

gaza situation report

gaza

unrwa



a weekly update from unrwa

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the next update will be issued on Wednesday 1 July 2015

- UNRWA has launched its global [#SOS4Gaza](#) campaign to mark the start of Ramadan. [#SOS4Gaza](#) features seven children from Beach Camp, a refugee camp in Gaza city, putting messages expressing their hopes and dreams in bottles, which they send to sea. The campaign is championed by UNRWA Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Youth and Arab Idol star, Mohammad Assaf. It is based around a [film](#) that features the children of Gaza against a backdrop of devastation caused by last year's conflict. The campaign reaches out to a global audience with a message of hope and charity during Ramadan, by donating to UNRWA's education programme in Gaza. [A hand-made bottle](#) from a local factory in Hebron can be bought online; each bottle contains a real drawing from children in Gaza. UNRWA has organized over 500 original drawings from children all across Gaza, in which they express their dreams and hopes for the future. The [campaign's landing site](#) also includes background information on the seven refugee children who participate in the film as well as 'behind the scene' features, including a visit from the Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl to the Beach Camp.
- During the first 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan, UNRWA is distributing Suhoor food parcels to almost 2,000 poor refugee families in 12 food distribution centres in all areas of the Gaza Strip. Suhoor is the last meal Muslims consume in the early morning hours before the start of the daily fasting; food baskets include items ranging from juice and jam to cheese, tea, chick peas or meat and will provide families with the important calories needed during the fasting hours until the Iftar, the evening meal after sunset. The families who will receive the food assistance are considered abject poor, meaning households who live below US\$ 1.5 per capita per day. The distribution was made possible to the generous contribution of US\$ 200,000 by Islamic Relief USA. While this contribution from Islamic Relief USA will provide urgently-needed support for Palestine refugees, the UNRWA General Fund deficit still stands at US\$ 101 million.
- [Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) in Gaza](#) remains a concern for UNRWA. The Agency participates in

the Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group, consisting of different UN agencies together with national and international non-government organizations, which meets on a monthly basis to strengthen multi-sectorial approaches for the effective prevention and response to GBV. UNRWA documents GBV cases through its 21 “one stop” centres, located in each of the UNRWA Health Centres, where trained staff are able to detect and provide services for GBV survivors. Over the years, the number of cases detected by UNRWA service providers has steadily increased; however, only a fraction of survivors seek assistance. From January to May 2015 UNRWA Health Centres have detected 533 cases in total, whereof 92 per cent were reported by females and 8 per cent by males. In 65 per cent of the cases the spouse was identified as the perpetrator. In 83 per cent of the total detected cases a psychological or emotional abuse was reported, and in 27 per cent a physical assault. 9 per cent of all survivors were below 18 years. According to a 2012 report by the think tank Palthink, domestic violence in Gaza is on the rise, related to the dire socio-economic and political situation the society is facing. 2011 data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) confirms high levels of domestic violence; according to PCBS approximately 37 per cent of married women in Gaza have experienced physical or sexual violence by their husbands in the previous 12 months; in addition, more than 600,000 children are growing up in homes where violence against women is prevalent.

