

## **UNRWA Gaza Field assessment of IDF Operation Days of Penitence 20 October 2004**

### **i. Introduction**

Late on 28 September 2004 large numbers of Israeli Defence Force (IDF) tanks, bulldozers and armoured personnel carriers moved into Northern Gaza from permanent bases in Nissanit settlement, Erez Industrial Zone and the Eastern Border, tearing up roads and flattening homes and crops as they pushed forward. Israeli Army units established strategic positions on high ground overlooking the Jabalia, Izbet Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia areas; troops also deployed along the main road between Jabalia camp and Beit Hanoun and on the northern and eastern sides of Jabalia camp.

Over the next 17 days the IDF remained in control of Northern Gaza. An estimated 200 armoured vehicles were on the ground in towns, villages and densely populated refugee camps, launching regular raids into civilian areas, firing on Palestinian targets from the air and ground, sealing off Palestinian neighbourhoods and restricting movement of civilians and humanitarian/emergency relief workers. Large swathes of agricultural land were leveled and there was widespread damage to public and private property – homes, schools, commercial interests - and public infrastructure. IDF bulldozers dug deep trenches across several main roads, severing sewage, water and electricity lines.

During the operation, approximately 36,000 Palestinians in different locations, including Beit Hanoun (22,000 persons), Izbet Beit Hanoun (5,000 persons), the areas east of Sikka St. and Salah Eddin St (2,500 persons), Nada and Awda towers (2,500 persons) and parts of Jabalia camp (4,000 persons) were under siege. Many thousands of civilians were unable to leave their homes, as fighting raged around them. An additional 4,000 persons fled their homes in the affected areas.

The stated aim of the IDF operation was to prevent the firing of homemade Palestinian rockets into the Israeli town of Sderot. These have killed four Israeli citizens in recent months. At the time of the IDF redeployment on 15 October over 100 Palestinians had been killed, including 27 children, and over 400 injured. Operation Days of Penitence was the largest IDF incursion into Gaza since the start of the Al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000.

This report summarizes the preliminary findings of UNRWA's field assessment of 16 October 2004, in the form of general data and a sector-by-sector review, which details the Agency's response and planned activities.

### **ii. General Data**

#### **• Casualties**

According to data collected by UNRWA's Field Security Office, 107 Palestinians were killed and 431 injured during Operation Days of Penitence. This is the number of confirmed casualties and is likely to rise. Tank shells and helicopter missiles, fired into densely populated areas, caused many of the casualties. A quarter of those killed (27) were aged 18 years and under. Five Israelis were killed during the same period.

The dead include nine UNRWA pupils from six schools and two teachers.

These latest deaths bring to 1,796 the number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since the start of the intifada; a further 12,600 persons have been injured. October 2004 has been the deadliest month so far, with 112 killed as at 17.10.2004.

- **Destruction of homes**

According to initial investigations by UNRWA social workers and technical staff, 675 Palestinians were made homeless during the IDF operation: 91 homes, for 143 families, were destroyed. Over 90 percent of those affected were refugees. The total cost of rebuilding these homes is estimated at around USD 2.5 million. A further 101 homes (housing 833 persons) sustained damage.

The majority of homes destroyed were on the eastern edge of Jabalia camp, close to Block 4. This was the most intense house demolition operation in northern Gaza since the start of the second intifada.

Across the territory as a whole, demolition rates have reached alarming levels in 2004: 1,360 Gazans per month, or 45 persons each day, have been made homeless as a result of IDF demolition operations. Whilst Operation Days of Penitence was ongoing in Northern Gaza, 482 persons were made homeless in Rafah, as the IDF continue to hack away at Palestinian areas along the Egyptian border.

- **Destruction of public buildings and commercial property**

In addition, 19 public premises and commercial properties were completely destroyed during the incursion, either by IDF shelling or bulldozers. These included PA security compounds, as well as a mosque, two farms, three factories and several workshops and small shops.

A further 16 buildings were damaged, including five UNRWA school compounds housing eight schools on the eastern border of Jabalia camp (see below for more details), one governmental school, a private kindergarten and two mosques.

- **Damage to infrastructure**

Engineers in UNRWA's Special Environmental Health Programme estimate that damage to roads in the affected areas will cost USD240,000 to repair: IDF bulldozers and tanks ripped up asphalt, dug deep trenches to prevent the movement of traffic and wrecked sandy paths. Much of the damage was wrecked when the IDF expanded their operation into the centre of Beit Lahia town on 13 October.



