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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

Situation Report on the Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip – No. 9 12 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 Israeli military operation has entered its seventeenth day. On 10 January, leaflets were dropped on Gaza City, warning of an escalation of the operation. Israel has since deployed reservist units inside Gaza to support regular troops. With continued fighting, an increasing number of Palestinians are fleeing their homes to seek refuge with hosts or in shelters. The Palestinian casualty rate is also rapidly increasing. Continued air strikes are causing extensive damage to homes and public infrastructure while jeopardizing water, sanitation and medical services.
2. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) (as at 1600 hrs local time, 1400 hrs GMT), the number of Palestinian casualties had increased to 910 fatalities, including a high number of civilians (at least 75 women, 292 children and twelve medical personnel). At least 4,250 Palestinians have been injured, including at least 1,497 children and 626 women as of 12 January.
3. As at 1500 hrs (1300 hrs GMT), sixteen rockets had been fired into Israel from Gaza including five Grad rockets. Twenty-two rockets were fired from Palestine into Israel on 11 January. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that since 27 December there have been four Israeli fatalities and over 250 Israelis injured.
4. On 12 January, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution condemning Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip and accusing it of "grave" human rights violations against Palestinians (see Resolution attached). The Resolution includes the following: a decision, "to dispatch an urgent independent international fact-finding mission...to investigate all violations of international human rights law and International Humanitarian Law by the occupying power, Israel, against the Palestinian People..."; "requests the Secretary General of the United Nations to investigate the latest targeting of UNRWA facilities in Gaza"; and "requests the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to report on the violations of human rights of the Palestinian people by...Israel, through a) strengthening the field presence of the office in the occupied Gaza Strip; b) [submitting] periodic reports to the Human Rights Council on the implementation of this resolution..." Thirty-three states voted in favour of the resolution, thirteen abstained and one voted against the resolution.
5. The UN Secretary General will travel to the region during the week of 12 January to meet with leaders and advocate for the expedited implementation of Security Council Resolution 1860.

2.1 Coordination and Humanitarian Response

Gaza Crossings

6. Kerem Shalom crossing was open on 12 January: a total of 94 trucks entered Gaza through the crossing, including 57 trucks for humanitarian actors (carrying water and food supplies). On 11 January, 93.5 truckloads entered the crossing, including 55.5 truckloads for aid agencies. Cargo that had accumulated on the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, after truck drivers on the Palestinian side had temporarily halted activities due to insecurity, was cleared on 11 January.

7. Rafah crossing was open on 12 January: 23 international surgeons, three ambulances and eight truckloads with humanitarian supplies entered Gaza through the crossing. Four of these trucks included clothing, which was the first time that non-medical humanitarian supplies were allowed through the Rafah crossing. On 11 January, 18 patients exited Gaza via Rafah to Egypt.

8. According to the Logistics Cluster, the Karni conveyor belt was running on 12 January, and facilitated the delivery of 27 truckloads into Gaza. The Karni crossing had been closed over the past days, and is the only facility that can import the amount of grain required in Gaza at this time.

2.1. Protection

9. Insecurity continues to constrain access to civilians in need of medical care, as well as the distribution of humanitarian assistance. On 11 January, the ICRC stated that, “the big challenge [in Gaza] at the moment is to have access to the victims in such an unpredictable and dangerous context”. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) suspended activities in the Al Zeitoun and Al Atatra regions as of 11 January, after their ambulances were exposed to gunfire in those regions on 9 and 10 January. Two ambulance personnel were injured and one ambulance was damaged in these incidents. The PRCS further noted that only five of 135 recent attempts to coordinate access to affected areas were successful; however, “in the five cases [the PRCS was] not able to complete [the] humanitarian tasks because of the obstacles and the gunfire...”

10. On 12 January, there was a unilateral suspension of military activity by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) between 1000 -- 1300 hrs (0700-1000 hrs GMT).

11. On 11 January, citing the lack of safe spaces for children in Gaza, UNICEF expressed grave concern about the mental health of children who have endured over two weeks of conflict. It was highlighted that UNICEF teams are ready to be deployed to meet children’s psychosocial needs, as the situation allows.

2.2. Food

12. Due to shortages in wheat flour, all but 12 bakeries have stopped functioning, and those operating are relying on a loan of 300 MTs of flour from WFP, provided on 11 January. Food for infants and for malnourished children is not available, and fruit and vegetables are scarce because farmers have been unable to harvest due to insecurity and transport of products from the south has been constrained.

