GAZA SITUATION REPORT 132

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- Through the "supporting students in Gaza after the summer 2014 hostilities" project, UNRWA provides medical supportive devices and special educational support to refugee students who were injured during the 2014 conflict in Gaza and whose families cannot afford this support for their children. The project aims at fostering their integration into school and society and enabling them to continue their education. To mark the distribution of the devices, on 18 February the UNRWA Education Programme organized a ceremony in Gaza city during which 31 male and female refugee students received a total of 74 medical devices, including wheel-chairs, medical cushioning for the wheel-chairs, hand splints, foot splints or orthopedic shoes. In total, the project will support 991 injured refugee students across Gaza. In addition to the distribution of devices, UNRWA also hired 137 teachers on a temporary basis through its Job-Creation Programme to provide extra educational services for injured students with special needs to help and enable them to reintegrate back into their schools. The 137 teachers also provide psycho-social support for the injured students. The scale of human loss, destruction, devastation and displacement caused by the 2014 conflict in Gaza – the third within seven years - was catastrophic, unprecedented and unparalleled in Gaza. Overall, 11,231 Palestinians were injured during the conflict, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children. Roughly one third of these children will have to cope with disabilities lasting throughout life as a result of their injuries. 991 of the injured persons were refugee students.

- UNRWA continues with its extensive outreach campaign on the improved food baskets to ensure that all questions and concerns of beneficiaries are addressed in a pro-active way. During the reporting week, the UNRWA communications team in partnership with the Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP) organized targeted information sessions for dozens of key front line staff working in UNRWA Health Centres, Distribution Centres, Area RSSP offices and schools across Gaza to ensure in-depth understanding

of the new food baskets among the approximately 12,500 UNRWA personnel,. To reach out and explain the new food baskets to the community – including community leaders, political factions, *mukhtars* and refugee committees – UNRWA also strongly relies on the outreach capacities of its five Chief of Area offices. To also communicate well the process of the UNRWA poverty assessment system (PAS) to beneficiaries, the Agency created an animation video outlining and explaining the process in detail; the video is currently broadcast on UNRWA TV and its corresponding YouTube channel. The Agency's nutritionally-improved baskets will be launched during the April-June food distribution round for all 960,000 beneficiaries who are scheduled to receive food assistance from UNRWA. One of the main improvements of the new UNRWA food baskets is the inclusion of lentils and chickpeas, selected as an optimal addition due to their nutritional values and macro- and micro-nutrients. The nutritional value of pulses is also recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the 68th UN General Assembly recently declared the year 2016 as the year of pulses.

- UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl visited Gaza from 22 to 24 February as part of his regular field visits across the region. During the three days, he met and was briefed by the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Bo Schack, and a variety of other UNRWA staff members on UNRWA activities, challenges and field priorities for 2016. He also engaged with the UNRWA Local Staff Union, various human rights and civil society groups as well as UNRWA School Principals, teachers and students - including members of the UNRWA school parliament in Al Amal Preparatory Girls school in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. In this school, he attended and gave a speech at a ceremony for high-achieving students; the ceremony also included a theatre show and other performances by the students. Mr Krähenbühl further engaged with internally displaced refugee families in Shujjaiya, eastern Gaza city, who are receiving transitional rental cash assistance from UNRWA. The Commissioner-General met with these families to learn more about how UNRWA assistance helps them to cope with the difficult circumstances and to listen to what their suggestions are for the Agency's emergency shelter response. During his three-day visit, Pierre Krähenbühl also gave an exclusive interview to UNRWA TV during which he talked about UNRWA activities and reforms, priorities for 2016, the changes in UNRWA food assistance, as well as the Agency's increased attention on the health of Palestine refugees in all five fields of UNRWA operations. The interview will be broadcast on UNRWA TV and YouTube channel after 4 March.

