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Protection of Civilians Weekly Report

1 - 8 January 2009

A humanitarian and protection crisis unfolding

Since the Israeli military operation “Cast lead” began on 27 December until 8 January (4:00PM), 758 Palestinians have been killed—approximately 42% of whom were women (60) and children (257) according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. The number of children fatalities has increased by 250% since the beginning of ground operation on 3 January (see chart below). 56% of Gaza’s population are children.

On 2 January, Israel began intensive shelling of all the border areas of the Gaza Strip. On 3 January, ground troops entered. As the ground operation progressed, fighting between Israeli troops and Palestinian militants intensified, with many Palestinian civilians killed and injured. Israeli tanks fired shells at buildings suspected of concealing Palestinian fighters, and mortars were fired in response. On 5 January, Israeli shelling directly hit two UNRWA schools where hundreds of displaced people had sought for shelter, killing at least 33 Palestinian civilians.

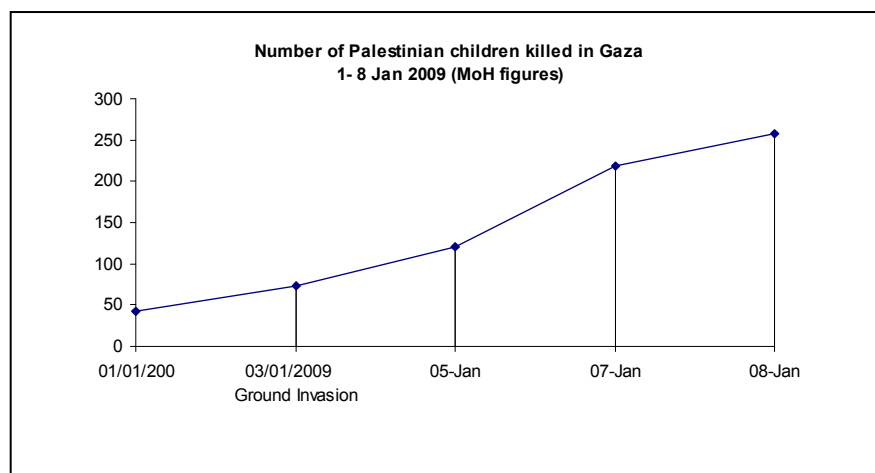
There is no safe space in the Gaza Strip—no safe haven, no bomb shelters, and the borders are closed and civilians have no place to flee. UNRWA facilities being used as shelters are not constructed to withstand bombardments as they are mostly schools and office buildings.

Zeitun killings:

There has been extensive destruction and many deaths reported in the Zeitun neighbourhood, south of Gaza city by IDF attacks. From 3 to 7 January, the IDF prevented medical teams from entering the area to evacuate the wounded. In of the one gravest incidents since the beginning of operations, according to several testimonies, on 4

January Israeli foot-soldiers evacuated approximately 110 Palestinians into a single-residence house in Zeitun (half of whom were children), warning them to stay indoors. Twenty-four hours later, Israeli forces shelled the home repeatedly, killing approximately thirty. Those who survived and were able, walked two kilometres to Salah Ed Din road before being transported to the hospital in civilian vehicles. Three children, the youngest of whom was five months old, died upon arrival at the hospital.

After several days of requesting safe passage to the area, on 7 January during a three-hour lull in hostilities, an ICRC medical team was finally allowed on foot (without ambulances) into the closed military area to evacuate any remaining survivors. Due to the limited time allowed, ICRC was not able to reach all houses in the area. In all, ICRC evacuated 30 Palestinians including 18 wounded.

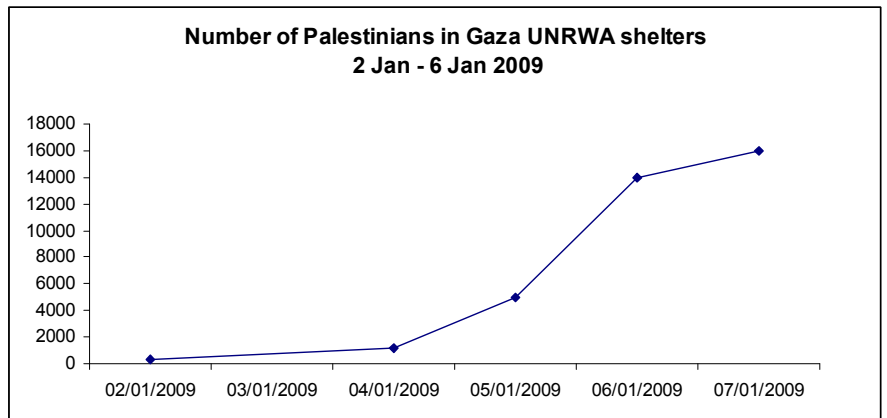


Rapid Increase of Internal Displacement

The Israeli offensive has resulted in the largest number of forcibly displaced Palestinians since 1967.

