GAZA HUMANITARIAN SNAPSHOT #2

13 - 29 July 2024

AID WORKER FATALITIES, ISRAELI ATTACKS ON SO-CALLED "HUMANITARIAN ZONES", AND CONSECUTIVE "EVACUATION ORDERS"* CRIPPLE AID DELIVERY

"This is the first time I find myself unable to offer help to others. It pains me as an aid worker that I can't do much for others. In all past escalations, I would still go out and serve those who needed help."

Salma Altaweel, NRC Support Manager in Gaza City

SITUATION IN GAZA

- As of 29 July, 39,363 Palestinians have been reported killed in Gaza and almost 91,000 injured (Ministry of Health in Gaza). Thousands remain buried under the rubble and presumed dead.
- 86% of Gaza is subject to so-called "evacuation orders"* (UNRWA) This means that Israel expects Gaza's 2.1 million Palestinians to seek shelter in only 14% of the Strip.
- Almost half a million people in Gaza are facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 5)
- Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have experienced a 94% reduction in water availability compared to pre-October levels. (Oxfam).
- On 13 July, two Palestinian staff of a War Child NGO partner were killed. Also on 13 July, the shelter of a second War Child and ActionAid NGO partner staff member was also bombed in Nuseirat, killing all four of his daughters, and critically injuring his wife.
- In just four days during 21 - 24 July, UNICEF and UNRWA both came under fire. On 21 July, Israeli forces shot at a clearly marked UN convoy attempting to access Gaza City. The convoy had been coordinated and approved by the Israeli authorities. (UNRWA). On 23 July, two clearly marked UNICEF convoys were hit by live fire as they waited at a designated holding point in Wadi Gaza. (UNICEF). Since October 2023, some 278 humanitarian aid workers have been killed in Gaza. (OCHA).
- Gaza's already collapsed health facilities are becoming increasingly overwhelmed while Nasser Medical Complex received 70 fatalities and 200 injuries on 22 July alone (OCHA).
- Between 22 - 27 July, new so-called "evacuation orders" issued by Israeli forces saw a mass exodus of some 200,000 people from central and eastern Khan Younis, and displaced a further 12,600 from camps in Deir al Balah. (OCHA)(OCHA)
- On 26 July, Israeli soldiers bombed the main source of drinking water in Rafah - the "Tal Sultan Water Reservoir", in southern Gaza Strip. (Haaretz)
- On 27 July, an Israeli airstrike on a Girl's School in Deir al Balah, central Gaza, where some 4,000 displaced Palestinian were sheltering, killed at least 30 people, including children, who were sheltering there (OHCA). The school also hosted one of Gaza's main mental health service providers.

This is the second such humanitarian access snapshot issued by NGOs operating in Gaza. The first edition, issued on the 15 July, can be found here. The first edition provided a clear outline as to the backdrop of key access constraints faced by humanitarian actors in Gaza. This edition builds on that to present access-related constraints which have been experienced by NGOs throughout the period 13 – 29 July. Some reported incidents may have occurred prior to the reporting period but were not included in the previous edition as they had not yet been documented or verified. This resource will be released regularly and aims to provide concrete examples of the overwhelming obstacles faced by humanitarian response actors in Gaza, which significantly impede aid efforts. The examples are not exhaustive and are intended to complement the ongoing reporting of UN agencies and civil society, including UN OCHA's Humanitarian Access Snapshots, the latest of which was published on 10 July, as well as the OCHA Humanitarian Situation Updates, the latest of which was published on 29 July.

HIGHLIGHTS: HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The following humanitarian access constraints continue to impede aid delivery in Gaza:

- **Israeli blockade and siege tactics.** Ever since Israel's defense minister Yoav Gallant declared a complete siege on the Gaza Strip on 9 October 2023, the amount of aid entering the enclave has never been sufficient to meet the needs on the ground. A severe lack of materials to maintain essential infrastructure as well as fuel shortages are significantly impacting aid and service delivery. During this reporting period, starvation remains widespread, and people have reported resorting to eating tree leaves in desperation.

