death toll as reaching “alarming proportions” and indicative of “extreme violence indiscriminately affecting civilians.”

3. Humanitarian aid workers continued to face insecurity and humanitarian operations were hit in three separate incidents during the day. A clearly marked UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) convoy was hit at 1400 hrs (1200 hrs GMT) on 8 January by three rounds of small arms, which hit one of the armoured vehicles. This occurred during the unilateral suspension of military activities by Israel. An ICRC-escorted convoy of 14 ambulances driving towards Rafah was hit by small arms fire, resulting in the injury of one person. Furthermore, during the morning of 8 January, a convoy came under fire at the Erez Crossing Point. One UNRWA contractor was shot and two were injured. The contractors worked for the only company cleared by Israel to transfer goods from crossings into Gaza, including cargo for WFP and UNRWA. The company decided to suspend all activities due to the current insecurity, which will effectively suspend all convoys within Gaza even if crossings are open, raising serious concerns for the delivery of essential goods in the coming days.

4. These incidents followed other recent incidents involving aid workers and UN installations in the last days. As a result, UNRWA has suspended all movements in Gaza as of 8 January and will resume movements only after concrete assurances of security are received from Israel. The UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), and UNRWA have conveyed their concerns to Israeli authorities about humanitarian access and incidents involving aid workers. They have asked for these incidents to be investigated.

5. Palestinian militants continued to fire rockets and mortar shells into Israel, resulting in moderate to light injuries; the number of rockets has not been confirmed. One IDF soldier was killed during the morning of 8 January. Furthermore, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon confirmed that at least three rockets were fired into the northern Israeli village of Nahariya during the morning of 8 January (in Israel), causing the possible injury of two people. The Government of Lebanon has condemned the attack. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) confirmed that they retaliated by firing five artillery shells into Lebanon. The UN Secretary General condemned the firing of rockets against Israel from southern Lebanon and reminded the parties of their obligation to fully adhere to Security Council resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah, and to respect the cessation of hostilities agreement.

6. The special situation room for the Israel Foreign Ministry and the Office of Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) was opened on 6 January and was created to find solutions to the challenges in getting humanitarian supplies into Gaza for the distribution of these supplies. Representatives of humanitarian agencies have been invited to allocate representatives to the special situation room to help coordination humanitarian operations between Israeli authorities and the humanitarian community. COGAT announced during the meeting that cash for organisations will be allowed into Gaza; increased NGO access into Gaza will be addressed quickly; and all requests for generators by the Coastal Municipals Water Utility have been approved. UN agencies will follow up on these announcements in the coming days.

7. On 6 January, in a statement to the Security Council the UN Secretary General highlighted the severity of the crisis in Gaza and the need for an immediate ceasefire that is durable and respected fully by all sides, while immediate humanitarian measures, including open crossings for humanitarian assistance, should be secured. The Security Council held a two-day high-level meeting earlier this week but has not yet come up with a ceasefire resolution. The 15-member body is meeting again on the evening of 8 January to continue efforts to bring an end to the conflict. The Human Rights council in Geneva will hold a special session on 9 January on the situation in the oPt.

2. Coordination and Humanitarian Response

Gaza Crossings

8. The Erez Crossing Point was open during the morning of 8 January, though the status of cargo intended to cross when the convoy was shelled is currently unknown.

9. The Karem Shalom crossing point was open on 8 January and 80.5 truckloads, including 34.5 for aid agencies (with food and medical supplies), were allowed entry to Gaza. It is not clear if the truckloads of supplies were transferred out of the crossing after the contractor with the authority to transfer goods suspended its operations. On 7 January at total of 78 truckloads, including 36 for aid agencies were allowed entry to Gaza. Additionally, three truckloads carrying nearly 135,000 litres of industrial fuel entered Gaza on 7 January.

10. Nahhal Oz pipeline into Gaza was open on 8 January and nearly 300,000 litres of industrial gas and 140 tonnes of cooking gas were pumped into Palestine. However, none of the fuel was collected due to security concerns.

