



SITUATION REPORT

Gaza Strip, 7- 24 August, 3pm

Palestinian death toll reaches 202 as 'Operation Summer Rains' extends into its tenth week

The nearly two-month long Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip continues to exact a heavy toll on the 1.4 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. Two hundred and two (202) Palestinians, including 44 children have been killed since 28 June, when 'Operation Summer Rains' (the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) name for the offensive) began. One IDF soldier has been killed and 26 Israelis injured in the same period.

Thousands of Palestinians have been forced to flee their homes due to repeated ground incursions and intensive shelling by the IDF. Since 28 June, the Israel Air Force (IAF) launched at least 267 air strikes attacks on the Gaza Strip. Only a limited amount of humanitarian aid has reached the Gaza Strip in the last ten days following the complete closure of main Karni crossing point. However, according to WFP, all food commodities are available in the market although there is a shortage of milk powder due to the closure of the crossings.

Approximately 120 Palestinian structures including houses, workshops and greenhouses have been destroyed and another 160 damaged by the Israeli military since the beginning of the current operation. According to UNDP, electricity networks and bridges have been the hardest hit. UNDP estimates the cost to the electricity networks at US\$ 1.8 million. Destruction of civilian infrastructure, including the Gaza Power Plant, remains un-repaired, leaving more than a million people with only limited access to power and water.

The increasingly unpredictable and volatile atmosphere in which the UN and other humanitarian agencies are now operating in the Gaza Strip was illustrated by the kidnapping of two international journalists ten days ago by a previously unknown group of Palestinian militants.

The IDF operation was launched three days after Palestinian militants attacked an IDF observation post at Kerem Shalom and captured one IDF soldier. Violence had been on the increase prior to this attack. Two IDF soldiers and two Palestinian militants were also killed in the attack and four other IDF soldiers injured. Israel has stated that it would continue its operations until its soldier is released and Palestinian militants cease firing rockets towards Israel.

Key developments since the last Situation Report on 7 August¹:

- Eighteen (18) Palestinians were killed, two of them children, and 87 injured since 8 August. One IDF soldier has been injured in the same period.
- No humanitarian aid has passed through Karni crossing since 15 August which has been closed for security reasons according to the IDF. On 23 August, Sufa crossing opened as an alternative entry point for humanitarian aid and food supplies.
- No Palestinians were allowed to leave the Gaza Strip either into Israel or across to the West Bank; only a limited amount of commercial goods have left the Gaza Strip and the import of construction materials vital to the rebuilding of infrastructure continued to be denied.
- Two international journalists were kidnapped in Gaza city on 14 August. A previously unknown militant group calling itself the "Holy Jihad Brigades" claimed responsibility and set a deadline of 26 August for the release of Muslim prisoners in the USA in exchange for their captives. Government workers have gone on strike in protest at the non-payment of PA salaries. Gaza school teachers are also threatening not to turn up for the new school year which begins on 2 September.

¹ This is the tenth Situation Report issued by OCHA since June 2006. The previous reports were published on 21, 27, 30 of June, 4, 6, 12, 18 of 27 July and 7 August.

Developments in detail:

Military operations

- The number of incursions declined during the reporting period, although IDF artillery shelling into open areas of the Gaza Strip and IAF air strikes on houses belonging to alleged militants has continued. The IDF has continued the practice of warning families by telephone to evacuate their residence prior to an air strike. This practice continues to result in the repeated evacuation of entire neighbourhoods forcing Palestinian residents to abandon their property and personal belongings in panic; in some cases, strikes never take place.
- The number of artillery shells fired by the IDF decreased in the last few weeks. Since 9 August, a total of approximately 185 artillery shells have been fired compared to an average of 200-250 per day in previous periods. Since 28 June, Palestinian militants have fired on average six homemade rockets per day into Israel, injuring 11 Israelis. However, the number of homemade rockets fired has also decreased in the last few weeks.
- Between 22 – 23 August, the IDF entered the eastern section of Gaza City near Karmi crossing and the area of Khuzaa conducting house-to-house searches. Search and arrest operations were also recorded in the areas of Nahal Oz (23 August) and Beit Hanoun industrial area (16-17 August).
- IDF incursions with tanks and bulldozers took place also in Al Yahuddiya (18 and 21 August), As Shoka (15 August) and Abu Al Ajeen area (14 August) resulting in land levelling and the demolition of 10 buildings.

Crossing points and humanitarian access

- Erez crossing remains partially open to diplomats and medical cases with permits. No Palestinian workers have been allowed through since 12 March. Attacks on IDF observation posts at Erez took place on 15 and 18 August.
- Karmi crossing, the principal goods terminal, has remained closed since 15 August for all consignments, including humanitarian aid. UNRWA has reported today that the shortages of food, fuel and construction supplies are jeopardising every element of their operations in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA has 123 empty containers waiting to leave Gaza; 13 full containers have been cleared in Ashdod port but are unable to enter the Gaza Strip due to the closure. UNRWA reports "it requires urgently 2,000 tonnes of cement for upgrading and reconstruction of critical infrastructure (health centres and schools)". The Municipality of Gaza requires urgently 30 truckloads of pipes to improve the sewage system.
- Rafah remains closed for regular movement but was open on 10, 11 and 19 August for limited movement. According to EU BAM, over 6,600 people crossed into Egypt and 310 people entered the Gaza Strip on these three days.