Initially, only a few hundred Palestinians sought shelter at five UNRWA schools. However, when the Israeli ground offensive began, thousands of displaced Palestinians poured into UNRWA facilities, and by 7 January, 16,000 displaced persons were staying in 23 shelters.

UNRWA has distributed food parcels, mattresses, and blankets to those in need, and its stocks are running out. UNRWA is reportedly able to provide shelter for up to 40,000 displaced persons.



Halt in Hostilities:

On 7 January, the Israeli military implemented a three-hour lull in hostilities on humanitarian grounds to allow the civilian population to access basic supplies and medical services. On the same day, the IDF opened a Humanitarian Affairs Coordination Center (HACC), with the aim of coordinating with various humanitarian organizations the flow of food, fuel and supplies into Gaza, and the evacuation of foreign nationals.

Any mechanism that facilitates the distribution of assistance is welcomed. However, the needs of the population are so great at this time that humanitarian assistance programs need to operate around the clock. Humanitarian programs require a constant and sustainable supply line into Gaza at a level to meet the needs of the population, as well as an environment which allows the people of Gaza to have safe access to assistance and services including free and safe movement of ambulances carrying wounded to medical services, and repair of damaged vital infrastructure.

Palestinian militant activities:

During the reporting period, Palestinians fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, some hitting areas deeper into Israel than ever before. Three Israeli civilians have been killed since 27 December and approximately 50 injured. Seven Israeli soldiers have been killed in the fighting, including four on 5 January by "friendly-fire," and more than 80 Israeli soldiers have been injured since the ground operation began.

Gaza electricity and fuel

The electricity output steadily declined as the week progressed, and finally shut down in most parts of Gaza on 4 January. Initially, the Gaza Strip had an electricity deficit of 41% since the Gaza power plant shut down on 30 December due to for the lack of fuel reserves. At that point, power outages reached 16 hours per day in Gaza City, with some areas experiencing outages of up to 48 hours due to power line damages from airstrikes. Nahal oz fuel pipelines were closed during the initial phases of the Israeli offensive.

By 4 January, 75% of Gaza's population was completely cut off from electricity. With the advent of the Israeli ground operation, all Gaza governorate and most of North Gaza and Middle area were without electricity, and only limited electricity supply in Rafah, following attacks which damaged power lines from Israel power lines from Egypt. On 4 January, 215,000 litres of industrial fuel were allowed into Gaza by Israel for distribution to the power plant. By 5 January, two of seven power lines from Israel and Rafah were repaired. However, as of 6 January, only a few sections of Gaza City have had electricity restored due to the severe damage to the internal network; repairs are ongoing.

Gaza health

During the week, the overriding health concern was of the effect of power outages on primary health facilities. Hospitals struggled to function under daily power blackouts. Fuel for backup electricity generators remains precariously low, and fuel generators are designed for short-term use only (increasing the risk of breakdown). On 1 January, four electric generators were brought in through Rafah crossing and distributed to Gaza MoH hospitals as additional power backup.

The severity of the electricity situation was underscored when on 5 January, generators at MoH ambulance stations, vaccines stores, labs and warehouses shut down for lack of fuel until UNRWA delivered fuel to the MoH. At Shifa hospital, generator failure could prove to be catastrophic as 70 intensive care patients, including 30 in the neonatal department, are reliant on machines.

Early in the week, hospitals were overwhelmed by the large influx of injured people. Patients are discharged as soon as possible to free beds for new casualties but intensive care units are still overstretched. Hospital capacity is approximately 2000 beds but only 164 of these are special care beds (28 general intensive care, 20 intensive coronary care, 8 in burns units, 10 pediatric intensive care, 98 neonatal). Safety of ambulances and medical staff is of major concern; the security situation prevents many medical staff from reaching hospitals, and ambulances experienced difficulty reaching the injured because of continuous fire. According to MoH, during the week six medical staff were killed and 30 injured; eleven ambulances were hit.

