gaza situation report

a weekly update from unrwa

weekly update – 23 February 08.00hrs – 1 March 08.00hrs | issue 133

the next update will be issued on Wednesday 9 March 2016

- On 29 February 2016, UNRWA opened the new Sa'd Al Abduallah Al Sabah building in the UNRWA Ibin Sina elementary boys school in Rafah, southern Gaza. This is one of UNRWA's many construction projects in Gaza, including 23 UNRWA schools due for completion in 2016. The opening ceremony was attended by the Director of UNRWA operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, other senior UNRWA staff, as well as representatives from UNRWA school parents' councils and leaders from the Rafah community. The construction of the new building has allowed the school to work on a single shift basis since February 2016, serving one of the most crowded and poorest neighbourhoods in Rafah. Prior to this, and for the past 20 years, the old building of Ibn Sina operated on double shift accommodating two UNRWA schools – the Ibn Sina Elementary Boys School and Rafah Elementary "C" Boys School. With the new building operational, Ibn Sina Elementary Boys School now provides education to 530 male first, second and third graders under the tutorage of 17 teachers in 14 classrooms, while Rafah Elementary "C" Boys School is serving 922 male first, second, third and fourth graders under the tutorage of 27 teachers in 24 classrooms. The new building includes a multi-purpose room, a Special Education Special Needs room, rooms for health and school counsellors, a library, a computer lab, a school canteen as well as water tanks working with solar energy and an elevator providing access to upper floors for students with disabilities.

- Breast cancer is a health concern for women in Gaza, as much as it is for all women across the world. The UNRWA Gaza Health Programme (HP) works to detect breast cancer among Palestine refugee women as early as possible

to increase the survival rate as well as to improve the mode of treatment. To raise further awareness in the community and provide information to help women understand how they can protect themselves from breast cancer, the HP launched an outreach initiative on 11 February to encourage women to visit UNWRA Health Centres for regular check-ups and screenings. The campaign also involved explaining to women how they can be aware about potential changes in their bodies to help detect breast cancer at an early stage. In total, between mid-February and mid-March, UNRWA organized more than 100 outreach and awareness-raising sessions in its health centres and schools as well as in community-based organizations such as Women Programme Centres and Community-Based Rehabilitation Centres. To show support for this important campaign, on 29 February also Deputy Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Ms. Melinda Young, attended an awareness-raising session held in the UNRWA Rimal Health Centre in Gaza city. As part of the campaign, the Agency also contracted with several hospitals in Gaza to initiate mammogram screenings for all suspected potential breast cancer cases, as well as for all women over 35 years old with a family history of breast cancer. All 21 UNRWA Health Centres also distributed campaign material such as posters, breast-cancer awareness raising brochures and mugs with related information. For the duration of the campaign, all Health Centre staff wear pink ribbons, the internationally recognised symbol for breast cancer awareness.

- During the reporting week, the UNRWA Job Creation Programme (JCP), in cooperation with the Agency's Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP), launched its annual "fighting mosquitoes" project across the Gaza Strip. The project runs for six months and includes the spraying of stagnant water pools, water assembly points and sewage pools in the eight refugee camps in Gaza, as well as in two areas of northern Gaza with a high Palestine refugee population. The project also includes the cleaning of waste water treatment plants to avoid the breeding of mosquitoes. Through this project, JCP hires 61 people for short-term employment opportunities in the unskilled sector, and 6 people for similar positions in the skilled sector. In total during 2015, the UNRWA Gaza JCP provided employment opportunities for 32,000 beneficiaries; since 2016, a total of 4,938 Palestine refugees have also benefitted from the Programme. Environmental health risks for the almost 45 per cent of Palestine refugees living in eight refugee camps in Gaza – with an average population density of nearly 40,000 persons per square kilometre – is highly challenging. This has been reported by the UN in 2012, through its Gaza 2020 report. Standing wastewater near camps are known breeding grounds for mosquitoes, threatening the health of the community, including children. The spread of the Sika virus in other parts of the world, has further highlighted mosquito-borne diseases globally, and preventative measures that can be taken, including those annually implemented by UNRWA. Through this project, UNRWA is also contributing to the UN global Sustainable Development Goals, particularly number three – good health and well-being –, number six – clean water and sanitation – , and number 8, related to decent works and economic growth.

- To further empower its front line staff and maintain closer community linkages, in 2010 UNRWA in Gaza set up its Chief Area Offices (CAO) in all five governorates of Gaza – North, Gaza, Middle Area, Khan Younis and Rafah. CAOs have an UNRWA representative function at the area level. They liaise with government authorities, refugee community representatives and humanitarian organizations on the general application of Agency policies and programmes, as well as other issues of interest to the Agency such as the security situation as it affects UNRWA operations, and any incidents affecting the humanitarian situation of Palestine refugees. CAOs also lead an area management team in close collaboration with the Gaza Field Office. During the reporting week, UNRWA announced Mr. Mohammad Reyati, former Deputy Chief of the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme, will become the new CAO in the Gaza Middle Area, effective 1 March. The post became vacant after former CAO Mr. Souhail Masharawi, was selected as CAO of Gaza North recently. The former CAO in the North Area, Mr. Khalil Al Halabi, retired from his post and now consults as a community liaison adviser for UNRWA Gaza. 29 February was also officially the last day before retirement of Dr. Yousef Mousa, the CAO of Rafah, southern Gaza, after having served UNRWA since 1995, and as CAO since 2011. UNRWA Gaza thanks all its current and former CAOs for their dedicated and important work.

