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occupied Palestinian territory

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS REPORT

Update on Escalation of Violence in the Gaza Strip and Southern Israel

19 AUGUST – 21 AUGUST 2011 (THROUGH 7PM)

Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip and rocket and mortar fire by Palestinian armed factions continue to affect civilians and civilian property in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. Overall, since the escalation of violence on 18 August, 14 Palestinians have been killed, including four civilians, and 41 injured, including 35 civilians, and nine Israelis have been killed, including seven civilians, and approximately 35 have been injured.

Between Friday, 19 August and Sunday, 21 August, initial reports indicate that the Israeli Air Force carried out approximately 30 air strikes on the Gaza Strip, resulting in the killing of seven Palestinians, and the injury of approximately 30 additional Palestinians. Tank fire from Israel forces stationed along the border and at sea was also reported, without casualty or damage. During the same period, tens of rockets and mortars fired by Palestinian armed groups towards cities in southern Israel resulted in the death of one Israeli civilian and the injury of six, including a baby and a nine-year-old child. One Palestinian child, 13-years-old, was also killed, and six others injured, when a GRAD rocket fired by Palestinian armed groups fell short.

On 18 August, a series of attacks along the Egypt-Israel border and in southern Israel claimed the lives of eight Israelis and left about 30 injured. At least seven of the attackers, who had infiltrated into Israel from Egypt, were reportedly killed. Five Egyptian policemen stationed near the border with Israel were also killed during the incident. Following the attacks, the Israeli Air Force launched a series of air strikes on the Gaza Strip and Palestinian armed groups escalated rocket and mortar fire towards cities in southern Israel.

Israeli air strikes have targeted a number of Hamas training bases, installations of armed factions,

tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border and open areas. Initial reports indicate that a number of civilian houses and public facilities were damaged as a result of Israeli airstrikes. On 19 August, an Israeli aircraft fired a missile targeting a member of a Palestinian armed group, killing the militant, his five-year-old child and his brother, a physician; five other injuries were reported. In another attack on 19 August, an Israeli drone fired a missile that hit a civilian house in the Az Zaitoun neighborhood, destroying a wall of the house and injuring three family members, including two children.

In Israel, much of the Palestinian rocket fire was either intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defense system or caused either no injuries or little damage. On 20 August, two serious incidents occurred, where one Grad missile hit a house in the city of Beer Sheva, killing one Israeli civilian and injuring several others, and another landed in the town of Ofakim, injuring two children. Also, on 21 August, a Palestinian-fired rocket reportedly hit an empty school in Be'er Sheva.

No Israeli airstrikes took place overnight 20/21 August, although rocket fire continued from Gaza. Three Israeli airstrikes were reported on the 21st, with some initial reports of injuries. As of the time of publication, however, the situation was relatively quiet.

Impact on property, infrastructure and humanitarian operations

Assessments are underway to estimate the level of damage to private property and public infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. Thus far, damage has been reported to numerous residential structures, at least four governmental buildings, seven local NGOs or associations, eight stores and supermarkets, a mosque, a school and a fuel station.

Among infrastructure damaged is a main sewage pump station, which, according to the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), was almost completely destroyed during one of the Israeli Air Force attacks on Nusairat Refugee Camp in the Middle Area. The pump station was supposed to start functioning in the coming months, when it would be connected with a larger sewage drainage network linked to the sewage treatment project, supported by KFW, east of Al Bureij. The damaged station was intended to serve the residents of Nusairat and Al Bureij refugee camps, with a combined population of over 130,000 people. In addition, the CMWU Central Office in Gaza City sustained some damage to office assets.

Also affected by a GRAD missile that fell short was the Al Qastina School, north of Gaza, which sustained damage to some windows, doors and frames. The Gaza Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which announced that it will rehabilitate the school in advance of the start of the new school year, reported that the school has frequently sustained damage as a result of conflict-related violence.

A number of INGOs has temporarily suspended field operations and UN agencies have restricted movement. The presence of international staff of INGOs in the Gaza Strip has also decreased, with the departure of some 20 such staff since 18 August.

Crossings open according to regular schedules

Gaza crossing points are operating according to their regular schedules, with some modification: Erez Crossing with Israel opened on 21 August for the entry and exit of internationals, but was closed for Palestinians requiring a permit to exit. Kerem Shalom Crossing, controlled by Israel, open on the 21st for the movement of goods, though a reduced number of truckloads of imports is expected to be processed. Fifty (50) truckloads for international organizations and 140 truckloads for the private sector were expected to enter. Rafah Crossing, controlled by the Egyptian authorities, has been open for the movement of specific groups of people (including patients, students, foreign passport holders and those with visas to other countries) the 20th and 21st; it was closed, as usual, on Friday (the 19th). Tunnels located under the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip are reported to be functioning with no reports indicating that the entry of fuel via the tunnels has been affected. Petrol stations are operating normally throughout the Gaza Strip.