Medical supplies imported 30 December – 6 January

	30- Dec-08	31- Dec-08	01-Jan- 09	02-Jan- 09	05-Jan- 09	06-Jan- 09	Total
Medical Supply trucks	24	6	7	5	1.5	7	51.5

At the beginning of the Israeli operation, stocks of adequate medical equipment and spare parts were already low due to the 18-month long blockade. By 2 January, following a large influx of medical supplies in preceding days, the situation vis-à-vis medical supplies began stabilizing although some shortages remain at the hospital level. However, the medical supplies entering Gaza presented logistical challenges related to the cataloguing and management of supplies. Inventory and distribution efforts are on-going and all MoH hospitals had been reached by new supplies before the ground operation started. Intensive care units in hospitals remain overloaded and of limited capacity; the lack of medical specialists is also a problem. An ICRC surgical team entered on 5 January, supplying 1000 units of tetanus oxide for MoH hospitals. There is an urgent need for neurovascular, orthopedic, and cardio surgeons.

The Erez crossing was opened intermittently during the week to allow for the evacuation of eight medical cases and eight escorts to Israeli hospitals. Except for these cases, the PA MoH in Ramallah stopped authorizing the referral of patients from Gaza to medical treatment in Israel as in the past, referring patients to Egyptian hospitals instead. Since the beginning of hostilities, 134 patients crossed into Egypt through Rafah for external medical treatment. Of growing concern are the 700-1000 chronic medical patients who had been receiving regular treatment in Israel and East Jerusalem each month. The existing referral system through Erez for these patients has been disrupted.

Water and Sanitation

As of 7 January, 800,000 people in North Gaza, Gaza and the Middle Area are without running water supply. Sewage and water systems were considerable damaged during the week due to fighting, causing sewage-water flooding in Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya. Conditions were further exacerbated when five of Gaza's 37 waste-water pumping stations shut down due to lack of electricity fuel for back up generators. There is concern that current military operations could damage the sand walls of the Beit Lahiya sewage lagoon causing a massive sewage overflow. Up to 15,000 people are directly at risk. Two years ago, five people were killed and 2,000 displaced when the lagoon overflowed. The sewage situation is also dangerous, as it poses serious risks of the spread of water-borne disease.

On 2 January, airstrikes in the Al Mughraga area damaged a main drinking water pipe, cutting off water supplies to 30,000 people in Nuseirat Camp. In addition, according to the CMWU (Gaza's water utility), 48 of Gaza's 130 water wells are not functioning for lack of electricity, damage to the pipes or diminished fuel reserves on which its electricity generators depend. At least 45 additional water wells are operating only partially and in danger of shutting down without additional supplies of fuel and

electricity. On 4 January, UNRWA donated 75,000 litres of fuel to CMWU. Due to prevailing security concerns, the CMWU faced difficulties in repairing damages to the networks because of security reasons.

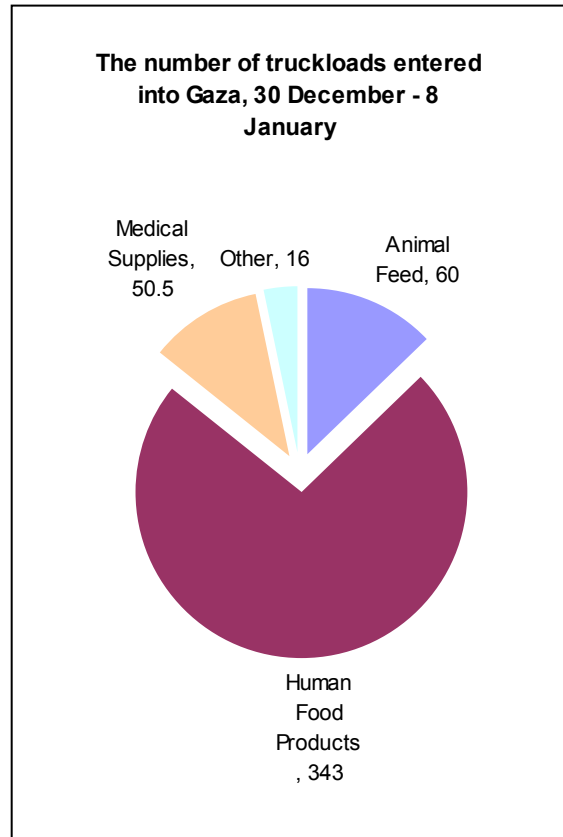
Gaza crossings activity

The daily average of truckloads that entered Gaza during these last seven days of fighting were three times higher than the daily averages of truckloads that entered in the weeks preceding the outbreak of hostilities—67 truckloads per day (30 December-8 January) compared to 23 truckloads per day in November.

Most truckloads of food and medical supplies entered through the Kerem Shalom crossing during the reporting period, with a few exceptional shipments of medical supplies entering through Rafah from Egypt. In all, as of 8 January, a total of 469.5 truckloads entered through Kerem Shalom, and thirteen truckloads of medical supplies entered through Rafah.