- **Intense hostilities,** including Israeli military ground operations and aerial bombardments in densely populated areas, attacks in so-called "humanitarian zones", unexploded ordnance contamination and attacks on humanitarian staff and facilities within Gaza have continued relentlessly. The latest so-called "evacuation orders" issued by Israel in Khan Younis - including areas in the so-called "humanitarian zone" - have resulted in further mass displacement of some 200,000 people between 22-27 July alone, and an often inaccessible environment for aid delivery. Palestinian NGOs, crucial to the response, are severely impacted on all fronts after 9 months of war.

- **Restrictions on access into Gaza**, including closure of border crossings and arbitrary blocking of essential items from entering, are hindering teams from effectively delivering everything from medical services to rehabilitating critical infrastructure essential for survival.

- **Movement restrictions inside Gaza**, including administrative and physical barriers, denials and delays by Israeli officials, affect the safety of our staff, partners and civilians, while families risk separation when moving around Gaza to access services in different locations, often during power outages which cut off all communications.

- **The breakdown of public order and safety.** Israeli attacks on the civilian police force, hindering their ability to work safely, nearly 10 months of destruction of civilian infrastructure and aid obstruction, and now the absence of functioning governance structures, have led to a deterioration of the security situation. This has led to a breakdown in public order and safety, increasing the likelihood of looting of humanitarian convoys. This has made it almost impossible to ensure goods effectively cross into Gaza via Kerem Shalom/Karam Abu Salam (KS/KAS).

"No goods are crossing into Gaza via Kerem Shalom because the unloading zone at Kerem Shalom has been full for weeks. Collection from the zone is not possible due to high insecurity, lawlessness, and bombardments in the zones under Israeli military operation, which surround this vital crossing point. This has resulted in the closure of Kerem Shalom border crossing into Gaza in all but name."

Mercy Corps representative

IN DEPTH: ACCESS CONSTRAINTS FACED BY NGOS

Israeli blockade and siege tactics

On 9 October, Israel's Defense Minister Gallant announced a "complete siege" of the Gaza Strip and declared that there would be "no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel". The systematic restrictions on access for basic commodities and lifesaving supplies into the Gaza Strip continue to severely impede the humanitarian response.

- Due to fuel shortages, DanChurch Aid (DCA)/Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), WeWorld and other NGOs responding to water and sanitation needs report that the **price of water trucking has increased,** which will significantly impact on the number of people in need who can be reached. Further, the attacks on water wells, desalination units and water and sanitation infrastructure overall, have affected the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver the planned response on time with the allocated resources.
- ActionAid, War Child, and the Middle East Children's Alliance NGO partners reported facing constraints in using their vehicles to deliver aid due to a **severe lack of fuel**.
- **Deteriorating sanitation services** have led to waste accumulation. Service delivery in unsanitary conditions is challenging due to the heightened risk of infection spread. NGO staff report frequent illness due to unsanitary conditions, lack of hygiene products, inadequate water, and poor nutrition. **Disease outbreaks** like Hepatitis A and traces of variant 2 poliovirus have been reported (WHO). There is almost no access to cleaning materials, and extreme heat exacerbates the already deadly crisis.

"We are talking about at least 34 children who have starved to death. If this estimate doesn't move the world, consider that most UN and other reports state that Gaza is on the verge of famine. What is the international community doing about this humanitarian crisis?"

Bushra Khalidi, Oxfam Policy Lead

Impact of Intense Hostilities

Intensified Israeli airstrikes in areas where aid organizations are providing services, including Israeli designated so-called "humanitarian zones", have resulted in **mass civilian deaths** and further shrinking space for aid agencies to deliver. Recent aerial bombardment, particularly in the middle area of Gaza, where civilians previously sheltering in Rafah were told to flee, have been particularly deadly. Attacks on communication and internet services are impeding NGOs, including ActionAid partners, from providing referral lines and support services to victims of gender-based violence.