- The World Humanitarian Summit hosted a panel discussion on the urban nature of displacement in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the UN and UN-Habitat – and with the support of the International Rescue Committee. The discussion took place on 18 February in New York and was live, but participants could also join online. It was filmed and can now be viewed at UN TV. Titled "City Haven" - Supporting the people and places that are providing long term solutions to the global refugee crisis, the panel focused on concrete actions to support towns and cities in managing humanitarian crises in an urban setting. In the highly urbanised Gaza Strip, long-term urban displacement – particularly following the unparalleled devastation during the 2014 conflict – is a challenge for humanitarian agencies. UNRWA has supported internally displaced persons (IDPs) through hosting them in its Designated Emergency Shelters and in the aftermath of the 2014 conflict in its Collective Centres – until their closure in June 2015 – and through the ongoing provision of transitional rental cash subsidies (TSCA) to allow families to rent a temporary shelter. However, according to UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) one of the biggest challenges facing IDPs in Gaza is the limited availability of rental accommodation,

coupled with lack of resources to pay rental fees as a result of economic devastation, unemployment and recurrent conflict. To gauge the impact of TSCA payments to the displaced, in January 2016 the UNRWA Monitoring and Evaluation team held five focus groups involving 65 beneficiaries who receive TSCA. The sample included male and female headed households, various family sizes, those with different types of damage to their homes and varying poverty status. Through the focus groups, the Agency aimed to know more about the living situation before and after the provision of TSCA assistance, to assess the rental market accessibility, to identify the extended impact of TSCA, to know how much the current TSCA meets rental costs, to receive inputs on UNRWA outreach efforts through its shelter response, and to measure satisfaction among beneficiaries. The analysis of the findings collected through these focus groups will be taken into consideration for the UNRWA emergency shelter response. Further, UNRWA also actively participated in the OCHA-led IDP Vulnerability Profiling exercise to better track IDPs with special needs and collect details about location, needs and concerns.

- UNRWA received a visit from a delegation from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Belgian Consulate in Jerusalem during the reporting week. The Belgian representatives attended a briefing by the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, and were informed by the UNRWA Operations Support Office on key protection concerns in the Gaza Strip. The delegation also engaged with the UNRWA-supported social enterprise GGateway (Gaza Gateway) - which outsources local and international Information Technology needs into the Gaza market – and visited the UNRWA Hashem Elementary Boys A school in Gaza city where they toured the school and discussed education-related issues with members of the school parliament.

- On 22 and 23 February representatives from the National Committees (NatComs) of Spain, Italy and the United States visited Gaza to get an overview of ongoing UNRWA projects and activities. On the first day, the NatComs visited and discussed with a refugee family in Beit Hanoun whose home was severely damaged during the 2014 conflict and who received support from UNRWA to repair their homes; they were also briefed by the UNRWA Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme on the UNRWA emergency shelter response, including the technical assessment of damaged houses, interagency coordination processes, the UNRWA payment process and the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. The representatives furthermore enjoyed a briefing by the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, as well as by Deputy Director Ms. Melinda Young on the UNRWA Emergency Appeal 2016 and field priorities for the coming years. Later that day the delegation met with representatives of the UNRWA Gender Initiative and learned more about gender-related interventions in Gaza. They also met with the Head of the Donor Relations and Project Support Office. On 23 February, the NatCom representatives continued to participate in meetings with various UNRWA Gaza departments and project teams – such as the UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme - and visited an UNRWA Distribution Centre in Rafah, southern Gaza, as well as an UNRWA school in northern Gaza where they engaged with children participating in psycho-social education activities. National Committees support the Agency through reaching out to the public, local authorities and the private sector. They engage with individuals through mailings, social media and special events. The NatComs also work with local organisations, foundations, councils and regional governments, preparing proposals tailored to local interests and opportunities based on UNRWA's programmes and priorities. The National Committees are independent non-profit NGOs.