- Sufa opened on 23 August for the import of humanitarian aid and food supplies. PalTrade reports that 56 trucks loaded with 649 tonnes of different food commodities crossed between 3am and 7:30pm on 23 August. Sufa remained open on 24 August.
- The fishing industry has been paralysed by the complete ban imposed by the IDF on fishing grounds off the Gaza Strip for over 50 days. On 14 August, the General Syndicate of Marine Fishers requested the assistance of the international community to support the needs of the fishermen and their families – there are almost 3,000 licensed fishermen in the Gaza Strip, most support sizeable families. Assistance was requested specifically in view of the new school year to cover the extra expense for clothes, stationary and other school-related needs.

Electricity

- No developments have been reported for the urgent repairs needed to the Gaza Power Plant. Currently, the remaining electricity available from Israel (approximately 57% of daily supply) is being shared among the 1.4million people of the Gaza Strip. Gazans receive on average between six and eight hours of electricity per day and for most families living in urban areas two to three hours of water per day.

Water and sanitation

- Intervention and coordination for the urgent issue of the Beit Lahiya Waste Water Treatment Plant were discussed in a technical meeting held on 23 August between the IDF, OCHA and the Palestinian staff responsible for the plant. The plant needs urgent repair to prevent the overflow of sewage onto neighbouring towns.
- The new Japanese-funded employment generation programme for solid waste management implemented by UNDP will create approximately 200,000 workdays over a period of 6 months.
- UNDP has committed US\$ 80,000 to procure spare parts for the Coast Municipal Water Utility (CMWU) which reports a general shortage in spare parts due to the closure of Karmi.
- ICRC has procured 14 generators of different sizes with 12 to be used in the water and wastewater sector based on needs assessed by the CMWU.
- UNRWA is in the fourth round of dispensing fuel for solid waste disposal across the Gaza Strip.

Fuel

- The Nahal Oz energy pipelines remained partially open for imports of fuel, except for August 9 when it was closed for a full day.

Health

- Data provided by UNRWA shows an upward trend in the number of children consultations for diarrhea, a reflection

of a possible decline in water quality and food safety. This problem is particularly acute in Northern Gaza and Rafah districts where a 200% increase, from March to June 2006, has been registered – well above the seasonal variation increase of 40%.

- The number of permits requested by patients for referral to Israel remains low as a result of the new criteria for passage introduced by the IDF after 25 June. Only patients in very critical conditions are considered eligible. Cancer patients have started to obtain permits since the last week of July.

Food

- Merchants have resumed selling goods on credit to employees who have paid part of their debts.
- According to the latest WFP market update, the price of vegetables is likely to rise again due to increased irrigation costs (use of generators to compensate power cuts), the loss of loans, land levelling during IDF incursions and the inflated price of imported fertilizers and other agricultural utilities.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) is in the process of distributing the July/August allocation of food aid to the 80,181 persons falling under the WFP Social Hardship Cases programme. The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) is preparing to register “new poor” beneficiaries for the second phase of distributions.

Shelter and land

- Forty-seven (47) families (340 persons), including more than 100 children, remain temporarily sheltered in a UNRWA school in Rafah after fleeing IDF shelling in the southern area of As Shoka and Al Tanour Quarters. UNRWA is supporting these people with food and water while UNICEF has provided baby hygiene kits and ten indoor recreational kits. At the peak of the incursion, nearly 3,000 people were being assisted. Most have been helped to move into more suitable accommodation following a relocation allowance offered by UNRWA.
- On 9 August, UNRWA closed the three temporary shelters in Jabalia used to shelter families who fled their houses in Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya as a result of IDF shelling.
- According to the Mayor of As Shoka, the IDF incursion into the area levelled most of the agricultural land, demolished all the greenhouses and destroyed water and electricity networks. In the fields that were not damaged, crops have been lost as Palestinians have not been able to work the land. Fifteen per cent of all agricultural land in the Gaza Strip was in the As Shoka area.
- In response to a request from Beit Hanoun Municipality, three UNDP engineers have been seconded for a period of three months to assist in the assessment of needs and in the preparation of projects.

Coordination

- Since 25 June, UN agencies, the ICRC and humanitarian NGOs have held regular coordination meetings. During the reporting OCHA facilitated on 10 August the visit of the deputy Foreign Minister of Norway to the Kami terminal, the Gaza power plant as well as members of the UN community in Gaza for a briefing on the humanitarian situation.

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