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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
occupied Palestinian territory

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS UPDATE ESCALATION IN HOSTILITIES IN GAZA AND SOUTHERN ISRAEL

18 NOVEMBER (1500 HS) 2012

Key issues

- At least 29 Palestinian civilians, including 11 children, have been killed and over 520 Palestinians, mostly civilians, including at least 140 children, were injured since 14 November.
- Three Israeli civilians have been killed and another 80, including many children, were injured, in the past five days.
- Hostilities in Gaza and southern Israel have resulted in extensive damage to civilian property.
- The uninterrupted waves of airstrikes and indiscriminate rocket fire continue to generate widespread fear among the civilian populations in Gaza and Israel, particularly among children.
- The only crossing for imports of commodities to Gaza (Kerem Shalom) opened today, allowing through some 100 truckloads, including medicines and food.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

As the current Israeli offensive in Gaza enters its fifth day, Israeli airstrikes and shelling from the land and the sea have continued. Despite a relative decline overnight, the intensity of indiscriminate rocket firing at communities in southern Israel has increased again since early morning. The ongoing violence is taking place amid widespread media reports about international efforts led by Egypt aimed at brokering a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

Reports estimated that since the start of the offensive on 14 November, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) has hit more than 1,000 targets in Gaza, with more than 150 targets hit in the past 24 hours alone, according to the IDF. Airstrikes targeted sites in Gaza City, northern Gaza and included rocket launching sites, military bases, and police stations, as well as tunnels along the border with Egypt.

The IAF also continued to target residential buildings belonging to, according to the IDF, members of Palestinian armed groups; at least 12 residential buildings were reportedly hit by

airstrikes since the beginning of the offensive. The majority of air-strikes on residential buildings have reportedly been preceded either by telephone calls from the IDF, or by the firing of sound or low-explosive rockets, aimed at warning residents to leave the building. Despite these measures, many attacks on residential buildings have resulted in casualties, including of civilians. The targeting of a residential building in the Rafah area this morning, for example, resulted in the killing of an elderly man attempting to leave a neighboring house and the injury of another six civilians, including two women and a child.

Overnight, the Israeli Navy shelled a bridge along the Coastal Road, one of the two main traffic arteries in the Gaza Strip. Depending on the scope of damage (to be assessed), this may impede movement between the northern and southern areas of Gaza. The offices of two local TV stations, which are located in office blocks in Gaza City that also host various international media offices, were targeted this morning.



Since the start of the offensive (as of 1500 hs), at least 53 Palestinian have been killed in Israeli attacks, of whom at least 27 are reported to be civilians, including at least ten children and five women. Two civilians, including one child, are reported to have been killed by rockets fired by armed groups falling inside Gaza; approximately 100 rockets fired by armed factions have exploded within Gaza, according to the IDF. To date, over 520 Palestinians are reported to have been injured, including over 140 children and over 80 women.¹

Initial information indicates that in the past 24 hours, at least 15 houses in Gaza were destroyed or sustained major damage, bringing the total number since the beginning of the offensive to at least 52. Additionally, more than 500 houses have sustained minor damage, including approximately 100 in the last 24 hours.²

Indiscriminate rocket fire by Palestinian armed groups towards Israeli communities in southern Israel has intensified since the early morning today. While the majority of rockets were reportedly intercepted by the Iron Dome system,

Latest developments: additional civilian fatalities, including five children and four women, were reported in an unconfirmed incident from this afternoon.

buildings in Ashkelon, Ashdod, Beer-Sheva and Sderot sustained direct hits.

The number of Israeli fatalities since 14 November remains three civilians, with no additional case reported in the last 24 hours. The total number of Israelis injured to date is reportedly 89, of whom 80 are civilians, including children.³

It is estimated that over 700 properties in southern Israel have sustained some type of damage since 14 November, including private houses, agricultural infrastructure, livestock, cars and other businesses, according to the Israeli Property Taxation Authority. Israeli media reports that many families from southern Israel continue to relocate to areas further in the centre and north of the country due to damage to their residences or for fear of future rocket attacks.

THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN THE GAZA STRIP

A generalized state of fear and uncertainty remains prevalent among Gaza's population, particularly relating to a potential IDF ground incursion. Gazans continue to limit their movement in the streets and public transportation is largely unavailable. Bakeries are crowded with people stocking up on supplies, in anticipation of a further escalation. Concerns about potential shortages of food, if hostilities escalate, remain high. Current shortages of fuel are of increasing concern due to the high reliance of people on back-up electricity generators. While some fuel stations across Gaza are partially functioning,

fuel is now being rationed by the local authorities based on sectoral priorities and locations.

Crossings

Kerem Shalom: the single crossing for commodities, resumed operations today, with approx. 100 truckloads of goods allowed through into Gaza. These included 14 truckloads of medical and food items brought by humanitarian agencies, with the rest brought by the private sector. The latter include 20 truckloads of fodder mainly for poultry, which would cover approximately 3-4 days of needs.

