gaza situation report

a weekly update from unrwa

weekly update – 12 January 08.00hrs –19 January 08.00hrs | issue 127

the next update will be issued on Wednesday 27 January 2016

- During the reporting week, UNRWA launched its US$ 817 emergency appeals for Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) – both contexts that continue to experience the relentless effects of conflict, occupation and blockade. In the oPt, Palestine refugees are exposed to the lasting consequences of an occupation now approaching 50 years and a nine-year -long blockade, which define every aspect of their lives. While in the year 2000, roughly 80,000 people in Gaza were reliant on humanitarian assistance, the figure has risen to over 900,000 today. The presence of UNRWA, its operational capacity and the courage of its staff will enable the Agency to preserve and where possible expand its response to critical needs. In the oPt, the response in 2016 will particularly focus on the needs of Palestine refugees exposed to displacement and home demolitions, as well as on reconstruction efforts in Gaza. In Syria, UNRWA will, in 2016, run one of the largest cash assistance programmes in an active conflict zone. It will also be an essential provider of innovative education programmes benefitting hundreds of thousands of Palestinian and Syrian children, including by means of distance-learning material and a dedicated Gaza-based satellite television channel - UNRWA TV.

- One year after the summer hostilities of 2014, more than 7,000 explosive remnants of war (ERW) are estimated to remain in the Gaza Strip. Only 30 per cent of ERW has been identified and removed. The remaining 70 per cent pose a threat to the population of Gaza, especially children and adults who work on agricultural land littered with ERW. Since the beginning of last summer's hostilities, 16 people have been killed and 90 wounded, including 38 children, due to contact with these unexploded remnants. With the support from the Italian Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, UNRWA and the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) will conduct a wide-range of outreach activities on safety and risk education on ERW. Further, UNRWA will also provide training opportunities to its staff, especially those working on the front line, including social workers, engineers and approximately 8,000 UNRWA teachers. They will be trained by UNMAS on how to recognize, demarcate and signal the presence of ERW safely. The teachers will pass on their knowledge to the approximately 251,000 UNRWA students across the Gaza Strip. In addition to an UNMAS awareness film, which has already been broadcast, the UNRWA satellite channel (UNRWA TV) will produce short films to raise awareness on the correct procedures for identifying and safely responding to ERW contaminations. The educational films will be broadcast on UNRWA TV and can be viewed on YouTube, benefiting also millions of people at risk outside of Gaza.

- The UNRWA Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP) promotes the development and self-reliance of less advantaged members of the Palestine refugee community – especially women, children, persons with disabilities or the elderly – through a wide-range of activities. During the month of December – among many other activities - the RSSP Social Intervention Unit (SIU) for example succeeded to enrol four children from Jabalia, northern Gaza, into the SOS Village (social centre) in Rafah, southern Gaza, to prevent them from the danger of homelessness. The SIU also assisted social intervention families with assistance ranging from the provision of cash assistance to non-food items (such as diapers or clothes) and with workshops for women on topics like "how to protect children from sexual harassment", "family violence" or "stress release." In addition, in December 732 persons with disabilities benefited from special educational services and 393 children benefited from integration services offered by the six RSSP-supported Community-Based Rehabilitation Centres (CBRC) located across the Gaza Strip. CBRCs also provide persons with disabilities with assistive devices, such as wheel chairs or hearing aids: in December, the CBRCs in Deir El Balah (central Gaza) and Jabalia (northern Gaza) provided 78 persons with disabilities with such devices. Furthermore, through Women Programme Centres (WPCs), RSSP provides refugees with social and recreational activities, legal aid, psychological counselling or awareness-raising sessions on community-relevant topics such as early marriage or adolescent health. WPCs across Gaza also cooperate with the Gaza-based Tamer Institute for Community Education in implementing the Family Centre Project which includes discussions and workshops on nutrition, personal hygiene or winter diseases, targeting mostly women and children. Under this project, in December in Deir El Balah, 120 women enjoyed training on "Health and Safety" and 250 children were able to participate in a course on photography, story writing and communication. Lastly, in December, 29 children from all areas of Gaza participated in a three-day RSSP initiative that included awareness-raising sessions on the concept of child protection and children rights.

- UNRWA in Gaza does not only provide emergency intervention measures in conflict-related situations, but also for families affected by natural disasters. In regards to the winter with its regular storms, flooding and cold temperatures UNRWA has made efforts to develop mechanisms to enhance its responsiveness and the quick provision of assistance for affected beneficiaries. In 2015, the Agency assisted 6,486 refugee families affected by natural disasters with the provision of non-food items – such as mattresses, blankets, nylon rolls, and hygiene and cleaning sets – as part of its winterization campaign. UNWRA also provides temporary shelter assistance for beneficiaries affected by natural disasters.

