Mass evacuations in Gaza choke survival and severely constrain aid operations

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Statement by Muhannad Hadi, Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Successive mass evacuation orders issued by Israeli forces amid hostilities have displaced 90 per cent of Gaza's residents since October 2023, often multiple times, exposing them to harm and depriving them of the essentials to survive. During August alone, the Israeli forces have issued 12 evacuation orders – on average, once every two days – forcing as many as 250,000 people to move yet again.

Just yesterday, tens of thousands of civilians in four neighbourhoods in Deir al Balah and Khan Younis were instructed to leave. Humanitarian staff of several UN agencies and NGOs were also affected, along with their families. Humanitarian workers play a critical role in supporting other displaced Palestinians.

If evacuation orders are meant to protect civilians, the fact is that they are leading to the exact opposite. They are forcing families to flee again, often under fire and with the few belongings they can carry with them, into an ever-shrinking area that is overcrowded, polluted, with limited services and – like the rest of Gaza – unsafe. People are being deprived of access to services essential for their survival, including medical facilities, shelters, water wells and humanitarian supplies.

The water supply in Deir al Balah has decreased by at least 70 per cent due to the shutdown of pumps and desalination plants located within evacuation zones. A severe chlorine shortage for water disinfection, with reserves expected to last only one more month, is fueling disease, skin infections, hepatitis A and now polio.

Civilians are exhausted and terrified, running from one destroyed place to another, with no end in sight.

This cannot continue.

International humanitarian law demands that the parties protect civilians and meet their essential needs. The way forward is as clear as it is urgent: protect civilians, release the hostages, facilitate humanitarian access, agree on a ceasefire.