- Unemployment in Gaza has been consistently high over the past two years, and the Strip is considered as having one of the highest joblessness rates in the world, as also confirmed by the World Bank. While the overall unemployment rate in Gaza in the fourth quarter of 2015 declined to 38.4 per cent – a 4.3 percentage point decrease compared to the previous quarter – unemployment still remains very high, particularly among youth, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). In the third quarter of 2015 the overall youth unemployment rate stood at 62.95 per cent, and the youth female unemployment rate at 84.2 per cent. Wide-spread youth unemployment in Gaza can lead to frustration and depression, and media reports are referring to an increase in suicides or attempted suicides by youth recorded in Gaza (see also Gaza situation report 131). UNRWA tries to mitigate the impact of these dire circumstances through various employment-related interventions, for example through its Job-Creation Programme, the generation of full-time job equivalents (FTEs) via its construction activities (including self-help shelter programme and reconstruction interventions), and vocational training to provide youth with skills-based training to increase their chances in the Gaza job market. During 2015, the Agency created a total of 6,844 FTEs, a significant increase on 2014, explained by the large-scale emergency shelter programme as well as the increase in the value of contracted projects due to approval for imports of restricted building materials. According to UNRWA internal estimates, the 6,844 FTEs contributed to reduce overall unemployment by 1.5 percentage points. Further, the Agency provides vocational training opportunities for a total of 1,293 youths in its two vocational training centres in Gaza city and Khan Younis; 375 of the youth are female and 918 are male. To tackle the particularly high unemployment rate of female youth, and their lack of opportunities, in 2011 the UNRWA Gender Initiative, in cooperation with partnering Community-Based Organizations, launched the Young Women Leaders Programme (YWLP) seeking to better equip fresh graduates from university with skills in leadership, interviewing and negotiation, English language, computer use and access to three-month intern positions within the private and non-government sectors in Gaza. From 2013 to 2015, 3,124 graduates between 22 and 28 years old have benefited from the programme.

- The US Permanent Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, met with civil society representatives from Gaza – including a female UNRWA teacher – and the West Bank in Jerusalem, during the reporting week. During the meeting, Ambassador Power heard from Palestinians facing restrictions on freedom of movement and the impact it has on their families. She also met the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, and with representatives of other UN agencies operating in the occupied Palestinian territory, including with the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, with whom she discussed access restrictions to Gaza, mainly focusing on the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza – the only crossing open for the transfer of goods into and out of the Strip.

GENERAL

Operational environment: Regular protests took place during the reporting week in solidarity with West Bank journalist Mohammad Al Qeeq who went on a hunger strike in an Israeli jail; protests also took place in front of UNRWA installations with Palestine refugees demanding job opportunities, housing, or protesting against the reduction in hospitalization services for refugees in Lebanon. Palestine refugees from Syria also held a

protest in front of the Fatah Movement office in Gaza city, demanding the improvement of their living conditions.

On 16 February, an explosion took place in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. No injuries were reported.

On 16 February, Israeli troops arrested three Palestinians who tried to cross into Israel through the perimeter fence east of Rafah in southern Gaza.

On 17 February, a 45 year old female was reportedly stabbed to death by her daughter in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, due to an alleged family dispute. The police opened an investigation.

On 18 February three brothers were injured due to reportedly mishandling of an item which exploded accidently in their house in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza.

On 19 February, unknown person(s) detonated an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in front of the house of the Sabreen movement leader Hisham Salem in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza. The explosion caused damage but no injuries were reported. The police opened an investigation. On 20 February, unknown person(s) detonated another IED in front of a house of a member of Al Sabreen Movement in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza. Minor damage but no injuries were reported. The police arrived to the scene and opened an investigation.

The Palestinian male who reportedly attempted suicide during the last reporting week by burning himself in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, died from his wounds on 19 February.

UNRWA'S RESPONSE

Amidst high unemployment rates, UNRWA provides opportunities for youths



23-year old Palestine refugee Ahmad Al Attar at his desk in the UNRWA Rehabilitation Centre for Visually Impaired in Gaza city. "My dream is to become famous, famous for having done something big for the people of Gaza," he said. Photo credit: © UNRWA Gaza 2016. Photo by Tamer Hamam.