13. Humanitarian agencies continue to face obstacles to the distribution of food aid within Gaza. The three-hour lull is not sufficient for food distributions; to meet urgent needs, agencies continue distributions outside of the lull, thereby exposing them to serious security risks. On 11 January, UNRWA distributed 2,129 food parcels for hardship cases, large families and households that had been stranded for two days, in addition to normal food distributions. UNRWA distributed 92 MTs to 1,273 families and conducted an emergency distribution of 4,200 kilos of bread.

2.3. Health

14. Hospital emergency rooms and staff are severely overstretched due to the high number of wounded Palestinians who require treatment. In particular, WHO has warned that an increased number of patients need to be evacuated (through the Rafah crossing or otherwise) in order to free up space in the Shifa Hospital intensive care unit. On 12 January, the PRCS also noted that, “many wounded people are dying as a result of not accessing urgent medical attention”.

15. On 12 January, the ICRC surgical team in Shifa hospital confirmed an increase in the number of children arriving at the emergency room. Furthermore, the ICRC reported that according to the Palestinian MoH on 12 January, almost 50 percent of all wounded people currently arriving at Gaza hospitals are women and children.

16. Primary health care also continues to deteriorate: the World Health Organization reported that 34 out of 56 primary health care centres are open, but there is a 90 percent reduction in visits because the centres cannot be reached due to insecurity.

2.4. Water and Sanitation

17. Due to insecurity and a lack of spare parts, none of the damage sustained by the water and wastewater networks has been repaired. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) received initial reports that the Gaza City Wastewater Treatment Plant had leaked 200,000 cubic metres of wastewater, due to damage to the embankment of one of the treatment ponds. Security permitting, assessments will be carried out to confirm the situation at the plant in the coming days. The overflow of wastewater poses serious public health concerns related to the spread of water borne diseases.

18. The PRCS will distribute 500 UNICEF family kits for water purification and 29,952 bottles of drinking water (1.5 litres each), which entered Gaza on 11 January.

19. On 11 January, UNRWA provided 41,000 litres of fuel to municipalities for solid waste collection. The Gaza Municipality estimates that 3,000-4,000 tonnes of rubbish have not been collected throughout the Gaza Strip since 3 January.

2.5. Shelter and Non-Food Items

20. The number of people seeking refuge in UNRWA shelters continues to rise: as of the evening of 11 January, UNRWA was accommodating 28,116 people in 36 emergency shelters. During 11 January, the number of displaced persons seeking shelter increased by 2,240, which was the largest increase reported thus far in the Gaza and Kahn Yunis Governorates. To reduce overcrowding in existing shelters, five additional shelters were opened on 11 January and two more were opened on 12 January. Shelters in the North Gaza and Gaza Governorates continue to face a shortage of non-food items.

21. For those who remain in their homes, a shortage of shelter materials, such as plastic sheeting, is constraining the repair of damage, which is necessary to provide protection against the cold.

2.6. Infrastructure, Fuel and Electricity

22. Approximately 40 percent of the North Gaza, Gaza and Middle Area Governorates are now receiving power for 8-12 hours per day after the repair of localized damage on 11 and 12 January. GEDCO is awaiting confirmation for safe passage to repair other localized damage and to repair the three damaged electricity lines coming from Israel.

23. On 12 January, UNRWA escorted five trucks of industrial fuel (235,000 litres) to the Gaza Power Plant; 360,000 litres of industrial fuel remain at the Palestinian side of the Nahal Oz pipeline and UNRWA is awaiting confirmation from the Israeli authorities for safe passage to collect this fuel.

3.0 International Assistance and Priority needs

3.1. Funding

24. 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).

25. There is an immediate need for USD 95.6 million to respond to 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.

26. In total, as of 12 January, donors have already committed or pledged over USD 55 million (in funding or in-kind contributions) for projects in the Consolidated Appeal and approximately USD 49 million to projects outside of the appeal (<http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/pagelader.aspx?page=emergencyDetails&appealID=834>). This information was compiled by OCHA, based on the information provided by

donors and appealing organisations. All humanitarian partners including donors and recipient agencies are encouraged to inform FTS of cash and in-kind contributions to: fts@reliefweb.int.

3.2. Priority Needs

27. **Protection:** Compliance with international humanitarian law is essential to enhance security for civilians within Gaza, allow civilians freedom of movement to reach lifesaving services, and for humanitarian actors to distribute assistance.

28. **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.

29. **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.

30. **Wheat grain:** Wheat grain is urgently needed for local bakeries and for humanitarian food distributions.