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- UNRWA Gaza Field Office continues to welcome high level delegations in an effort to expose representatives to the context in which Palestine refugees live in Gaza. A delegation from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was received on 21 June. The Agency accompanied the delegation to the heavily impacted area of Shujjaiya in eastern Gaza city where they met with a refugee family; they also visited an UNRWA Health Centre in Khan Younis. A general cooperation agreement was signed between UNRWA and JICA in August 2011. The main agency wide areas of cooperation include camp improvement and technical support on renewable energy and energy efficiency as well as the support of UNRWA Health Centres.
- The Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl sent his Ramadan greeting message to all UNRWA colleagues on 18 June. This year, he stressed that Palestine refugees face “the most severe crisis and threats in decades, with a prolonged and relentless occupation and blockade and the effects of conflict, violence, destruction and despair.” He also acknowledged the concerns expressed by colleagues regarding the austerity measures and the impact of the Agency’s serious financial deficit on the lives of many refugees in dire need of support. Yet “Palestine refugees have faced so much hardship and never given up,” he continued, and added: “The same applies to UNRWA: we will never give up!” He thanked all UNRWA staff members for their dedication and energy and underlined the importance of maintaining a culture of dialogue and partnership to overcome the common challenges.
- The Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Robert Turner, visited Ankara, Turkey on 16 and 17 June. He met various Turkish representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) as well as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). He briefed them on the current situation in Gaza and UNRWA’s humanitarian response, including the emergency shelter response, as well as on the serious financial deficit UNRWA is facing, which could strongly impact the life of Palestine refugees in Gaza.
- **Shelter update:**
 - Since the start of the 2014 emergency shelter response, UNRWA has distributed over US\$ 111.2 million (excluding Programme Support Costs) to Palestine refugee families whose homes were damaged or demolished during the 2014 summer conflict. During the reporting week, US\$ 11.25 million in funding was made available for the first (US\$ 11,850) and second (US\$ 11.23 million) tranches in rental subsidy payments for 2015 and US\$ 7,500 was made available for US\$ 500 reintegration grants to replace lost household goods. The US\$ 11.25 million in funding reached 8,646 refugee families across the Gaza Strip. They have accessed the payments through local banks on 23 June. With this payment the Agency was able to

pay the first and second tranches (January to July 2015) of rental subsidies to all remaining eligible refugee families. Donations from Japan, Germany, Australia and the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) have made this week's substantial TSCA payment possible.

- To date, over 60,000 Palestine refugee families – almost half of the caseload – have been able to complete the minor repair works of their damaged homes with assistance provided through UNRWA and 290 families have completed the repairs of their severely damaged shelters. In addition, 11,601 families are currently in the process of completing the repair works of their shelters. Over 11,653 families have now received a rental subsidy payment to cover September to December 2014 the period.
- US\$ 216 million has been pledged in support of UNRWA's emergency shelter programme, for which a total of US\$ 720 million is required. This leaves a current shortfall of US\$ 504 million.
- Due to the lack of funding, to date still 50,839 families have not received the first tranche for repair works of their shelter and 7,698 have not received the second tranche to continue repair works. 693 refugee families still wait for their rental subsidy payment covering the period from September to December 2014. 4,655 families have not received their US\$ 500 reintegration grant to replace lost household goods. UNRWA has processed all these cases and they have received approval through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism; as soon as funding is secured the Agency can distribute the urgently needed financial support.
- Almost one year after the beginning of last summer's conflict and almost ten months after the ceasefire, not a single totally destroyed home has been rebuilt in Gaza. As of 22 June, UNRWA engineers have confirmed 138,508 Palestine refugee houses as impacted during the July/August armed hostilities, 9,117 of them are considered totally demolished. In addition, 4,939 shelters have suffered severe, 3,635 major and 120,817 minor damages. While the Agency is in dialogue with interested donors to fund reconstruction, to date it has only secured funds to rebuild 200 of the 9,117 totally destroyed homes. The families have been identified and 85 of them have already prepared the design and building permits.
- The Agency closed its remaining two Collective Centres (CC) in Gaza on 17 June. In the 9 months following the ceasefire, UNRWA has supported families who were unable to move to alternative shelter solutions; simultaneously, UNRWA worked to early recovery through providing payments for rental subsidies or repairs of damaged properties to enable families to find more dignified shelter options outside school buildings. As families took up alternative housing with the assistance provided, the CC population decreased and UNRWA systematically returned the buildings to their intended purposes following appropriate safety and neutrality checks that facilitated maintenance and education teams to re-engage. Throughout the 11 months of displacement, the use of school buildings as CCs resulted in increased pressure on the students, teachers and the education programme as a greater number of schools operated on a double or triple shift to compensate for the unavailable school buildings. The Agency is currently undertaking maintenance work to prepare the facilities for the coming school year that begins on 23 August 2015.
- On 18 June, at the end of a mission to assess economic developments in the West Bank and Gaza, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation stated that "the economic activity is weak and insufficient to generate adequate job opportunities." Concerning Gaza, the IMF notes a slow increase of growth driven by a limited revival of donor-supported reconstruction, yet at the same time unemployment has remained very high. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the average unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2015 reached 41.6 per cent, a slight decrease from the previous quarter (42.8 per cent), yet still the highest in the world. For the refugee population it reached 42 per cent and the youth refugee population 67.2 per cent in the first three months of 2015, according to PCBS. Trade is still almost non-existent in Gaza; according to the Palestinian Trade Centre, the easing of export restrictions by Israel in November 2014 for transfers to the West Bank and in March 2015 for transfers to Israel remains very limited: not all industries are