Nuseirat

- On 13 July, an Israeli airstrike hit a shelter of a War Child partner's staff member in Nuseirat killing **all four of his children**, and leaving his wife critically injured.
- On 14 July, while WeWorld was servicing (e.g. cleaning and disinfecting) the UNRWA Abu Ariban School in the Nuseirat refugee camp, the **school was hit by an Israeli strike** injuring two contracted workers of WeWorld. The intensification of attacks in the Nuseirat area is severely undermining the movement of WeWorld staff. As a result, **water, sanitation and hygiene activities** at two schools in Nuseirat housing displaced families have been **temporarily suspended.**

Gaza City

- On 13 July, two staff members from a War Child partner organisation were **killed by a drone attack** on the way to their office in Gaza City.
- Since 11 July, WeWorld has been forced to **suspend water trucking services** in the Zaytoon and Tal al Hawa areas of Gaza City due to escalating tensions and military attacks.

Khan Younis, including Al Mawasi

- On 13 July, three airstrikes fell near the Al-Aqsa University in Khan Younis, an Israeli-designated so-called "humanitarian zone". The staff of an NGO were conducting water trucking activities in the vicinity of the strikes, only about 300m away from the impacted area as per staff accounts. Staff immediately withdrew, and the **activity was suspended for the day.**
- War Child and its partner were forced to **suspend food parcel distributions and psychosocial interventions** on four separate days when there were attacks on the Al-Mawasi area of Khan Younis as well as on the schools of the shelters in Nuseirat Camp. A large number of War Child partner staff were present in the Al Mawasi area when the strike occurred and were **severely traumatized**, while response implementation was disrupted for a week owing to repeated strikes in the area.
- ActionAid partners are no longer able to access warehouses in eastern Khan Younis after Israeli forces issued so-called "evacuation orders" in the area, forcing them to flee. This is impacting the ability to deliver a humanitarian response in the area.
- On 13 July DCA/NCA met with groups of community volunteers in Al Mawasi that they are supporting to enhance their capacities to lead their own crisis responses. Shortly after arriving at the meeting location - which had been previously identified as a designated "humanitarian zone" - the nearby Al Mawasi camp housing displaced people was hit by Israeli airstrikes – killing at least 90 people. DCA/NCA and its partner's staff were some 800m away when the attack happened, and were forced to flee.

"This Israeli attack – as so many others – continues to underscore the fact that there is no safe place in Gaza. When seeking to support people in crisis, our colleagues – as all humanitarian workers in Gaza – continue risking their own lives in doing so."

DCA/NCA Programme Officer

"The obstruction of aid to the people in Gaza not only deepens their suffering but also perpetuates a cycle of despair and hardship. For persons with disabilities, this obstruction is even more devastating, as it prevents them from accessing critical medical care, rehabilitation services, and essential resources, exacerbating their vulnerability and marginalization."

Mara Bernasconi, HI Regional Advocacy and Policy Advisor

Impact of Restrictions on Access Into Gaza

Significant restrictions on moving humanitarian supplies and staff into Gaza persist.