- UNRWA is committed to strengthening leadership, management and staff in departments and programmes across the Agency, as they work to serve Palestine refugees. During the reporting week, the Agency continued the implementation of its Pilot Leadership Initiative, launched in spring 2015, which aims at training and empowering senior UNRWA leaders through theoretical and practical sessions, including personalized coaching sessions. On 18 and 19 January, the Agency organized a two-day session on ethics leadership for all Pilot Leadership Initiative participants, led by the Chief of the UNRWA Ethics Office. The training focused on leading with integrity and provided theoretical and practical information and exercises on ethical role models, ethical leadership, self-assessments, principles and theoretical approaches, and ethical team work approaches.

- The Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, participated in a regional conference on "The role of the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Promoting and Protecting Human Rights in the Arab Region," held in Doha, Qatar, on 13 and 14 January. In light of the declining respect for human rights at a domestic, regional and international level the conference looked at the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in addressing violations of such patterns and aimed at identifying the appropriate responses of the international human rights mechanism including its structural and technical components in promoting and respecting human rights in the Arab region. Seen as an open opportunity for interaction between State delegations, national human rights institutions and humanitarian and civil society organizations, the conference included a specific objective to assess the state of cooperation between Arab states and the UN human rights mechanism, to discuss and create a common understanding on thematic human rights priorities in the region including freedom of expression and association, human rights

education, and response to regional basic human rights issues in the context of war and conflict and how the OHCHR efforts in advancing human rights can be supported. Approximately 200 persons were present at the conference, among them human rights officers at Foreign Affairs and Justice ministries in the region – including the Director of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights Mr. Ammar Duweik - representatives of human rights or legal committees in Arab parliaments and advisory (Shura) councils, UN representatives, members of civil society organisations, researchers or representatives of regional organizations such as the Arab League.

- During the reporting week, Makarim Wibisono, the UN Special Rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territory, announced his resignation, due to Israel's failure to grant him access to the areas he is tasked with monitoring, as the UN reported this week. "I took up this mandate with the understanding that Israel would grant me access, as an impartial and objective observer," he stated, and added: "unfortunately, my efforts to help improve the lives of Palestinian victims of violations under the Israeli occupation have been frustrated every step of the way." In his statement Mr. Wibisono also said that that throughout his tenure, the Government of the State of Palestine cooperated fully with the mandate. The former Indonesian diplomat had taken up the post as special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory in June 2014. In his recent reports, Mr. Wibisono had voiced concern at Israeli raids against the Hebron-based Youth Against Settlements in the occupied West Bank, at the high level of clashes in the city, where Palestinians live in close proximity to a large settler population, and at the blockade around the Gaza strip, which imposes severe restrictions on Palestinian movement, imports and exports. "The bottom line remains that, if Gaza is to recover from the damage wrought by multiple rounds of hostility and a shattered economy, the blockade must be lifted. The people deserve help and realization of their human rights, not collective punishment," he said in June 2015.

- Shelter update: A comprehensive shelter update will be provided in the situation report issued on Wednesday 27 January.

General

Operational environment: The renowned Carnegie Endowment for International Peace research centre published an article describing the dire socio-economic realities in Gaza and its impact on the political landscape. According to a recent public opinion poll, as the article states, the overall level of satisfaction with conditions in the Gaza Strip stands at 15 per cent: **"**A rise in public protests and strikes reflect a growing sense of frustration over the economic situation, the ongoing energy crisis, the rising taxes reportedly imposed by Hamas, and the unresolved salary crisis for Gaza's public employees," explains the research centre.

Living conditions in Gaza continue to be made worse by the electricity schedule currently on a "between 4 and 8 hours on" and "12 hours off" schedule, as also reported by Al Jazeera. The ongoing electricity crisis often disproportionately affects women who traditionally spend the most time inside their homes, as Oxfam states in a recent publication.

Over the course of the period under review, there were-ongoing protests in support of Al Aqsa mosque and developments in the West Bank (see Summary of Major Incidents), demonstrations by protestors demanding the allocation of UNRWA housing units in the Rafah re-housing project, solidarity demonstrations in for West Bank journalist Mohammad Al Qeeq who went on hunger strike in an Israeli jail, and protests against electricity cuts and against the closure of Rafah crossing

On 14 January, a 45-year old Palestinian man reportedly committed suicide in his house in Nuseirat camp, central Gaza. The background of the incident is unclear.

