GAZA SITUATION REPORT 134

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- On 8 March, under this year's slogan 'Planet 50:50 by 2030: Step it up for gender equality', the UNRWA Gender Initiative organized a celebration of International Women's Day in the UNRWA Technical and Vocational Training Centre in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. The festivities were supported by 30 partnering Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and aimed at giving approximately 500 refugee women from across Gaza the opportunity to engage in sports activities, such as riding bicycles, flying kites and playing in a volleyball tournament. The Gender Initiative also organized a film screening, showing short movies related to gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition to the festival on 8 March, the UNRWA Gender Initiative also organized panel discussions this week and next, regarding "Raising voices – women can make change in Gaza". The discussions are being held in CBOs in all five areas of Gaza. Each panel discussion involves approximately 50 women who share their experience in the successful organization of initiatives to promote change through municipal processes.

- The UNRWA Sulafa Embroidery Centre is currently marketing its new designs for the 2016 season. Products range from handmade pillows, shawls, handbags, small purses and ornaments in traditional Palestinian designs or modern colours. Many of these elegant products were also exhibited at the recent New York NOW trade show, held at the end of January 2016. This triggered orders from the prestigious ABC Home shop in New York as well as the editor of

Turkish Vogue, among others. Palestine refugee women employed through the Sulafa Centre also make beautiful 'made to measure' jackets, trousers and dresses. The Sulafa Project aims to provide meaningful and sustainable income for women and give them access to the (local) market by using their artisanal skills. The Sulafa Centre has been supported and operated by UNRWA since 1950 and brings income into the homes of more than 300 Palestine refugee women through the production and sale of embroidery goods.

- During the reporting week, the Government of Japan contributed US$ 38.21 million to UNRWA, marking the largest ever one-time contribution from Japan to UNRWA. Of the total contribution, US$ 15 million will support the Agency's health and education services and emergency humanitarian assistance efforts in the Gaza Strip; US$ 20.87 million will be allocated to improving and expanding the capacity of the Agency's education and health programmes in the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria; and US$ 2.34 million will support the construction of a sewerage network in Aqbat Jabr refugee camp in the West Bank. Japan has long been a valued donor to UNRWA. Last November, the Commissioner-General met with Japanese Prime Minister H.E. Shinzo Abe during his visit to Tokyo, where he expressed his profound gratitude for Japan's continued support to Palestine refugees and to the Agency's human development activities. In November 2015, three UNRWA preparatory students from Gaza visited Japan to share messages of peace and hope with Japanese children. Next week, UNRWA Gaza will host its annual kite flying event in solidarity with Japanese earth quake survivors.

- The UNRWA Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP) in Gaza implemented various activities during the month of February, ranging from the provision of food rations, the assessment of the poverty status of households and various awareness sessions and trainings for women, children and youth. In total, in February, RSSP social workers visited almost 6,100 families to assess their poverty status, and almost 1,900 families, assessed previously, were notified about their poverty status. Further, the RSSP disability programme provided 40 refugees with assistive devices through coordination with Community-Based Rehabilitation Centres in Deir El Balah, central Gaza, and in Jabalia, northern Gaza. RSSP-supported Women Programme Centres (WPCs) located in all five areas of the Gaza Strip provided social, recreational and educational activities for women, men and children, as well as awareness sessions for women on topics such as personal status law or inheritance rights of women. Further, the WPCs offered trainings on business development ('start your own project') and skills-based training courses to increase opportunities for women in the local job market. RSSP also assists other vulnerable groups such as elderly persons, children who have lost one or both parents and visually impaired children studying at the Agency's Rehabilitation Centre for the Visually Impaired (RCVI) in Gaza city. A training for RCVI teachers on how to use tablets , as well as a pilot project with visually impaired students on the same practice, were also completed during February.

- On 2 March, a large delegation from Spain, including the Spanish Ambassador to Israel Fernando Carderera Soler, the Consul General Juan José Escobar Stemann as well as the

Military Attache Pedro Antonio Munoz Fernandez, visited Gaza to better appreciate the humanitarian situation. They were briefed by UNRWA on its emergency shelter programme and met with a refugee family in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza, whose home had been totally destroyed during the 2014 conflict and who was able to be rebuilt it with support from UNRWA. The delegation also visited the UNRWA Asma Elementary Girls B school in Beach refugee camp, Gaza city, where they met with the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack, and engaged with representatives of the school parliament. Thereafter, the delegation visited an UNRWA Distribution Centre in the same camp and was briefed by UNRWA staff on the Agency's food assistance programme. UNRWA distributes food assistance to 70 per cent of Palestine refugees in Gaza on a quarterly basis. New and nutritionally improved UNRWA food baskets will be distributed in the April-June 2016 distribution cycle, targeting 960,000 beneficiaries who are scheduled to receive food aid from UNRWA.

