



16 May 2007

Rising Death Toll - Concern Over Deteriorating Situation (Report as of 6:30pm)

Update on Internal Palestinian Fighting:

Internal fighting in Gaza is now entering its fourth day with at least 37 dead and 114 injured since Sunday. This is the third round of intense factional fighting seen in Gaza this year leaving at least 128 Palestinians dead and 692 injured since 1 January 2007.

Following the killing of a senior Fatah leader on Sunday 13 May in Jabalia in northern Gaza, violence erupted throughout the Gaza Strip and particularly in Gaza city. Two attempted ceasefires collapsed within hours and fighting continued between Fatah forces and Hamas and its affiliated Executive Support Force (ESF). Today, fighting has taken place around security installations in Gaza city with few incidents reported elsewhere in northern, central and southern Gaza.

In one of the worst incidents, on 15 May, seven members of Fatah security forces were killed near Karni crossing when their jeep was hit by a rocket alleged to be fired by Hamas militants. This morning, the home of Fatah security chief, Rashid Abu Shbak was besieged by Hamas gunmen and at least five of Abu Shbak's body guards were killed.

Update on Palestinian-Israeli Violence:

Israeli media has reported that 30 Qassam rockets were fired by Palestinian militias towards Sderot and the Western Negev in Israel in the last two days, resulting in 28 injuries, including two women (one elderly) who both suffered moderate to serious wounds.

At around 2 pm today, Israeli Air Force jets fired missiles into an Executive Support Forces base in southern Gaza. Three ESF members were reported dead and 27 injured.

Humanitarian concerns

Every day life in Gaza City has been paralysed as people are too afraid to leave their homes. Heavily-armed Palestinian gunmen from all factions are now controlling the streets of Gaza City. These gunmen have taken up sniper positions in a number of populated high-rise buildings that dominate western Gaza City.

There are no shelters for the civilian population, and most people can only seek cover inside their homes, leaving them vulnerable to stray bullets and other types of ammunition.

Streets are barricaded and masked gunmen at dozens of impromptu checkpoints stop the few vehicles traveling on the roads for ID checks and searches.

The fear of the civilian population of leaving their homes has begun to impact the delivery of public services and the commercial sector:

- **Access to education:** On 13 and 15 May, UNRWA requested all Gaza Strip staff to leave their work places during the early afternoon. This caused some disruption to teaching schedules. Today, UNRWA staff in Gaza City were also requested to remain at home resulting in the closure of 45 schools in Gaza City and Beach camp. Elsewhere however, UNRWA teachers and pupils have shown a determination to reach their schools; yet the 15 schools in the Nuseirat area are only partially functioning.
- **Access to primary health care services:** UNRWA primary health care clinics are operating in most areas of the Gaza Strip today with the exception of Gaza city where



the fighting remains most intense and where UNRWA staff have been instructed to remain at home. The Ministry of Health clinics are similarly operating where staff have been able to reach their work place.

- **Access to secondary health care services:** WHO has confirmed that there have been no major interruptions to hospital services in spite of some armed incidents taking place in and around Shifa hospital in Gaza City. Hospital staff are reported to be sleeping overnight at a number of hospitals to ensure continuity of service. Such an arrangement however is not sustainable. WHO is reporting concerns at Shifa hospital over declining blood stocks as casualties mount and people do not have the possibility to donate. X-ray film is also reported to be in short supply.
- **Ambulances:** There are reports that ambulances have been stopped at militia checkpoints and the IDs of the wounded have been checked. This has not been possible to confirm.
- **Psychosocial:** There is an increasing sense of despair, hopelessness and powerlessness among many civilians, as the Gaza Strip once again descends into violence and chaos emanating from internal Palestinian fighting.
- **Electricity:** The Gaza power station relies on 270,000 litres of fuel per day. Reserves are low at the power station. While fuel has been piped into Gaza from Israel via Nahal Oz, the violence on 15 May prevented the dispatch of tankers to power stations south of Gaza City.
- The Palestinian Energy Authority (PEA) has confirmed that supplies arrived this morning (16 May), but concern remains that continued fighting may affect the ability of fuel tankers to reach the power plant in the days ahead. (Following the Israeli bombing of the power station last summer, the Gaza power station provides only 50 MW out of a total 187 MW supply. 120 MW comes from the Israel Electrical Company and 17 MW from Egypt. Interruptions to output are expected to impact hundreds of thousands of Gazans this summer.)

- **Solid waste disposal:** Garbage collection has largely ceased in the last three days. Garbage is beginning to pile up in the streets of Gaza City as municipal workers are unwilling and unable to move around streets that are now populated by masked gunmen. Should the violence continue, public health concerns may grow especially as temperatures continue to rise.
- **Freedom of movement:** Numerous militia checkpoints are present on the two main north-south arterial roads, Salah ed Din street and the Coastal road. People are reluctant to move south of Gaza city to the middle area, Khan Younis and Rafah because of these checkpoints, restricting populations to their localities.
- **Shortages of essential food supplies:** Karni, the principle crossing point for the movement of goods and supplies in and out of Gaza was open on 13 and 14 May, but closed on 15 May and today. The crossing has been closed at the instructions of the Palestinians. There are no reports of shortages, however, many shops and supermarkets remain closed as people are not willing to leave their homes to open their shops.
- **International organizations:** International and local UN staff were instructed to leave their offices early on 13 and 15 May and to remain at their homes today. There is a significant risk of being caught at one of the checkpoints or in cross fire and kidnapping remains a risk for international staff.