11. Rafah crossing was open in 8 January and nearly eight truckloads of medical supplies crossed into Gaza and four medical cases crossed into Egypt.

2.1. Protection

12. As a critical part of protecting civilians and providing humanitarian assistance, access within Gaza remains severely constrained. A unilateral suspension of military activities by Israel came into effect between 1300-1600 hrs (1100 – 1400 hrs GMT) on 7 January, and allowed some of the civilian population to access basic supplies and medical services, and provided medics some access to the dead and wounded. UNICEF reported that they were able to distribute some supplies, including family water kits and health kits, to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict. UNRWA was also able to reach the Khalil Uweiyya School in Beit Hanoun where 570 people had been cut off from aid for four days, and provided food supplies and a medical team to those at the school. WFP also carried out food distributions through CHF. Fighting resumed as soon as the three-hour suspension of Israel's military activities ended on 7 January and the three hour suspension of military action by Israel came into affect again on 8 January.

13. In the Noon Briefing at the UN, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator gave an update on the humanitarian situation and highlighted that while the suspension of Israel's military activities for a three hour period was welcomed, the level of insecurity severely constricts the delivery of humanitarian assistance. MSF has noted that the suspension of Israel's military activities for a three hour period, "is largely inadequate for providing lifesaving assistance". Save the Children also reported that relatively few families left their homes during Israel's suspension of activities due to a lack of confidence in the suspension. UNRWA reported an inability to carry out essential movement, even during Israel's suspension of military activities.

14. After having been denied safe passage since requesting it on 3 January, the ICRC was able to access the Zaytun neighbourhood of Gaza City during Israel's three hour suspension of military activities on 7 January, which had earlier been hit by Israeli shelling. At least 15 corpses were discovered in two of the damaged houses, along with many other injured people. Eighteen injured people, 12 other people suffering from exhaustion and two corpses were evacuated. ICRC also reported that IDF soldiers, posted only 80 metres from the affected houses, ordered the rescue team to leave the area. Due to the delay in providing access to these affected populations, the ICRC noted that they believe the Israeli military failed to meet its obligations under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded.

15. Human Rights Watch released a statement on 8 January and highlighted that, "during the current fighting, Israel and Egypt have blocked the exit from Gaza of many severely wounded people in urgent need of medical treatment," which they called a serious concern.

16. World Vision stressed that the current operation is likely to inflict further trauma on children. They reported that a recent study illustrated that high rates of trauma among children in North Gaza, large induced by fear, already existed before the current military operation.

2.2. Food

17. WFP carried out food distributions on 8 January through CHF. WFP reported that 26 trucks with food stocks are stuck at the Kerem Shalom crossing due to the lack of capacity to transfer goods into Gaza after the only approved contractor to conduct these activities suspended activities. As at 1900 hrs (1700 hrs GMT), 120 trucks with food stocks were awaiting permission to cross through Kerem Shalom in Israel and Israeli authorities had not given permission or indicated that WFP would be allowed to send a convoy on 9 January.

18. Six out of ten UNRWA distribution centres distributed food on 7 January, though it was too dangerous for populations to access some of the distribution centres in Gaza City and North Gaza.

2.3. Health

19. On 8 January WHO reported that health services in Gaza are on the point of collapsing if steps to support and protect them are not taken immediately. As lifesaving supplies cannot reach those in need and access to care has been compromised, WHO has called for immediate improvement in the situation to make humanitarian health services accessible by the local people.

20. WHO reported on 7 January that is greatly concerned about the public health situation in Gaza. Disruptions in services have caused a break in vaccinations since 27 December, which could lead to outbreaks and epidemics. Only 29 of the 56 primary health care centres in Gaza were functioning as of 7 January, due to insecurity, and many have sustained damage.

21. Furthermore, only 25-30% of medical staff are reporting to work, due in part to movement restrictions, according to WHO. The medical staff working at facilities are exhausted, additional staff are required, and emergency rooms and intensive care units remain overstretched. Most Gaza city hospitals are relying on back-up generators, which require spare parts and have limited fuel.