- A War Child partner organisation has been unable to bring specialised psychotropic medication into Gaza for mental health interventions, while another partner's stock of non-food items (NFIs) worth approximately 288,000 USD is still awaiting clearance to enter.
- Humanity and Inclusion/Handicap International (HI) still has hygiene-related stock waiting in Egypt and Jordan. Atlas Logistique - one of HI's operational units - faces significant challenges in securing storage spaces due to destruction, occupation, or inaccessibility of potential sites. Additionally, the **cost of available storage space** has inflated to unprecedented levels due to scarcity.
- Currently, Médecins du Monde (MdM) is operating three Primary Health Care centres in the Middle area. Although MdM has managed to procure some drugs and disposables locally, the closure of borders and the **blocking of entry of key items** have hindered the MdM medical team from delivering quality services and ensuring a continuum of care. The shortage of alcohol-based products is especially critical given the occurrence of skin and infectious diseases.
- Since the Israeli invasion of Rafah in early May, WeWorld has delayed the import of NFI hygiene materials due to increased security risks and a backlog at the KS/KAS crossing.
- Oxfam has reported that the limit on the number of surge staff allowed into Gaza, currently stuck at 23 per rotation, twice per week, is entirely insufficient for the scale of the response, considering the widespread trauma and needs among the population.
- The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) was forced to **postpone a shipment of 758 tents** to Al-Areesh port, due to the backlog and inability to access goods already stuck at KS/KAS crossing. Israeli authorities have rejected 4,500 shelter toolkits which are still stored at Al-Arish port and accruing demurrage fees.
- ActionAid still has **19 aid trucks**, three of which are waiting in Al-Arish and 16 of which are waiting in Cairo, containing urgently needed dignity and hygiene kits.
- Save the Children (SC) has **17 pallets of temperature-controlled medicines** stuck in Al-Areesh, Egypt. COGAT only allow flatbed trucks, not the closed trucks required to transport such supplies, resulting in repeated rejections of SC's temperature-controlled shipments.
- CARE has **2 aid trucks of dignity kits** waiting in Cairo, which cannot be brought into Gaza due to the backlog at Kerem Shalom.

"From time to time, some organizations come to distribute things like baby formula milk, or diapers, but currently, since the past three months, we have been receiving nothing (...) Even the women who come and say that there are some vegetables or fruits in the market, you know how the prices are, they are astronomical, they are unaffordable to most people, except for a small minority."

Dr. Ruhaifa, midwife and Head of obstetrics section at Emirati Red Crescent Field Hospital, Al-Mawasi, Khan Younis (July 10, 2024)

PHOTO CREDIT: NRC, GAZA

Impact of Movement Restrictions Inside Gaza

NGO teams face constraints in delivering aid inside Gaza, as movement from one area to another is unsafe and requires negotiating complicated bureaucratic layers of logistics and coordination with the army.

- Following major so-called "evacuation orders", Gaza Protection Consortium (GPC) partners must often concurrently relocate staff, offices, and warehouses, and establish a new set of increasingly constrained contingency plans, all with significant cost implications. Movement constraints, power outages, and internet cuts hinder communication and coordination between partners, affecting service complementarity for vulnerable populations. Referrals are complex, as one partner may provide health services while another cannot easily access the same sites for physical rehabilitation of people with disabilities and injuries. Limited supplies and shortages of cash liquidity complicate the delivery of comprehensive care. Civilians similarly face security risks when moving to access services in different locations.
- A combination of restricted movement, consecutive so-called "evacuation orders" for eastern Khan Younis, and ongoing bombardment forced HI and DCA/NCA to suspend operations to allow staff and their families to relocate, which crippled the overall access to and delivery of aid.
- For one NGO, between 4 July and 18 July, 30% of all their movement notifications were not approved by the Israeli authorities. Several non-acknowledged movements occurred, including movements to the humanitarian warehouse in Deir al-Balah, staff movement in North Gaza, and movement from Deir al-Balah to Khan Younis for a Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene workshop. In all such instances, the NGO was given no reason by the Israeli authorities for the non-acknowledgement of their movements.
- During the period of 11 - 22 July, all of War Child's partners faced numerous constraints in accessing and delivering aid in Northern Gaza. These included not being able to transport assistance from southern and central regions to northern Gaza and hindering partners' northern teams' access to warehouses.
- Restrictions on the movement of aid within Gaza City have disrupted the reception and distribution of aid, as War Child and other INGOs reported that aid cannot currently be brought in from the south to the north, nor to Rafah.

"Things are starting to take a toll and our bodies feel weak and flimsy. We can't really walk anymore but have to walk long distances to get water or buy anything. So at the moment, we stopped leaving the place we're in (...) and yesterday we picked and cooked mulberry leaves to block the children's hunger."