allowed, only few commodities are concerned (almost exclusively vegetables) and quantities are subject to quotas predefined by Israel (250 tons per month). In average, 79 truckloads of goods existed Gaza each month since the partial easing of export restrictions in November 2014; this is just 7 per cent of the monthly average exports in the first quarter of 2007, prior to the blockade

- The United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza conflict announced on Monday 22nd June, the release of its [report on violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the context of the military operations conducted last summer](#). According to the report, the commission was “able to gather substantial information pointing to serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law by Israel and by Palestinian armed groups.” In some cases, these violations may amount to war crimes. The commission urges all involved actors to ensure accountability. The 217-page report is based on 280 interviews with victims and witnesses and 500 written submissions as well as on publicly available information. The report has raised [widespread media attention](#); according to the [New York Times](#), the report is expected to serve as a road map for the inquiry into possible war crimes already underway by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

General

Operational environment: The slow pace of the reconstruction process combined with ascending poverty and worryingly high unemployment rates and aid dependency leads to growing frustration in Gaza, further aggravated by recent [media reports](#) that Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and his Palestinian Government of National Consensus – formed on 2 June 2014 – may have resigned on 17 June or will resign in the coming weeks. [Media](#) also report that the Hamas movement is holding indirect exchanges through [Arab and European channels](#) with Israel for cementing a long-term truce in the Gaza Strip, prompting fears of a separation between the West Bank and Gaza.

The Rafah Crossing has remained partially open during the reporting week in both directions; according [news reports](#) Egypt has allowed the crossing of trucks carrying construction material for a Qatari aid project into Gaza.

On 20 June a 25-year old male Palestinian committed suicide in Khan Younis. According to an article published by [the Palestine News Network](#) suicide rates in Gaza have increased due to the worsening economic, social and psychological situation. The Shifa hospital in Gaza, states the article, speaks of at least one suicide attempt per day.

Also several incidents of intercommunal violence were reported during the week; in one on 19 June a family dispute led to eight injuries due to a grenade that was thrown during the strife.

The number of protests decreased during the reporting week, most likely due to the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. Protestors still demonstrated against the perceived cuts in UNRWA services or the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails.

UNRWA's response

Refugee family moves out of a Collective Centre with UNRWA's help



Rima Fadel Al Masri is sitting on the floor of her newly rented house, surrounded by her ten children.
Photo credit: © UNRWA 2015. Photo by Ahmad Awad.

A few weeks ago, in the beginning of June 2015, 39-year old Rima Fadel Al Masri and her family received rental subsidy payments from UNRWA and were able to rent a house after having stayed over nine months in an UNRWA Collective Centre in Jabalia, northern Gaza.

“Although this is not my house, I feel very relaxed; finally all of us are able to be together again and also the behavior of my children changed a lot; they feel calmer,” Rima explained, sitting on the floor of her new 3-room house in Jabalia, surrounded by her ten children – the youngest being only 19 months old.

Rima Fadel Al Masri and her family had to flee their house in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza, during last summer’s conflict due to the heavy shelling of their neighbourhood. “We were running out to the street and took nothing with us; we walked until we reached Sheikh Zayed area, then we continued to the Unknown Soldier Square, then to the Shifa hospital in Gaza city. We were just looking for a safe place,” recounts Rima on her family’s escape. Ultimately, the Masris found refuge in an UNRWA school in Jabalia that served as designated emergency shelter.