- During the reporting week, the new UNRWA Director of Human Resources (HR), Mr. Brian Gleeson, had his inaugural field visit to Gaza. During the visit, from 28 February to 1 March, he engaged with different UNRWA staff and programmes, participating in a town hall meeting with the UNRWA Field Management Team and separately with representatives from the UNRWA Gaza Local Staff Union. During his engagement with staff, the Director talked about the importance of staff well-being, trust, professional development and family-life balance. He also announced the launch of a new Agency-wide newsletter on HR related matters to keep all staff better informed and up-to-date. As an overview of ongoing UNRWA programmes and projects in Gaza, Mr. Gleeson visited to the UNRWA beach refugee camp Health Centre, the Gaza Preparatory Girls A school in Gaza city, the Sulafa Centre for Embroidery and a family in Shujjaiya, in eastern Gaza city, whose shelter is being reconstructed with the help of UNRWA.

- The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) recently signed an agreement with UNRWA in support of the Agency's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programme in the Gaza Strip. A pledged contribution of US$ 447,996 will enable UNRWA to conduct a comprehensive study of its existing TVET programme in Gaza, with the aim of improving its effectiveness and maximizing employment prospects for TVET students and graduates. The study will focus on highlighting relevant job sectors and developing new courses under the programme, paying special attention to industries that offer opportunities to Palestine refugee women. Better Life for Girls (BLG) is one of the new initiatives presented by the President of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) at the UN Sustainable Development Summit last September. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

through the BLG initiative, KOICA is reportedly paying special attention to support vulnerable groups, hence the focus on Palestine refugee women in Gaza. UNRWA currently manages two TVET centres in Gaza – offering approximately 50 regular courses for a total of 1,293 youth (375 female and 918 male), and employing over 200 staff. In February, UNRWA also signed a partnership with Silatech, a regional social organization with its headquarters in Doha, Qatar. Silatech works to create jobs and expand economic opportunities for young Arabs, to empower youth and promote employment in Gaza, the State of Palestine. The agreement aims to provide baseline training courses focused on key construction and health and safety skills to youth in Gaza who are interested in pursuing jobs or who are currently employed in the construction sector.

Shelter update:

This week

- During the reporting week, UNRWA was able to disburse approximately US$ 1.82 million in funding available for reconstruction (US$ 1.73 million) and severe repair works (US$ 91,454). The funds will reach a total of 189 refugee families across the Gaza Strip. The families will be able to access this assistance through local banks next week.

Overview of assistance disbursed

- The UNRWA shelter assessment confirmed 142,071 Palestine refugee houses as impacted during the 2014 conflict; 9,117 of them are considered totally demolished. 5,417 shelters have suffered severe, 3,700 major and 123,837 minor damages.

- Since the start of the 2014 emergency shelter response, the Agency has distributed over US$ 153.2 million (excluding Programme Support Costs) to Palestine refugee families whose homes were damaged or demolished during the 2014 summer conflict.

- UNRWA has completed the payments to over 66,300 Palestine refugee families – more than half of the caseload – for minor repair works, to 1,540 families to repair their severely damaged shelters, to 13 families for major repair works and to 60 families for reconstruction. Payment transfers for over 12,400 refugee families to continue repair works of their shelters and for 543 families to continue the reconstruction of their shelters are ongoing.

- 13,250 families have received a rental subsidy payment to cover the period from September to December 2014. Disbursement of subsequent instalments entailed further eligibility checks through which over 9,900 families have received the relevant rental subsidy payments during the period from January to December 2015.

Funding gaps and needs

- Due to lack of funding, as of 1 March 2016, over 60,860 refugee families have not received any payments to undertake repair works for their minor damaged homes (total estimate repair costs: US$ 68.7 million). Further, 3,194 families have not received any payments to repair or start repairing their major damaged homes (total estimate repair costs: US$ 28.7 million), 1,880 families have not received payments to repair or start repairing their severely damaged homes (total estimate costs: US$ 16.9 million). Out of these, UNRWA has processed the documents of approximately 45,600 families with damaged shelters and could disburse payments to these families immediately upon receipt of funding.

- As of 1 March 2016, 6,797refugee families have not received any payments to start repairing their totally demolished homes; the total costs of reconstructing their homes amounts to approximately US$ 305.8 million.

- Due to lack of sufficient funding also approximately 8,000 refugee families displaced by the 2014 conflict have not received transitional shelter cash assistance (TSCA) in 2016. The US$ 23.3 million in TSCA needed to assist the 2014 conflict emergency caseload in 2016 has been included in the oPt Emergency Appeal 2016.