UNRWA's response

UNRWA Health Centre reaches out to the community to improve refugee women's health through antenatal care services



25-year old Palestine refugee Nihaya Al Qidra is reading a brochure on the importance of early registration of pregnancy in the waiting area in the UNWRA Khan Younis Health Centre in southern Gaza. Gaza Photo credit: ©UNRWA Gaza 2016. Photo by Tamer Abu Hamam.

In October 2015, the UNRWA Health Centre in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, launched an initiative titled "I support early registration of pregnancy", aiming at increasing the percentage of refugee women who register for antenatal care services in UNRWA Health Centres during the first three month of their pregnancy. The campaign was launched following internal research conducted by Health Centre staff that indicated roughly 35 per cent of the pregnant women in the Khan Younis area do not register their pregnancy in the early stages. Early registration of pregnancy to enjoy antenatal care services is crucial in protecting the health of mothers and their babies, for example by detecting potential diseases and receiving the appropriate treatment.

"During my first two pregnancies, I did not register for antenatal care at an UNRWA Health Centre, but now due to the outreach campaign of the UNRWA staff I registered and participated in their awareness sessions; I now understand the importance of early registration," commented 25-year old Nihaya Al Qidra.

To reach out to the widest audience possible, the UNWRA Health Centre in Khan Younis designed and distributed information material such as posters and brochures on the

importance of early registration and offered special awareness sessions for women visiting the Health Centre. All the staff in the Health Centre actively participated in the outreach campaign, including doctors, nurses, midwives as well as the cleaning staff who usually play an important role in guiding patients to the relevant stations and using this as opportunity to raise further awareness.

“I was made aware of the importance of early registration through the posters in the Health Centre, and I immediately told all my relatives about it. I suffer from diabetes, and when I registered for antenatal care services in the early stages of my pregnancy, the UNRWA doctors ordered a special diet for me to protect my and my baby’s health,” commented 38-year old Nisreen Arafat.

According to Health Centre staff, the campaign has proven successful and the rate of early registrations has already increased by approximately 6 per cent over the past three months.

UNRWA provides antenatal care services in each of its 21 Health Centres across the Gaza Strip. Antenatal care services include a comprehensive initial physical examination and regular follow-up checks, including the screening for pregnancy-related hypertension, diabetes mellitus, anaemia and oral health issues. UNRWA encourages pregnant women to receive their first antenatal assessment as early as possible and to have at least four antenatal care visits throughout their pregnancy to promote early detection and management of risk factors and complications.

Summary of Major Incidents

During the reporting week, Israeli forces reportedly fired towards Palestinian fishing boats and Palestinian farmers near the perimeter fence on a daily basis. On 13 January, one Palestinian was reportedly injured when Israeli patrol boats fired towards northern Gaza. On 14 January, Israeli patrol boats reportedly arrested two fishermen in northern Gaza and confiscated their boats. No injuries or damage were reported. On 16 January, Egyptian patrol boats reportedly fired towards Palestinian boats in southern Gaza. No injuries or damage were reported.

Regular protests in support of Al Aqsa mosque and the West Bank were held in the vicinity of the perimeter fence. Protests, involving hundreds of persons and including youth, took place east of Bureij camp in central Gaza, east of Gaza city, in the vicinity of the Erez crossing or in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. During these protests, some participants reportedly approached the perimeter fence and threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli security forces reportedly responded with gunfire and tear gas. A total of approximately 11 persons were reportedly injured due to Israeli gun fire and approximately six are reported to have suffered from gas inhalation. On 15 January, Israeli soldiers reportedly killed two persons in one of these protests east of Bureij camp.

On 12 January, militants reportedly fired two test rockets from southern Gaza towards the sea. No injuries were reported.

On 13 January, five Israeli bulldozers reportedly entered approximately 150 metres into northern Gaza and conducted a clearing and excavation operation.

On 13 January, militants reportedly fired two test rockets from northern Gaza towards the sea. No injuries were reported. On the same day, Israeli aircraft reportedly fired one missile targeting and killing an apparent Fatah-affiliated militant who was reportedly planting an explosive device in an area in northern Gaza.

Also on 13 January, four Israeli bulldozers entered approximately 100 metres east of Khan Younis area and conducted a clearing and excavation operation. They withdrew on the same day.

On 14 January, two Israeli bulldozers entered approximately 300 metres into northern Gaza and conducted a clearing and excavation operation. They withdrew on the same day. Also on 14 January, militants reportedly fired eight test rockets from southern Gaza towards the sea. No injuries were reported.