2.4. Water and Sanitation

22. Many water wells and sewage pumps are still not functioning due to a lack of electricity, diminished fuel supplies to operate back-up generators and a lack of spare parts. The Gaza CMWU, Gaza's water utility, reported that despite the humanitarian cease-fire on 7 January, technicians were not able to repair the systems. Currently 500,000 people in Gaza have no running water, which is a significant improvement over yesterday (800,000 without running water) as fuel was delivered to several wells by UNRWA.

23. Due to a lack of fuel to pump out sewage, there are concerns that the Beit Lahiya and Sheikh Ajlan waste water treatment plants will overflow. Because water pipes are not being used, sewage is also leaking into and contaminating water pipes. This poses a serious risk of the spread of water-borne diseases.

2.5. Shelter and Non-Food Items

24. On 8 January, UNRWA was operating 27 shelters with over 19,800 displaced people. Water tanks and water are reportedly available at all shelters; however, UNRWA's stocks of NFIs in Gaza have been exhausted. On 7 January, the Israeli Air Force dropped leaflets over Rafah warning people to evacuate their homes in the Philadelphi corridor (south of Gaza City). Over 800 people left the city, many sought shelter with families and many more are expected to have gone to UNRWA shelters.

2.6. Infrastructure, Fuel and Electricity

25. Virtually all of Gaza remains without power. Though the power plant was turned on, damage to the power network is preventing areas from receiving electricity. According to GEDCO, all electrical lines from Israel have been fixed, except one, though the network needs to be repaired before the lines will function. Electricity has been restored to Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.

2.7. Early Recovery

26. The Early Recovery Cluster was activated in the field on 8 January. Preliminary discussion on early recovery will take place at the headquarters and field levels in the coming days.

3.0 International Assistance and Priority needs

3.1. Funding

27. The Humanitarian Country Team has re-visited projects proposed for the 2009 CAP (which appealed for over USD 462 million) to ensure that the projects, activities and priorities remained relevant to the ongoing emergency. At this stage, the budget of the CAP has been increased by over USD 67 million for a total appeal of over USD 529 million, and is subject to further changes. This includes the UNRWA Flash appeal for over USD 34 million (for additional food, cash assistance, shelter and fuel); an increase in the capacity of the Humanitarian Emergency Response Fund (HRF) (to quickly fund unpredicted emergency responses), and funding for WFP (for additional food and to cover costs of the newly-established logistics cluster which it is leading).

28. There is an immediate need for USD 101 million to address the current needs in Gaza. Priority sectors include: protection; shelter; food aid and food security; water and sanitation; agriculture; cash for work/assistance; education; health; and coordination and support services.

29. In total, as of 8 January, donors have already committed or pledged approximately USD 45 million (in funding or in-kind contributions) for projects in the Consolidated Appeal and approximately USD 39 million to projects outside of the appeal (<http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/pageloader.aspx?page=emergencyDetails&appealID=834>). This information was compiled by OCHA, based on the information provided by donors and appealing organisations.

3.2. Priority Needs

30. **Protection:** Urgent action is needed to restore an environment within Gaza that is conducive for the protection of civilians and respect of international humanitarian law.

31. **Access:** A sustained re-opening of all crossings into Gaza is required to meet assistance needs. Improved humanitarian access to Gaza is also required for humanitarian staff, particularly for NGO staff. Increased security and improved access within Gaza is essential for civilians to reach lifesaving services and for humanitarian actors to distribute assistance.

32. **Electricity & Fuel:** Much of the population of Gaza continues to live without electricity. Hospitals require fuel to run generators on which they rely; water and sanitation facilities require fuel to operate; and households and bakeries require cooking gas.

33. **Wheat grain:** Wheat grain is urgently needed for local bakeries and for humanitarian food distributions. 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, and is currently closed.

34. **Cash:** 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” program, salaries for staff and payments to suppliers.

35. This situation report, together with further information on ongoing emergencies, is also available on the OCHA Internet website at <http://reliefweb.int>. A copy of the Field Update from the Humanitarian Coordinator for the oPt can be found at:

http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_humanitarian_situation_report_2009_01_08_english.pdf

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