- UNRWA has soft-launched the #RememberUs campaign on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to tell the story of Palestine refugees in Syria who, after five years of armed conflict, have experienced tremendous hardship with over 60 per cent of the 560,000 refugees registered with UNRWA now displaced throughout Syria and further afield. The conflict in Syria has been deadly, claiming the lives of over 250,000 civilians. UNRWA stands by the Palestine refugees, many of whom have lost their homes, family, livelihood and tight-knit communities. Sixteen UNRWA staff members have lost their lives during the conflict.

GENERAL

Operational environment: During the reporting week, regular protests took place, namely of people demanding the payment of their salaries from the Palestinian Government of Consensus, or in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Protestors also demonstrated against UNRWA, demanding housing solutions.

On 1 March, an internal family dispute reportedly took place between cousins in east Khan Younis, southern Gaza. One person was killed in an exchange of fire. The police intervened and arrested several persons. On the same day, a Palestinian male in Khan Younis reportedly attempted to commit suicide by using fuel; he sustained moderate burns. The police opened an investigation.

On 3 March, a Palestinian football player was arrested by Israeli forces at Erez crossing when he reportedly wanted to return to Gaza.

Also on 3 March, one militant of Al Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Hamas movement, reportedly died in a tunnel collapse east of Khan Younis. One day later, approximately 3,000 persons reportedly participated in his funeral in Khan Younis.

On 4 March, a homemade bomb exploded at the entrance of Bureij camp; no injuries were reported. The police launched an investigation.

UNRWA'S RESPONSE

Planet 50:50 by 2030: UNRWA celebrates International Women's Day in Gaza



On 8 March, the UNRWA Gender Initiative organized a celebration of International Women's Day in the UNRWA Technical and Vocational Training Centre in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. Activities included kite flying, bicycle rides, playing volleyball and film screenings. Photo credit: © UNRWA Gaza 2016. Photo by Reham Ghazali.

Approximately 500 women and girls from all areas of Gaza gathered at the UNRWA Khan Younis Training Centre in southern Gaza on 8 March, following a call from the UNRWA Gender Initiative (GI) to celebrate International Women's Day together. Under this year's international slogan "Planet 50:50 by 2030: step it up for Gender Equality" the GI organized a festival aimed at giving women and girls the opportunity to engage in sports activities usually not practiced by them in public due to conservative values prevailing in Gaza. Activities included bicycle rides, playing volleyball, flying kites and watching short films.

While many of the participants were shy to play in the beginning, over the day they opened up and laughter and happy chatter were heard from all corners of the training centre. "I came here today because I needed to release stress and negative energy; this is the first time in my life that I will ride a bicycle, I feel very happy," commented 55-year old Ayda Hasouna.

Soon after the event had started, a group of women were walking into the area, proudly carrying handmade kites with messages written on them calling for gender equality. More than 100 kites were prepared by women

participating in the celebrations. The activities were arranged through Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in all five areas of Gaza.

“Today, I feel like I am a child again; I can run, fly a kite and ride a bicycle,” commented 28-year old Heba Al Masharfa.

“International Women’s Day is unique, and it is a reminder for ourselves about how important we are.”

In addition to the festivities on 8 March, the UNRWA GI also organized panel discussions on “Raising voices – women can make change in Gaza” in CBOs across Gaza. The discussions feature approximately 50 women who in the beginning of this year had launched a community initiative to increase safety and security in their neighbourhood and who were now encouraged to share their experience with other women.

UNRWA supports the development and empowerment of women through various programmes, particularly through its Gender Initiative. Of the 101 CBOs the GI works through on its various projects, 30 provide social and recreational spaces for women. The CBOs are also seen as friendly and safe spaces for women, many of whom feel empowered by doing activities outside their home, establishing new networks, participating in public life and exercising more independence.

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 2 March, Palestinian militants reportedly fired towards Israeli forces, and Israeli forces reportedly responded with heavy gun fire. No injuries were reported. Also on 2 March, Israeli forces reportedly opened fire towards Palestinian areas east of Gaza city. One classroom of Beit Dagan Government School reportedly sustained damage; no injuries were reported.

On 7 March, Palestinian militants reportedly opened fire towards Israeli forces at the perimeter fence east of Maghazi camp; the Israeli force reportedly retaliated and one militant was injured.

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 150 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. No injuries were reported.

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. UNRWA urgently appeals to donors to generously contribute to its emergency shelter programme to provide displaced Palestine refugees in Gaza with rental subsidies or cash assistance to undertake repair works and reconstruction of their damaged homes.

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 1 to 3 March and from 6 to 8 March. On 4 March it was open for pedestrians only. It was closed on 5 March.
- 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 1 to 3 March and from 6 to 8 March. It was closed on 4 and 5 March.