Funding Needs

Thanks to generous donors, UNRWA has overcome its immediate and most serious financial crisis. For 2016, the Agency now projects a deficit of US$ 81 million, down from US$ 135 million as estimated earlier this year. This is the first time in ten years that UNRWA expects a zero-growth programme budget owing to strategic changes in staffing, business processes including procurement, budgeting norms, and service delivery models, amongst other measures.

US$ 247 million has been pledged in support of UNRWA's emergency shelter programme, for which an estimated US$ 720 million is required. This leaves a current shortfall of US$ 473 million.

As presented in UNRWA's occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Emergency Appeal for 2016, the Agency is seeking US$ 403 million to meet the minimum humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees in the oPt. The Agency requires US$ 355.95 million for programme interventions in Gaza, including US$ 109.7 million for emergency food assistance, US$ 142.3 million for emergency shelter assistance, US$ 10 million for emergency cash assistance, US$ 4.4 million for emergency health/mobile health clinics and US$ 3.1 for education in emergencies. More information can be found here:

http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2016_opt_emergency_appeal.pdf

Crossings

Longstanding restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza have undermined the living conditions of 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza. Israel prevents all access to and from the Gaza Strip by sea and air. Movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza is restricted to three crossings: Rafah crossing, Erez crossing and Kerem Shalom crossing. Rafah crossing is controlled by the Egyptian authorities and technically allows for the movement of a number of authorized travelers, Palestinian medical and

humanitarian cases only. Erez crossing is controlled by Israeli authorities and technically allows for the movement of aid workers and limited numbers of authorized travelers, including Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases. Kerem Shalom crossing, also controlled by Israeli authorities, technically allows for the movement of authorized goods only.

- Rafah crossing remained closed during the reporting week.
- Erez crossing is usually open six days a week. It was open for National ID holders (humanitarian cases, medical cases, merchants and UN staff) and international staff from 12 to 14 January and from 17 to 19 January. On 15 January it was open for pedestrians only. It was closed on 16 January.
- Kerem Shalom crossing is the only official crossing open for the transfer of goods into and out of the Strip and is usually open five days a week. It was open from 12 to 14 January and from 17 to 19 January. It was closed on 15 and 16 January.

Background

On 7 July 2014, a humanitarian emergency was declared by UNRWA in the Gaza Strip, following a severe escalation in hostilities, involving intense Israeli aerial and navy bombardment and Palestinian rocket fire. Hostilities de-escalated following an open-ended ceasefire which entered into force on 26 August.

The scale of human loss, destruction, devastation and displacement caused by this third conflict within seven years was catastrophic, unprecedented and unparalleled in Gaza.

UNRWA mounted an extraordinary response during the 50 days of hostilities which highlighted its unique position as the largest UN organization in the Gaza Strip and the only UN Agency that undertakes direct implementation.

The human, social and economic costs of the last hostilities sit against a backdrop of a society already torn by wide-spread poverty, frustration and anger, heightening vulnerability and political instability within the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Israeli blockade of Gaza entered its 9th year in June 2015 and continues to have a devastating effect as access to markets and people's movement to and from the Gaza Strip remain severely restricted. The economy and its capacity to create jobs has been devastated, with the majority of the population becoming dependent on humanitarian aid to meet basic needs. The number of Palestine refugees relying on UNRWA for food aid has increased from fewer than 80,000 in 2000 to almost 877,000 today.

Despite the immense daily challenges, and through the dedication of its staff, UNRWA's operations continue to sustain approximately 1.3 million refugees surviving a broken economy, political divide and devastated infrastructure.

Gaza: Facts and Figures

- 1.3 million refugees out of 1.8 million total population (71 per cent)
- 8 refugee camps
- Almost 12,500 staff

- 257 schools for almost 251,000 students
- 21 health centres
- 16 relief and social services offices
- 3 micro-finance offices issuing 111,243 loans valued at US$ 143,524,910 since 1991
- 12 food distribution centres for almost 877,000 refugees
- Living under a tight land and sea blockade since 2007
- Long standing restrictions on movement of people and goods has led to a de-development of Gaza
- Potentially unliveable place by 2020, including a potentially unusable aquifer by 2016.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight.

The Arabic translation of the Gaza weekly situation reports can be found here.

unrwa الاونروا united nations relief and works agency for palestine refugees in the near east

For more information, please contact:
Sami Mshasha | e: s.mshasha@unrwa.org
Jennifer Watson | e: j.watson@unrwa.org