The Gaza Strip has one of the highest unemployment rates world-wide, according to the World Bank. In the fourth quarter of 2015, the overall unemployment rate stood at 38.4 per cent, as reported by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). While the rate declined by 4.3 percentage points compared to the previous quarter, joblessness remains high in Gaza, particularly amongst youth, with an average unemployment rate of almost 63 per cent and 66.3 per cent for refugee youth. The numbers are more dire for women: in the third quarter of 2015, the PCBS reports a rate of over 84 per cent.

Against the backdrop of a society already torn by repeated conflicts, wide-spread poverty, heightening vulnerability and political instability within the occupied Palestinian territory, youth unemployment can increase frustration, anger and feelings of hopelessness, and can lead to depression.

UNRWA contributes to mitigating the impact of these difficult socio-economic circumstances through various employment-related interventions. Focusing on youth in particular, the Agency provides skills-based training through its two vocational training centres in Gaza city and Khan Younis to increase the chances of youths in the highly-competitive Gaza job market.

UNRWA also provides regular employment opportunities for talented and motivated youths. 23-year old Ahmad Al Attar, who since January 2016 worked as a clerk in the UNRWA Rehabilitation Centre for Visually Impaired (RCVI) in Gaza city, considers himself lucky to be able to contribute to his family's household through a job with UNRWA.

"Since I have this job, I feel my family trusts me more; I have now more responsibility towards them, as I contribute to the household," he said proudly.

Ahmad struggled in the past. When he was only five years old, he suffered an accident resulting in a disability lasting for life. After the accident, he said, he lost his self-esteem and self-confidence.

"I felt like a loser; I was not motivated and felt depressed. But then one day I decided to stand up, focus on education and pursue my dreams, despite all odds. My family – especially my brothers and sisters – and UNRWA teachers were very supportive of me," Ahmed recalled.

After graduating in Development Planning from the University of Applied Sciences in Gaza in September 2015, Ahmad worked for a Community-Based Rehabilitation Centre in Rafah, southern Gaza, for three months, until he found an employment opportunity with UNRWA.

"At RCVI, I work as a clerk and have mostly managerial and administrative tasks. However, in the morning I join the bus with all the visually impaired children coming to school here, and I help them and advise them as much as I can," Ahmad said, smiling. "I wish for the young people of Gaza to have the same opportunity, and to live in peace and safety; I hope they all also get a chance to follow their dreams in life."

SUMMARY OF MAJOR INCIDENTS

During the reporting week, Israeli forces fired towards Palestinian areas along the perimeter fence and towards Palestinian boats on a daily basis.

Regular protests in support of Al Aqsa mosque and the situation in the West Bank were held in the vicinity of the perimeter fence. Protests, involving approximately 300 persons, predominately youths, took place east of Bureij camp in central Gaza, east of Gaza city, in the vicinity of the Erez crossing and in Khan Younis. During these protests, some participants approached the perimeter fence and threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli security forces responded with gunfire and tear gas. The Ministry of Health in Gaza reported that a total of 10 persons were injured due to Israeli gun fire.

On 17 February four Israeli bulldozers reportedly entered approximately 150 metres southeast of Maghazi camp and later moved east of Deir El Balah, both in central Gaza, to conduct a clearing and excavation operation. They withdrew on the same day. On the same day three Israeli tanks and two bulldozers reportedly entered approximately 200 metres into southern Gaza to conduct a clearing and excavation operation. They withdrew on the same day.

On 18 February four Israeli bulldozers reportedly entered approximately 100 metres east of Khan Younis area in southern Gaza to conduct a clearing and excavation operation. They withdrew on the same day.

FUNDING NEEDS

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall, projected for 2016 to stand at US$ 81 million. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

Following the 2014 conflict, 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$ 60.4 million for emergency cash-for-work 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.

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 16 to 18 February ad from 21 to 23 February. On 19 February it was open for pedestrians only. It was closed on 20 February.
- 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 16 to 18 February and from 21 to 23 February. It was closed on 19 and 20 February.