Photo 1: main street in Beit Lahia, October 2004

- **Land leveling**

Large swathes of agricultural land, in particular olive groves and citrus trees in Beit Hanoun, were leveled during the two-week incursion. The North Gaza Governorate is continuing work on its damage assessment: according to information dated 15 October, between 1,000-1,100 dunums of agricultural land and 30 greenhouses were destroyed. In excess of 50 percent of all arable land in Beit Hanoun has now been destroyed since September 2000.

iii. **Sectoral review**

- **Education department**

Teaching for 40,000 pupils at 34 UNRWA schools in Jabalia, Beit Lahia and Beit Hanoun was suspended when the IDF operation began on 29 September. Whilst 17 schools in western Jabalia reopened on 9 October and a further 15 began functioning on 16 October following the IDF redeployment, two schools, which sustained extensive damage (see below for details), remain closed.

Due to the fighting and restrictions on movement, 1,154 UNRWA teachers were prevented from reaching their duty stations, resulting in a loss of 13,938 teaching days at a cost of USD280,000 by the end of the operation. Wherever possible, affected students were reassigned to functioning schools.

As noted above, nine UNRWA pupils (aged 15 and below) and two teachers were killed during the IDF operation. These include four boys at a single school.

Five UNRWA school compounds were damaged during the operation: four schools on the eastern side of Jabalia and one in B/Lahia. Two of the schools sustained extensive damage and remain closed, with affected pupils and teachers accommodated temporarily at neighbouring schools.

The total area of the damaged road network is around 12,000 m<sup>2</sup>. In many places temporary repairs have already been completed. These will not survive the winter rains.

Water, sewerage and electrical lines were also destroyed during the course of the incursion, with the cost of repairs estimated at USD 80,000.

Total damage to infrastructure is estimated at USD 355,000.



Photo 2: Jabalia Prep "A" Boys' School, hit by IDF tank shells, Oct 2004

Tank shells and bullets were fired at schools, destroying walls and classrooms, windows and window frames, and leaving blackboards pitted with holes. Bulldozers destroyed boundary walls. A resident school attendant's shelter was also demolished. Furniture was damaged and equipment, including computers, fax machines, fans and stationery, was looted.

The cost of repairing the damage to UNRWA schools will be close to USD 100,000.

- **Health Department**

UNRWA primary health centres in Jabalia and Beit Hanoun operated on 24 hour shifts during the incursion and additional staff were called in to handle the emergency situation; ambulance drivers were on call throughout and transported 46 injured persons to neighbouring hospitals.

No major outbreaks of disease or infection were reported. UNRWA health centres were well stocked with pharmaceuticals and there was regular coordination with other service providers (e.g. Ministry of Health, PRCS).

Access to regular services at UNRWA's clinic in Beit Hanoun was affected by the restrictions on movement: daily out-patient attendance dropped from 400-500 patients to 200; family planning and dental services and treatment for chronic conditions was suspended; and the child vaccination programme and provision of ante/post natal care were reduced. Of the regular workforce of 29, 14 staff (who live outside Beit Hanoun) were initially unable to reach the health centre. Five of those trapped outside were later able to enter, following coordination with the IDF.

An additional six staff members were assigned to UNRWA's Jabalia health centre during the incursion, with a total of 79 persons on duty. The average number of patient visits dropped from 1000 / day to 500 / day in the first five days of the operation, subsequently increasing to 1200 per day. Provision of all primary health care services continued as normal throughout.

- **Relief and Social Services**

Over the course of the operation UNRWA, with assistance from WFP, was able to distribute emergency food parcels to 1,000 besieged families in Northern Gaza. Access was not afforded to relief workers until 7 October, eight days after the incursion began. A number of planned distributions, most notably to 26,000 persons trapped inside Beit Hanoun, had to be cancelled, despite repeated attempts to coordinate with the IDF. Mass food shortages were not reported during the operation and water/power supplies were only intermittently cut.

UNRWA food parcels comprised rice, sugar, oil, powdered milk, lentils and canned food. The Agency also distributed water to several hundred affected families. The Agency coordinated its distributions with WFP and ICRC.

Following the IDF redeployment and lifting of the trisection in the Gaza Strip, the Agency has been able to resume distributing food to eligible families under its emergency and Special Hardship Case programmes. A total of 9,000 families under the emergency programme and 300 under the SHC programme will receive parcels by the end of October. Distributions, which were suspended in mid-June due to restrictions placed on the Agency at Karni crossing, had resumed on 19 September, only to be suspended again with the onset of the IDF operation.

Over 60 families whose homes were demolished have already received relocation fees. Social workers are continuing to process outstanding cases. The Agency has also provided in-kind assistance to needy families – both refugees and non-refugees - in the form of mattresses, blankets, kitchen kits and other supplies.

In 2004, UNRWA has disbursed almost USD145,000 each month in rental subsidies to families (mainly refugees) whose homes have been destroyed. A total of 4,250 families have been assisted.



Photo 3: Jabalia Prep "A" Boys School, October 2004. The complete destruction of the southern boundary wall was caused by debris pushed onto the wall by IDF bulldozers.