Meanwhile, their house in Beit Hanoun had been totally destroyed during the conflict. Rima recalls her visit to the destroyed area during one of the ceasefires: “I could not recognize which house is mine, I could not figure out the streets; the rubble was everywhere, the destruction was everywhere.”

The accommodation of such a large family in the UNRWA Collective Centre was difficult. “Life was unbearable” due to overcrowding and lack of privacy, said Rima. “My son Mohammad used to cry day and night, he felt very sad staying at the school. For him it was a school and it was built for this reason only and all he wanted was going home,” she added.

For this reason, Rima’s family is very pleased to be able to spend Ramadan in a different place, “in a real house, like a normal family, being able to receive guests and relatives, something we really missed at the Collective Centre,” Rima explained

Yet although the family is grateful, they are also worried that UNRWA will not be able to continue to support them through rental subsidy payments and they will become homeless again, since they cannot afford to pay rent without UNRWA’s assistance. In addition, the Masri family was still not able to start rebuilding their home; to date not a single totally destroyed home has been rebuilt in Gaza.

“All I wish for is to have my house back and to settle down again,” said Rima.

Summary of Major Incidents

Israeli forces fired at Palestinian farmers near the security fence or fisher boats on a daily basis. On 19 June one Palestinian was injured when Israeli forces opened fire towards him in Gaza's Middle Area.

On 16 militants fired one test rocket towards the sea and on 17 June militants fired one test rocket towards the sea and one rocket towards Israel. The rocket dropped short and landed in Palestinian areas. On 18 militants fired another rocket towards Israel. Also this rocket dropped short and landed in Palestinian areas. On 19 June militants fired two test rockets towards the sea.

On 18 June four Israeli bulldozers entered approximately 100 metres into Gaza and conducted a clearing operation.

Funding Needs

US\$ 216 million has been pledged in support of UNRWA's emergency shelter programme, for which a total of US\$ 720 million is required. This leaves a current shortfall of US\$ 504 million.

As presented in UNRWA's oPt Emergency Appeal, the Agency is seeking USD 366.6 million for its 2015 emergency operations in Gaza, including USD 127 million for emergency shelter, repair and collective centre management, USD 105.6 million for emergency food assistance, and USD 68.6 million for emergency cash-for-work. More information can be found here:

English: http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2014_opt_emergency_appeal_english.pdf

Crossings

- The Rafah Crossing was open from 16 to 19 June in both directions. It was closed from 20 to 22 June.
- The Erez crossing was open for National ID holders (humanitarian cases, medical cases, merchants and UN staff) and for international staff from 16-18 and 21-22 June. On 19 June, Erez crossing was open for pedestrians only. It was closed on 20 June.
- Kerem Shalom was open from 16 to 18 June and 21 to 23 June. It was closed on 19 June.

Background

Following the escalation in violence between Gaza and Israel in November 2012 an understanding was reached between Hamas and Israel, mediated by Egypt. 2013 was subsequently the quietest year in a decade, in terms of hostilities between Israel and Gaza. Events in 2014, however, led to a profound deterioration in the situation.

From 8 July 2014 until 17 September, UNRWA shifted to emergency operations - whilst maintaining its core services - in all five areas of the Gaza Strip in response to escalating violence between Israel and Hamas. Until the 26 August cease-fire, civilian displacement and fatalities reached unprecedented levels.

The Israeli blockade of Gaza entered its 8th year in June 2014 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 868,000 today.

Gaza: Facts and Figures

- 1.26 million refugees out of 1.76 million total population
- 8 refugee camps
- Almost 12,500 staff
- 252 schools for almost 240,000 students

- 21 health centres
- 16 relief and social services offices
- 3 Micro-finance offices
- 12 food distribution centres for almost 868,000 refugees
- Living under a tightened land and sea blockade since 2007
- Shattered local economy
- Long standing restrictions on movement of people and goods has led to a de-development of Gaza
- Potentially unliveable place by 2020.

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



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