General

Operational environment: Regular protests took place during the reporting week in solidarity with the West Bank journalist Mohammad Al Qeeq who ended his three-month hunger strike on 27 February in an Israeli jail after reportedly reaching a compromise with Israeli authorities. Other demonstrations were held in solidarity with Palestinians demanding the payment of salaries from local authorities, and in mourning the death of a Palestinian former prisoner who was found killed at the Palestinian Embassy in Bulgaria. Protests were also held against UNRWA by beneficiaries criticising alleged delays in their financial assistance, or regarding their housing assessment status. On 27 February, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) also held a demonstration in Gaza city to mark its 47th founding anniversary**.**

On 26 February, a family dispute reportedly took place in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza; edged weapons were used but no injuries were reported. The police arrested several persons.

On 25 February, a hand grenade reportedly exploded accidently while two children were mishandling a fuse inside their home in Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza. One child died and the other was injured. The police have opened an investigation.

UNRWA's response

UNRWA raises awareness about breast cancer and the importance of early detection, amongst Palestine refugee women in Gaza



UNRWA senior nurse Jamalat Abu Hilal (on the left) is leading an awareness session for deaf women in Al Amal Association in Rafah, southern Gaza. Photo credit: © UNRWA Gaza 2016. Photo by Tamer Hamam.

As part of UNRWA's breast cancer awareness campaign, on 1 March over 50 Palestine refugee women gathered at Al Amal Association for Persons with Disabilities in Rafah, southern Gaza, to learn more about and discuss breast cancer and early detection.

The session was one of over 100 planned awareness and outreach sessions being conducted through the UNRWA Health Programme between mid-February and mid-March 2016. Sessions are being held in the 21 UNRWA Health Centres across Gaza, but also in UNRWA-supported Community-Based Organisations such as Rehabilitation Centres and Women Programme Centres, often located in remote areas.

The session at the Al Amal Association was designed for deaf women. It was led by UNRWA senior nurse Jamalat Abu Hilal and translated in sign language by staff from Al Amal.

“Three years ago, my brother’s wife died from breast cancer. Since then I continuously raise awareness among women in the community of how they can better protect themselves from it through early detection,” explained nurse Jamalat. “I hope that all women who participate in these awareness sessions will themselves go and function as messengers for other women whom we could not reach directly; the information must be transferred to everyone,” she added.

During the session, Jamalat explained to the women in detail the importance of regular check-ups and screenings to detect potential breast cancer at an early stage, how women can check themselves and to what extent medical family history can impact the chance of getting breast cancer. The senior nurse also advised the women where they can go to seek help and professional advice.

“This disease is very dangerous, and I am glad I learned how to better protect myself,” commented 24-year old participant Raghda Hashem, who said she was informed about breast cancer for the first time in her life.

After the session, UNRWA health staff also distributed breast cancer awareness brochures to all women for further information, and they offered free check-ups for all participating women.

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. On 25 February, Israeli patrol boats opened fire towards Palestinian boats in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza. One boat sustained damage; no injuries were reported. Also on 27 February, some Palestinian boats sustained damage after Israeli patrol boats opened fire towards them in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza. No injuries were reported.

Regular protests in support of Al Aqsa mosque and the situation in the West Bank were held across Gaza and in the vicinity of the perimeter fence. Protests near the perimeter fence, involving approximately 300 persons, predominately youth, 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 reportedly threw stones towards Israeli observation posts. Israeli security forces reportedly responded with gunfire and tear gas. The Ministry of Health in Gaza reported that a total of six persons were injured due to Israeli gun fire.

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:

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 23 to 25 February ad from 28 February to 1 March. On 26 February it was open for pedestrians only. It was closed on 27 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 23 to 25 February and from 28 February to 1 March. It was closed on 26 and 27 February.

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.

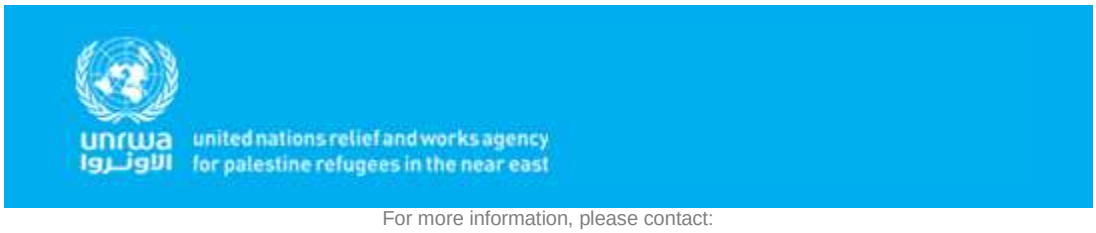
Despite the immense daily challenges, and through the dedication of its staff, UNRWA's operations continue to sustain approximately 1.3 million refugees surviving a broken economy, political divide and devastated infrastructure.

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 over 920,000 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.



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