Ola, 42, displaced more than fives times, Tal Al-Hawa, northern Gaza

Breakdown of Public Order and Safety

Many organisations have stock approved and waiting to enter, but the unloading zone at the KS/KAS border crossing on the Gaza side has been full for weeks due to the high insecurity, risk of looting during distribution, and Israeli military operations. The increase in looting incidents now is a result of 9 months of Israeli destruction of civilian infrastructure and aid obstruction as well as continued attacks on public service providers, which has decimated local governance structures. When people are pushed to extreme limits, they will do whatever it takes for the survival of their families. This has worsened the safety and security situation by the day and increased the risk of supplies being looted or rotting in the sun. Examples include:

- Oxfam has water tanks, desalination units, tap stands, generators, latrines, and bladders approved but unable to enter through KS/KAS and be picked up on the Palestinian side due to insecurity.
- Some 864 tents procured by NRC that had been at Al-Arish port recently arrived at Kerem Shalom but still remain inaccessible due to insecurity and safety concerns. Currently, NRC has over 1 million USD worth of tents and hundreds of additional pallets of shelter items stuck on the Gaza side of the KS/KAS crossing.
- Save the Children (SC) has run out of food parcels to distribute to families in need. SC finally managed to get four trucks (80 pallets) of medical supplies into Gaza on a convoy after waiting at KS/KAS in the sun for more than a month, following hostilities on the other side of the border. SC has been unable to get critical medical supplies into Gaza in a timely manner. SC health facilities report running out of supplies and relying on supplies from UN agencies that are also running out.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Under the IV Geneva Convention, Israel as the occupying power is obligated to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the occupied population are met. This includes facilitating humanitarian aid and creating conditions that enable the provision of supplies. In this case, Israel as the occupying power has the duty to ensure that aid is not only allowed into Gaza but also delivered safely to those in need. Humanitarian organizations are crucial in providing support but cannot do so without safe delivery procedures and an enabling environment - a responsibility beyond our remit. The facilitation of aid must be principled, safe, secure, and unimpeded across all areas of Gaza.

The protection of humanitarians is meant to be guaranteed under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The responsibility for upholding this protection rests with the parties to the conflict. Third States must also respect their own legal obligations to urgently act to enforce respect for IHL in the Gaza Strip.

On 26 January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered that Israel must take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. On 24 May 2024, the ICJ ordered that Israel must keep the Rafah crossing open for unhindered provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance at scale, and must immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah governorate.

On 19 July 2024, the ICJ concluded that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory - which includes the Gaza Strip - was unlawful and that Israel must bring its occupation to an end, while Third States also have an obligation not to recognise as legal the unlawful presence of Israel in occupied territory, nor to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation. Third States also have a responsibility to bring Grave Breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Gaza to an end, including, but not limited to, forcible transfer and extensive destruction of property.

**Israel has issued multiple so-called "evacuation orders", resulting in mass displacements, without providing adequate accommodation, or satisfactory conditions of health, safety and hygiene to meet the requirements of a lawful evacuation under IHL. IHL also requires that a lawful evacuation be temporary and due to massive damage and destruction to residential buildings in Gaza it is likely that many such evacuations will not be temporary, and so would not constitute a lawful evacuation.*

As humanitarian actors, our presence in Gaza is possible thanks to the unwavering commitment of our colleagues on the ground despite great risks to their own lives. Our continued presence should not be mistaken for an indication of unimpeded access. We operate at great risk, despite significant impediments to our access. The risks our colleagues are exposed to each moment are unacceptable and contrary to their protections under international law. In Gaza, we are not witnessing a "shrinking" humanitarian space; there is barely any space left to operate at all.

We, the undersigned NGOs continue to call for an immediate and lasting ceasefire and maintain it is the only way to provide humanitarian assistance and protect and save lives in Gaza.