31. **Cash:** Cash has still not entered the Gaza Strip and is urgently needed, including for the Palestinian authority to pay civil servants, 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. The Palestinian Monetary Authority requested approval from Israel for a cash transfer of NIS 243 million (USD 62.9 million) and USD 16 million from Palestinian banks in the West Bank to their branches in Gaza.

32. 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

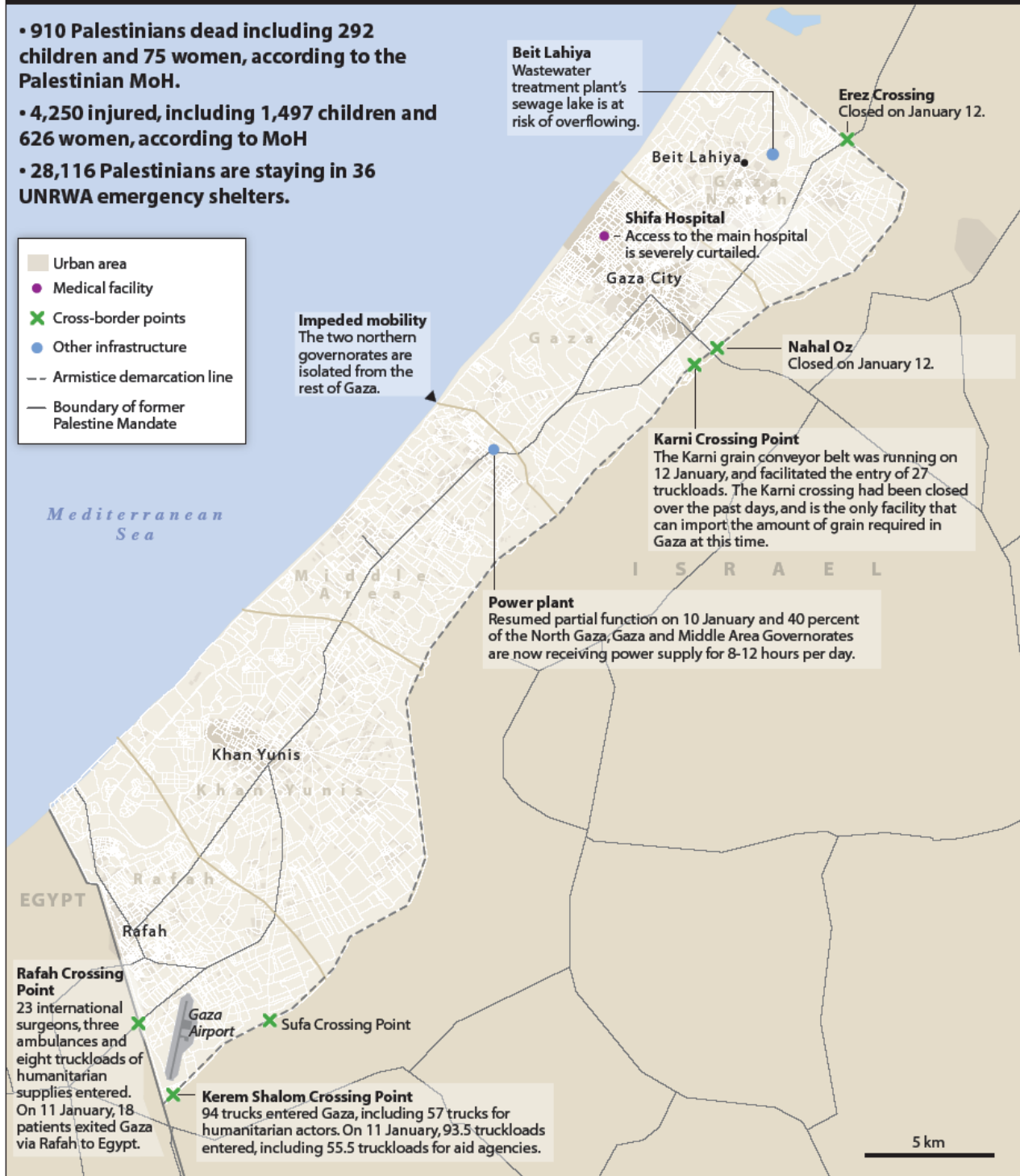
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Situation in Gaza Strip (as of 12 Jan 2009)

- 910 Palestinians dead including 292 children and 75 women, according to the Palestinian MoH.
- 4,250 injured, including 1,497 children and 626 women, according to MoH
- 28,116 Palestinians are staying in 36 UNRWA emergency shelters.

Urban area
 Medical facility
 Cross-border points
 Other infrastructure
 Armistice demarcation line
 Boundary of former Palestine Mandate



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