The Erez crossing was opened intermittently during the week to allow for the evacuation of medical cases to Israeli hospitals. On 3 January, 226 foreign nationals, mainly spouses and Gaza residents and their children, left Gaza through Erez crossing.

Nahal Oz was closed during most of the reporting period but was opened on 5 January, allowing nearly 215,000 litres of Industrial fuel along with 47 tonnes of cooking gas have been pumped from Israel to Gaza. 100,000 litres of diesel have entered for UNRWA.



The conveyor belt located at Karni crossing, the only available mechanism for the import of wheat grain, remained closed during the week. This has resulted in the depletion of wheat grain stocks, forcing all six mills in the Gaza Strip to shut down.

Gaza food

Although 232 truckloads of flour have entered Gaza since 30 December, no wheat grain has been allowed into Gaza since the beginning of the hostilities. The Ministry of National Economy in Gaza ordered flour mills to allocate the available wheat flour to bakeries and distribute it under its supervision. As of 6 January, only nine bakeries in Gaza were operational, due to the paucity of flour and cooking gas, and bread prices have nearly doubled since the Israeli offensive began. WFP has reported shortages of rice, sugar, dairy products, milk, canned foods and fresh meats. The availability of food items and cooking gas is affected not only by closures, but also by the recent destruction of many tunnels along the border with Egypt, through which these items were being imported.

Although WFP’s distribution to 265,000 beneficiaries is ongoing, food assistance remains erratic due to heightened security risks. Since 27 December, WFP has distributed only a fraction of the 1350 metric tonnes available. UNRWA resumed its food distribution to 2,000-3,000 families in six distribution centres on 1 January, but was forced to shut down three days later due to the Israeli military activity, except in southern Gaza.

	Date	Total
Truckloads of Flour	28-Dec-08	17
	29-Dec-08	26
	30-Dec-08	30
	31-Dec-08	31
	01-Jan-09	17
	02-Jan-09	21
	05-Jan-09	32
	06-Jan-09	22
	07-Jan-09	36
Total		232

Prior to the current operation approximately 80 percent of the Strip’s population was already reliant on humanitarian assistance including food distribution from UN and international organizations.

Wave of protests throughout the West Bank resulting in Palestinian injuries

Throughout the West Bank daily demonstrations in protest of the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip continued during the reporting period, in addition to the regular anti-Barrier demonstrations. Some demonstrations developed into violent clashes between stone-throwing demonstrators and Israeli security forces, who responded with live ammunition, rubber-coated bullets, teargas and physical assault. In addition, several incidents of stone-throwing at IDF checkpoints resulted in Palestinian injuries this week, most involving Palestinian children from the Qalandiya Refugee Camp (Jerusalem). In the course of these incidents and clashes, at least 35 Palestinians were injured (two critically) by the Israeli security forces, of whom 21 were children, and two demonstrators were killed. Many protesters suffered from teargas inhalation. Six demonstrators were injured by PA police in Hebron City.

Several cases of stone-throwing and Molotov throwing at Israeli vehicles travelling on main roads were also reported this week, particularly in the northern West Bank, though no casualties were reported. In two such cases, the IDF imposed curfews on the villages of An Nabi Elyas (Qalqiliya) and Huwwara (Nablus) for approximately 12 hours. In two cases the IDF occupied the roofs of Palestinian houses, using them as observation positions over main roads for two days.

The total number of Palestinians arrested this week by the Israeli security forces continued to increase and reached 116, compared to 75 and 56 during the previous two weeks.

On 2 and 3 January the Israeli authorities imposed a general closure on West Bank, preventing all Palestinians holding valid permits from entering East Jerusalem and Israel, excepting urgent medical cases and those working with UN and international agencies. On 2 January, Palestinian males aged 16-50 were prevented to cross Tappuah checkpoint southward, severing them from the central and southern West Bank.

Israeli court approval of the demolition of family home of Palestinian attacker

This week the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a petition objecting to the demolition of two of the four floors of a building in the East Jerusalem, ordered by the IDF. This building is the house of the extended family of the perpetrator of an attack against a *Yeshiva* (Jewish learning center) on March 2008, in which eight Israelis, including four children, as well as the perpetrator, were killed. Accordingly, the basement of the building, as well as two flats in the first floor, will be filled with concrete and sealed off. This is the first such "punitive" demolition order against the family of a deceased attacker, issued by the IDF since February 2005. At that time the Israeli Minister of Defense suspended punitive demolitions based on recommendations of a commission questioning the deterrent effect of such demolitions. Since the beginning of the second Intifada and until then, Israel has demolished over 600 housing units as a punitive measure.