

Gaza Crisis, UNICEF oPt Information Note

3 February 2009

General overview

Casualties:

Children account for roughly a third of the dead and wounded. As reported by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as at 31 January the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) figures are: 1,380 Palestinians dead, including 431 children and 112 women. This number does not include those who died due to lack of access to regular health care (including obstetric care and treatment for chronic diseases). The number of Gazans injured stands at 5,380, of whom 1,872 are children and 800 are women. Seven school children were also killed in recent incidents since the ceasefire. Four Israeli civilians were killed and 183 injured.

Displacement:

Thousands of Gazans remain homeless, although the exact number of displaced people is unknown. As of 2 February, three UNRWA shelters remain open for 288 displaced people. Most people have left the shelters to stay with relatives or other hosts. An assessment in 45 localities found that 71,657 people were staying with host families - many of whom face shortages of food, blankets, mattresses, plastic sheeting, kitchen kits, hygiene kits, water tanks, clothing and tents.

Electricity:

Most of Gaza is receiving only intermittent electricity. While the main power lines have been repaired, some lines providing electricity directly to households are still not working. Due to the shortage of fuel supplies, the Gaza Power Plant has had to increase its schedule of blackouts.

Access:

Full and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza is critical. International agencies have faced unprecedented denial of access to Gaza since 5 November. Humanitarian access continues to be unreliable and needs to be granted every day without restriction. The difficulties facing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in accessing Gaza, and the unpredictable procedures are hindering efforts to address the humanitarian crisis.

The level of truckloads of aid allowed into Gaza daily is insufficient to meet the needs. The Israeli authorities have assured the humanitarian community that Kerem Shalom would be improved to allow 150 trucks per day. However, for the most part, capacity has not exceeded 120 truckloads. Only a very restricted list of items is being allowed in.

Unexploded ordnance:

Explosive remnants of war are limiting the access of aid workers to certain areas. UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other agencies continue to highlight the danger posed by unexploded ordnance (UXOs) following the deaths of two children by UXOs on 20 January. All UNRWA schools have been checked and cleared of UXOs. Eight of the 32 UNICEF-supported government schools were cleared as of 28 January. Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technicians are clearing areas throughout Gaza, and are prioritizing UNICEF-supported clinics, as well as requests from UNRWA to clear residential areas.

SRSG CAAC

Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), arrived on 2 February to conduct a visit to Gaza and southern Israel, ascertain first-hand the impact of the recent conflict on children, meet with relevant stakeholders, and advocate for the protection of children.

Flash Appeal

The inter-agency Gaza Flash Appeal was launched on 2 February for a total of \$613 million to support 1.4 million Gazans over a nine-month period. UNICEF has requested a total of \$34.5 million for activities in the sectors of child protection, psycho-social and mental health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, and health.

Health

Primary care services, such as antenatal care and immunizations have resumed in 50 Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) clinics. UNICEF and UNRWA have resumed vaccination programmes in all shelters.

In coordination with WHO, UNICEF concluded a rapid assessment of hospitals, Primary Health Care (PHC) facilities, health related NGO facilities, MoH premises / Gaza, damages to health supplies and ambulances, and casualties in health staff. Some 16 hospitals and 28 primary health care clinics were destroyed or damaged during the conflict (WHO).

Hospitals and much of their medical equipment is in need of urgent repairs, already deteriorated by the Israeli blockade of Gaza for over a year and a half. However, repairs are dependent on the ability to import spare parts into Gaza. Some medical supplies, including heavy painkillers and medicines for cancer patients and patients with bleeding disorders, are not available (ICRC).

As reported by OCHA and Handicap International, over half of the 5,380 injured during the conflict may suffer life-long impairment, exacerbated by the inability of rehabilitation workers to provide early intervention.

While hospital report caseloads have decreased, hospitals continue to treat large numbers of patients requiring intensive care. Chronically-ill patients are returning for routine care and treatment, as well as for regular services such as elective surgery.

Education

UNICEF continues to provide essential educational equipment and materials to re-establish learning and recreational activities, create safe environments, and provide a sense of normalcy for children. UNICEF has provided 130 school-in-a-box kits, including items such as pens, pencils, and exercise books for 12,000 children, 84 recreational kits targeting 6,720 children, 6 school tents, 42 maths and 42 science kits for 4,200 children in all six districts of Gaza.