1. Information on the number of Palestinian casualties has been collected by members of the Protection Cluster, particularly OHCHR, PCHR, Al Mezan and B'Tselem, with reference to MoH data.
2. Provided by the Shelter Cluster.
3. According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Erez: the crossing continued to be operational on the Israeli side for humanitarian cases and foreign nationals. However, a Hamas checkpoint controlling access to the crossing has been preventing people from reaching Erez, with a few exceptions made for medical referral cases.

Rafah: the passenger crossing with Egypt remains open and is working at levels prior to the current escalation in violence, i.e. it is open for Gazans with coordination in advance and for humanitarian cases. One truckload of medical supplies was also scheduled to enter Gaza through Rafah today. The Egyptian authorities have confirmed that UN and INGO staff who have previously been cleared for evacuation will be allowed to exit following prior-coordination (up to 24 hours in advance).



Electricity

Two electricity transformers were hit during an IAF airstrike west of Jabalia, resulting in significant damage. Despite efforts to repair

the damage, the electricity supply to over 400 households in the area is disrupted. GEDCO reports that their teams have been able to repair small scale damage to the electricity network in other parts of the Gaza Strip, as well as the electricity supply line from Egypt that was damaged during attacks on the tunnels in recent days.

Yesterday, the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) received 345,000 liters of fuel that was transported through the tunnels, raising its reserves to approximately 500,000 liters. This has allowed the GPP to start running a second turbine between 6pm and 6am, slightly reducing power outages in some areas to a minimum of eight hours a day. Current reserves are sufficient for the next 3-4 days.

Overall, despite a decline following airstrikes and restrictions by the Egyptian Police, fuel transfers through the tunnels, including for the GPP, continue; during the last two days some 1.3 million liters of fuel are believed to have reached Gaza via the tunnels.

UPDATES BY CLUSTERS



Protection

The Protection Cluster is concerned by the increasing number of civilian casualties in Gaza. The recent use of naval artillery fire is also of concern, as these are reportedly less precise than airborne munitions so far used. Cluster members are documenting incidents to identify possible violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Also of concern is the psychosocial impact of the conflict on the population of Gaza, especially children. Reports continue of children displaying signs of stress, including excessive crying, bedwetting, and screaming when hearing frequent explosions.

Moderate displacement continues to be reported; families whose homes have sustained damage or are located near to potential air or ground targets are relocating to the homes of friends and family in areas they consider safer.

There is an immediate need to protect children, men and women from explosive remnants of war (ERWs), initially through risk awareness and later on by ensuring that ERWs are safely removed before any humanitarian work begins in areas that were targeted and their peripheries.



Health

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has postponed all elective surgeries due to the current situation

and shortages in anesthesia drugs. Non-urgent cases have been transferred to NGO hospitals and health personnel have been asked to report to the nearest health facility for extended shifts. Five Palestinian injured in the current hostilities were transferred yesterday to hospitals in Egypt for treatment.

Today, 19 out of 21 health centres run by UNRWA were open, providing a range of services to the population. Two UNRWA health centres were not operating due to their close proximity to the border; one sustained damage during an air strike yesterday. The closure of the one of the health centres will affect already vulnerable communities in the Khan Younis area. While UNRWA's health centre in Jabalia also sustained damage this morning, it continued to operate. Yesterday, more than 9500 patients were treated in UNRWA's clinics.



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

So far, no major damage to WASH facilities or disruption in the provision of WASH services has been reported. Since 14 November, however, at least two water networks, one water well and two water reservoirs have been damaged; both reservoirs remain out of service. One network damaged in airstrikes yesterday normally serves up to 20,000 people in Al Nasser area (Rafah). According to the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility in Gaza (CMWU), repairs are underway and there is no need to deliver water tankering to the area at this stage. Waste collection services in Gaza have been affected with dumpsters overflowing and waste scattered in the streets.



Food assistance

UNRWA opened seven distribution centres across Gaza today to distribute food assistance to more than 12,000 beneficiaries. Four other centres were closed due to the security situation. Another

center, which was scheduled to distribute food assistance to more than 3,500 beneficiaries, was damaged as a result of an Israeli air strike to the adjacent building; following some repairs the center is scheduled to open tomorrow. The current food distribution is part of the main UNRWA food distribution cycle (October to December).

Scheduled food distributions are planned to resume on November 20th for WFP and its cooperating partners. Ninety-two (92) percent of voucher beneficiaries have redeemed their entitlements for the third week of November.



Education

All schools throughout the Gaza Strip continue to be closed. UNRWA TV continues to provide children with mathematics, Arabic and English lessons.

In the last two days, five additional schools have reportedly sustained damage; the total number of schools damaged so far is at least 30. This includes 24 schools run by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Gaza, at least 5 UNRWA schools and one private school. A school guard was injured yesterday.



Coordination

OCHA is continuing to coordinate clusters in Gaza. Efforts are focused on information gathering, identification of stocks and potential response in the event of increased needs. The Inter-Agency Contingency Plan will be fully activated in the event of any substantial deterioration in the situation on the ground.