All government and UNRWA schools re-opened on 24 January. On 28 January, student attendance in UNRWA's 221 schools was 96 percent and teacher attendance was 99 percent. Reports as of 26 January indicate the overall figure of attendance is at 80 per cent of pupils.

OCHA, quoting the Ministry of Education (MoE), reported that 7 schools in northern Gaza were badly damaged and approximately 157 primary schools were partially damaged. All schools in Gaza were closed from 27 December to 24 January causing approximately 540,000 school children to miss out on almost one month of classes.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

UNICEF distributed 200 basic family kits and 3 collapsible water tanks in southern and central Gaza, as well as 50 family hygiene kits for 50 families in Gaza City and northern Gaza between 29 January and 1 February.

UNICEF has also provided over 66,000 bottles of water to approximately 20,000 people. UNICEF has also sponsored the distribution of 400 hygiene kits between 28 and 29 January, as well as 1,000 hygiene kits on 21 January, and 650 kits on 20 January.

Although approximately 70 percent of water wells are functioning, an estimated 500,000 people remain without access to safe and adequate water supply (OCHA). The Gaza City Wastewater Treatment Plant has been partially repaired, and wastewater is no longer leaking into agricultural fields or into the streets of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia.

According to the Gaza's Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) report, damages to water infrastructure and facilities amount to \$6 million. The CMWU continues to work on urgent maintenance of water and waste water systems, although it is unable to complete the repairs without the entry of needed spare parts. UNICEF has provided financial support for repairs.

Nutrition

A three-month breastfeeding campaign was launched on 2 February to strengthen the capacity of 80 health workers. Trainees will include physicians, nurses, midwives, and field workers. Prior to the crisis, only 15 per cent of newborns were exclusively breastfed (OCHA).

UNICEF is supporting a local NGO to care for 900 children through its therapeutic programme for severely acute malnourished children. UNICEF is also supporting four therapeutic feeding centres, and has provided micronutrient supplies, including Vitamin A and D for 50,000 children.

The number of people in Gaza dependent on food assistance is now at 1.3 million or 91 per cent of the population, including 714,168 children (OCHA). Shops and markets continue to offer limited food supplies; prices have doubled or tripled since before 27 December. The shortage of currency and sharp increases in food prices make it extremely difficult to obtain food. Local food production has been severely affected by the conflict, with many farms destroyed. Almost all of Gaza's 13,000 households are dependent on farming, herding, and fishing (FAO).

Child Protection

UNICEF continues to raise awareness of the danger posed by UXOs through radio messages broadcast on different local radio stations. UNICEF has also distributed 75,000 leaflets on protection from UXOs; 200,000 copies of Mine Risk Education (MRE) awareness material are being reprinted for distribution to schools and family centers.

UNICEF partner psycho-social teams have conducted 450 initial support visits to households, health facilities and shelters this week. 50,000 copies of child protection leaflet are being reprinted as a guide for parents on how to assist their children to cope with stress.

Adolescent Development/Participation (ADAP)

21 out of 28 UNICEF-supported adolescent learning centres are now operational with daily recreational activities. Four centres in Gaza have been identified as family centres that will provide a broader range of activities.

Assessment of damages to 28 adolescent friendly learning centers has continued. Reports from Ma'an Development Center and Tamer Institute show that some of the centers are not safe as they are yet to be cleared from UXOs. Two centers continue to be used as shelters.

Supplies

No UNICEF truck went to Gaza today, as planned educational supplies were not allowed in.

On 2nd February, a UNICEF truck with vaccines, including hepatitis B, polio, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, and anti-tuberculosis, arrived to Gaza. On 1 February, UNICEF sent in 6 trucks with high energy biscuits, medicine, basic family water kits, micronutrient tablets and 3,780 blankets. A UNICEF truck entered Gaza on 30 January containing medical supplies (sodium chloride). Five UNICEF trucks entered Gaza on 29 January containing 3,780 blankets and medical supplies. The cumulative number of trucks with UNICEF supplies at 41 since the emergency started.